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বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়
গ্রন্থাগার



**INFORMATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT:
ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS AND
DESIGNING A DISSEMINATION SYSTEM
FOR BANGLADESH**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

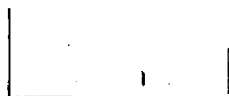
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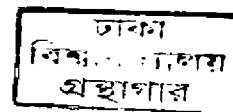
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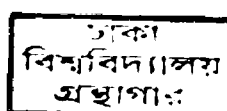
My parents, my wife Sharmin and son Andalib -
Wellsprings of my inspiration

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DESIGNING A DISSEMINATION SYSTEM
FOR BANGLADESH**

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**Information for Rural Development:
Assessment of Needs and
Designing a Dissemination System for Bangladesh**

**Thesis submitted to the University of Dhaka
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Information Science and Library Management**

Kazi Mostak Gausul Hoq

**Department of Information Science and Library Management
University of Dhaka
October 2011**



SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Information for Rural Development: Assessment of Needs and Designing a Dissemination System for Bangladesh", submitted by Kazi Mostak Gausul Hoq to the University of Dhaka for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is an original research work carried out by him under my supervision. The contents of this thesis, in full or in parts, have not been submitted to any other Institute or University for the award of any degree or diploma.

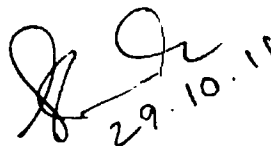
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30.10.2011
(Dr. S. M. Mannan)
Professor

DECLARATION

The work reported in this thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort has been made to indicate that clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

It has not already been accepted for any degree, and is also not being concurrently submitted for any other degree.


(Kazi Mostak Gausul Hoq)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

A2I	- Access to Information
ADB	- Asian Development Bank
AICC	- Agricultural Information and Communication Centres
AIT	- Asian Institute of Technology
ARDO	- Association for Rural Development Organizations
ARI	- Acute Respiratory Infection
Banbeis	- Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BARD	- Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development
BBS	- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BCC	- Bangladesh Computer Council
BCS	- Bangladesh Computer Samity
BFES	- Bangladesh Friendship Education Society
BNNRC	- Bangladesh National Network for Radio Communication
BRAC	- Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BTN	- Bangladesh Telecentre Network
BTRC	- Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission
CABI	- Centre for Agricultural Bioscience International
CBO	- Community Based Organisation
CCC	- Cyber Community Centres
CCC	- Central Coordination Council
CD	- Compact Disk
CDL	- Community Development Library
CD-ROM	- Compact Disk Read Only Memory
CeC	- Community e-Centre
CERLS	- China Evergreen Rural Library Service
CHT	- Chittagong Hill Tracts
CIC	- Community Information Centre
CLIC	- Community Library and Information Centres
D.Net	- Development Research Network
DAM	- Dhaka Ahsania Mission
DCO	- District Commissioner's Office
DELNET	- Developing Library Network
DFID	- Department for International Development
DVD-ROM	- Digital Video Disk-Read Only Memory

EDGE	-	Enhanced Data rates for GSM Evolution
EDL	-	Electronic Doorway Library
FAO	-	Food and Agricultural Organisation
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussions
FICCs	-	Fisheries Information and Communication Centres
FM	-	Frequency Modulation
GDC	-	Grameen Digital Centre
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
GKP	-	Global Knowledge Partnership
GNP	-	Gross National Product
GO	-	Government
GRID	-	General Resource and Information Dissemination
IADB	-	Inter-American Development Bank
ICT	-	Information and Communications Technologies
IDRC	-	International Development Research Centre
IEC	-	Information, Education and Communication
IFAD	-	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IKB	-	Information and Knowledge Base
ILC	-	Internet learning Centres
IPM	-	Integrated Pest Management
IRD	-	Integrated Rural Development Program
ITU	-	International Telecommunication Union
KE	-	Knowledge Economy
LGRD&C	-	Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives
LIS	-	Land Information System
MDG	-	Millennium Development Goal
MFI	-	Micro-Finance Institution
MSME	-	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
MTC	-	Multipurpose Community Telecentres
NASA	-	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NBC	-	National Book Centre
NGO	-	Non-governmental Organisations
NIRD	-	National Institute of Rural Development
OVOP	-	One Village One Portal
PC	-	Personal Computer
PCO	-	Public Call Office

PTCL	- Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited
PwD	- Persons with Disability
R&D	- Research and Development
READ	- Rural Education and Development
RIC	- Rural ICT Centre
RIRC	- Rural Information Resource Centres
RLRDP	- Rural Libraries and Resources Development Program
RTC	- Rural Technology Centres
RTI	- Right to Information
RUDIS	- Rural Development Information System Research
SARI	- Sustainable Access in Rural India
SDRE	- Extension, Education and Communication Service (FAO)
SNDP	- Sustainable Development Networking Program
SPSS	- Statistical Package for Social Sciences
ToT	- Training of Trainers
UGC	- University Grants Commission
UISC	- Union Information Service Centre
UISCC	- Union Information and Service Centre Committee
ULCC	- Upazila-level Coordination Committee
UN	- United Nations
UNDP	- United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNISDR	- United Nations' International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
UNISIST	- United Nations International Scientific Information System
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	- Union Parishad
UPS	- Uninterrupted Power Supply
USAID	- United States Agency for International Development
VGD	- Vulnerable Group Development
VGF	- Vulnerable Group Feeding
VIE	- Village Information Entrepreneur
VIP	- Village Information Profile
YCMC	- Youth Community Multimedia Centre
YPSA	- Young Power for Social Action

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Most of the countries in the world have been experiencing urbanization at an unprecedented rate, particularly since the last half of the twentieth century. The global proportion of urban population rose dramatically from 13% (220 million) in 1900, to 29% (732 million) in 1950, to 49% (3.2 billion) in 2005. UN World Urbanization prospect Report 2005 projected that the figure is likely to rise to 60% (4.9 billion) by 2030 (Population Division, DESA, 2005). But in spite of this massive urbanization, the majority of people in the continents of Asia, Africa and South America live and will continue to live in the rural areas. As per the estimate of International Telecommunication Union (2010), the world is home to about three million villages, of which 92 per cent are in the developing world. Interestingly, contrary to the popular belief, some economists argue that the number of people living in the urban areas might in fact decrease because of adverse living conditions and scarcity of basic facilities. French economist Philippe Bocquier has calculated that the proportion of the world population living in cities and towns in the year 2030 would be roughly 50%, substantially less than the 60% forecast by the United Nations - because rapid urbanization is unsustainable. Bocquier is of the opinion that many of the people now residing in the urban areas are likely to leave the cities upon discovering that there is no work for them and no place to live (Bocquier, 2005).

Therefore, developed and developing alike, world nations can hardly afford to ignore the importance of rural development or wipe it out from their development agenda.

Since majority of the people in the developing countries live in the rural areas, these countries, in particular, should pay proper attention to the issue of rural development. As the world is continuing its journey into a new century as well as a new millennium, rural development is claiming more focus and attention in the national and regional development programmes of the developing countries. They are increasingly realizing that their overall development depends largely upon the proper formulation and effective implementation of policies to confront the problems of the rural areas.

'Rural' and 'Rural development': definition of terms

Here it will be pertinent to clarify the notion of 'rural' and 'rural development'. The term 'rural' is somewhat ambiguous. Wiggins and Proctor (2001) point out that there is no exact definition of the term, but that rural areas are 'clearly recognisable'. They constitute the space where human settlement and infrastructure occupy only small patches of the landscape, most of which is dominated by fields and pastures, woods and forest, water, mountain and desert. IFAD (2001, p. 17) adds to this that rural people usually live in farmsteads or settlements of 5,000-10,000 persons, but also makes the point that 'national distinctions between rural and urban are arbitrary and varied'. Beyond these core features, related to natural resources and population density, rural areas can be characterized in different ways: as places where most people spend most of their working time on farms; by the abundance and relative cheapness of land; by high transaction costs, associated with long distance and poor infrastructure (Binswanger and Deininger, 1997); and by geographical conditions that increase political transaction costs and magnify the possibility of elite capture or urban bias (Moore and Putzel, 1999).

Rural development, on the other hand, implies improvement or betterment in the totality of life for rural people. Rural development, therefore, extends beyond any particular sector. It encompasses improved productivity, increased employment and thus higher income and health (Abdullah, 1979). According to B. K. Sahu, 'Rural

development is viewed as an activity of a series of activities or a process, which either improves the immediate living conditions – economic, social, political, cultural and environmental and increases the potential for future living or both of the rural people (Sahu 2003, p. 32).’ As suggested by Seetharama (1996), development of rural communities involves:

- i. Physical development, i.e. development in the fields of communication, transport, sewage, irrigation, energy, forestry, environment and conservation or natural resources and livestock;
- ii. Economic development, i.e. development in the fields of agriculture, animal husbandry, fishery, business and industry;
- iii. Social development, i.e. development in the fields of education, culture and political activities; and
- iv. Health development, i.e. developments in the fields of nutrition, sanitation, community health, prevention of water and air pollution.

Webster (1975) views rural development as a process which leads to a rise in the capacity of rural people to control their environment resulting from more extensive use of the benefits which is ensured from such a control (cited in Ahmed, 2000). The increased benefit could come from all or some of the indicators of rural development:

- a. Change in agricultural productivity, reflected in per hector yields.
- b. Changes in the extent of employment, unemployment and underemployment.
- c. Changes in the distribution of wealth, income and other amenities.
- d. Changes in the socio-political structure reflected in changes in the participation of rural people at the village, area and national level decision making processes.
- e. Changes in the degree and extent of mobility in the class structure of the rural community reflected in allocations of positions of prestige, power and status on the basis of achievement.
- f. Changes in the beliefs, values, attitudes in favor of controlling the micro and macro environment towards modern values from traditional ones.

In spite of the fact that majority of the people in the developing countries live in rural areas, when it comes to the enjoyment of socio-politico-economic facilities, the rural people receive much less attention than their urban counterparts. Historically, national economic development efforts continue to be skewed in favour of urban areas, which tend to attract disproportionate amounts of all forms of resources other than those that are immobile, namely land and other resources (Ludden, 1999). The sad reality of the developing countries is that, although a lot of promises and commitments are being made by the GOs and NGOs, substantial development of the rural areas is still a faraway dream. Lack of sincere and honest efforts, problems of coordination, rampant corruption, etc. have been acting as stumbling blocks on the way of rural development. Then, there is the question of sustainability also. Probably it's easy for a government to spend considerable amount of money in the villages for building roads and bridges and schools, but if the users of those facilities, i.e. the rural people, are not aware of the significance of these facilities and do not play their parts in the use and maintenance of these infrastructure, then the sustainable use of these facilities will become uncertain. Therefore, the rural people must have the ability to make informed decisions and act in a judicious manner to make sure that:

- they enjoy the services and facilities like their urban counterparts, and
- they play their own role in maintaining a good standard of living.

Information as a resource for rural development

Development cannot be imposed or showered from above. The receivers must deserve it. Therefore, the efforts of the government or the non-government organisations should be supplemented by the rural people (Chatterjee, 2004). Here comes the importance of information. Only an informed man can make good decisions for the betterment of his/her own life as well as the betterment of the society he/she lives in. Information, in this regard, acts as a very important determiner of a good life, be it for an urban businessman or a rural fisherman. As Okiy (2003, p. 1) suggests, "Information is an important ingredient in development process. People in rural areas whether

literate or not should have access to any kind of information which will help them to become capable and productive in their social and political obligations, to become better informed citizens generally.” Similarly, Diso (1994, p. 143) holds the view that ‘As a matter of policy, information must be seen as a basic resource for development if durable structures are to be provided for effective access and utilization, which entails information capturing, coordination, processing, and dissemination.’ As observed by Chatterjee (2004), information support is required not only at the organisation level, but also at the individual level. While organisations require basic and background information for drawing and implementing realistic development schemes, the citizens require information about education, healthcare and their avocation to improve their life.

But, unfortunately, the availability of information in the rural areas, especially those in the developing countries, is far from satisfactory. Firstly, the rural people in general are ignorant of the importance of information in their daily life, secondly, the efforts to make information available to them are inadequate, and thirdly, the channels and mediums used to convey information to them, sometimes, are inappropriate. In consequence, the rural people can hardly make informed choices in personal and social life. This inability of the rural people has sparked a renewed effort worldwide to have a closer look at the ways information can benefit the underprivileged people and how it can be made available to the people living in desperate conditions especially in the rural and far-flung areas.

‘Information’ is probably one of the most widely used terms of modern time. With the increasing interests in subjects like ‘information science’ and ‘information technology’, the word ‘information’ has drawn the attention of academics and general people alike and has been used in relation to every sphere of human endeavour, in every academic discipline. Naturally, innumerable attempts have been made to define the term, and the definitions have been quite different from one another, which had prompted Kent

(1974) to remark that the definition of information is in 'the eye of the beholder'. Davis defines information as 'data that has been processed into a form that is meaningful to the recipient and is of perceived value in current or prospective decisions (Davis, 1974).' Meadow and Yuan (1997) define information in relation to two other closely related terms: 'data' and 'knowledge' – 'Roughly, data usually means a set of symbols with little or no meaning to a recipient. Information is a set of symbols that does have a meaning or significance to their recipient. Knowledge is the accumulation and integration of information received and processed by a recipient (Meadow and Yuan, p. 701).' According to Buckland (1991), 'Objects, such as data and documents are referred to attributively as information because they are regarded as being informative (1991, p. 41).' In the view of Ingwersen, information is the 'result of a transformation of generator's knowledge structures (by intentionality, model of recipients' states of knowledge, and in the form of signs); and on the other hand being something which when perceived, affects and transforms the recipient's state of knowledge (1996, p. 33).' Summing up all these definitions, Rasmussen (2001) remarks that, information is something that changes the states of its recipient or, more specifically, the knowledge state.

Although the significance of information as a vital resource for development is now well accepted, this particular aspect of information had been overlooked by most academics and intelligentsia in the past. Owing to the fervent efforts by economists Fritz Machlup and Mark Porat, and sociologist Dainel Bell, the role of information as an ingredient as well as resource of development is now well established. Machlup, Porat and Bell pioneered the ideas of information economy with information as the transforming resource for postindustrial society. Authors such as Horton (Marchand & Horton, 1986) pioneered the view of information as a corporate resource, which like other resources such as people, money, raw materials, equipment and energy, should be managed to give a competitive edge. As phenomenal developments in the fields of information and communication technologies started to take place, authors like Cleveland (1985) and

Hawkins (1987) confirmed that information has become a commodity. This view stems from evidence that the possession, manipulation, and use of information can increase the cost-effectiveness of many physical and cognitive processes. The rise in Information-processing activities in industrial manufacturing as well as in human problem solving also have contributed to this belief. Analysis of one of the three traditional divisions of the economy, the service sector, shows a sharp increase in information-intensive activities, which further strengthens information's role as an important resource. Development specialists rightly point out that, without information decisions will be random ad-hoc choices, projects are unlikely to meet set objectives, reports will not adequately reflect situations, which will bring total chaos and confusion in every sector (Lee and Evans, 1992). Grillon (1994) comments, 'Information is a resource on its own, as well as an asset to others. It falls within the resource hierarchy which starts with data, which leads to information, coming together as knowledge, and resulting in wisdom.' He presented the following six inherent characteristics of information as a resource:

1. *Information is expandable*: it is recognized that for specific purposes information may deplete, but in general, the more we have, the more we use, and the more useful it becomes.
2. *Information is compressible*: It is possible to concentrate, integrate, and summarize information for easier handling.
3. *Information is substitutable*: Information can and does replace land, labor, and capital. It is the use of computers and telecommunications that aids in this phenomenon.
4. *Information is transportable*: Information can be tapped into just about anywhere; this has led to the idea of being remote as much more difficult to achieve since people and information can be taken to the remotest of places.
5. *Information is diffusive*: There tends to be an ability for information to leak. This leakage allows us to have more, and more of us to have it.
6. *Information is shareable*: No exchange transaction of information can take place, only sharing transactions, and this leads to an entire sharing environment.

Burk and Horton give nine basic similarities between information and other traditional resources to fit into a resource-management framework, namely:

- Information is acquired at a definite, measurable cost.
- Information has a definite value, which may be quantified and treated as an accountable asset.
- Information consumption can be quantified.
- Cost-accounting techniques can be applied to help control the costs of information.
- Information has a clear life cycle: definition of requirements, collection, transmission, processing, storage, dissemination, use, and disposal.
- Information may be processed and refined, so that raw materials (e.g., databases) are converted into finished products (e.g., published directories).
- Substitutes for any specific item or collection of information are available, and may be quantified as more expensive, or less expensive.
- Choices are available to management in making trade-offs between different grades, types and costs of information. (Burk & Horton, 1988).

When people receive up-to-date information on issues that directly and indirectly affect their lives, they tend to make better decisions, choose the right options and spend their time, efforts and resources judiciously. Iftekharuzzaman (2009, p. 3) comments, 'Information is the cardinal source of power. Those who possess information are powerful. Those who do not have access to information are powerless. By enforcing people's right to information the powerful and can be brought closer to powerless, through sharing and disclosing information. It can turn out to be the most effective catalyst for institutionalization of democracy, promotion of good governance and control of corruption. It is about empowerment of citizens and about building responsiveness of the state and its organs, the political parties and leaderships, administration and other institutions to the citizens.'

Admittedly, in spite of all the 'logical links' that can be shown between information and development, the notion that information is indeed a vital resource for development is still debated hotly among the academics. The debate is more about the degree and the ways in which information impacts development, than whether information is really relevant for development. The fact that intensive and extensive information services are being designed and implemented by GOs-NGOs and even corporate bodies (CIC by GrameenPhone in Bangladesh; DISKNet by Amul and iShakti by Hindustan Lever in India), prove that more and more organisations and institutions are now aware of the power of information as an important asset for development. Therefore, the future challenges lie not in proving that information is a resource, but to ensure effective, innovative and sustainable use of information for development.

Impact of information on different aspects of development

Almost two decades ago, while speaking at a conference organised by Malaysia Business Council, former Prime Minister of Malaysia Dr. Mahathir Mohammad commented, 'It can be no accident that there is today no wealthy developed country that is information-poor, and no information-rich country that is poor and underdeveloped (Mohammed, 1991).' This is quite true. One common characteristic that binds all the developed countries together is their advanced information infrastructure which ensures quick supply of abundant information as per requirement of the government as well as the common people. These nations enjoy a tremendous competitive advantage over those that lag behind. And they continue to invest heavily in strengthening their information infrastructure with an aim to accelerate the pace of socio-economic development even further. Rasmussen (2001), in his seminal work 'Information and development: the information effect' has attempted to identify and analyse various aspects of development to which information can contribute. He argued that information can effectively contribute to social and democratic development, cultural enrichment, education and research, microeconomic development and macroeconomic

development. Following is a concise representation of the arguments he put forward to support his observations:

Social and Democratic Development

Information contributes to social and democratic development by ensuring that people have access to necessary information. People can only participate in the development of society, exercise rights and benefit from protections if they are aware of what exists. Access to information enables people to make critical judgments about civil, social and political aspects of the state and its activities.

Cultural Enrichment

Cultures are in a constant state of development and change. Information and communication systems can provide a means of recording, preserving and promoting local cultures, making them available for a wider audience. The measure of achievement in this area is the richness of the culture: its openness to outside influence and its distinctive local character.

Education and Research

The basic provision of books, articles and other kinds of information bearing media are an essential part of even the most rudimentary educational system. To measure the impact of information on educational development, it is necessary to assess the extent to which the book and library activities, including access to the Internet, add value to education and research systems.

Micro-Economic Development

Information can be used to assist innovation and product development by giving firms access to new ideas, technical processes, materials and intermediate products. Measuring the impact of information activities that are intended to support micro-

economic development involves assessing the extent to which they improve the sustainability and profitability of firms and institutions.

Macro-Economic Development

Information contributes to macro-economic development by increasing the flexibility and speed of response of the overall economy. Measuring the general impact that information makes on macro-economic development means assessing the contribution made to the current level of GDP or GNP. It could involve assessing the contribution made to a range of macro-economic policy goals, such as the contribution made toward re-structuring the economy or improving international competitiveness.

'Information society' and its impact on rural development

Today's society, in which the creation, distribution, diffusion, use, integration and manipulation of information is considered as a significant economic, political, and cultural activity, is widely dubbed by development thinkers as 'information society'. In his book 'The Third Wave', Alvin Toffler (1980) describes three types of societies, based on the concept of 'waves' - each wave pushes the older societies and cultures aside.

- First Wave is the society after agrarian revolution and replaced the first hunter-gatherer cultures.
- Second Wave is the society during the Industrial Revolution (ca. late 1600s through the mid-1900s). The main components of the Second Wave society are nuclear family, factory-type education system and the corporation.
- Third Wave is the post-industrial society. In this society, information is considered as a vital force of development and progress. It can substitute most of the material resources and become the main material for workers.

The view that information is central to the solution of any society's economic and social problems, and should be regarded as a factor of production is now widely accepted (Belshaw 1965, p. 128; McAnany 1980, p. 2). Pradervand (1980, p. 56) has gone even

further to insist that information is the most basic of all basic needs. Jacques Valias, an information specialist working at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in the 1980s, authored an important handbook titled 'Information services for developing countries' (1983); in which he wrote, 'To ignore information means running an exponentially increasing risk of the same order and magnitude, of duplicating what has already been done, of not benefiting from already acquired experience – of in fact, "reinventing the wheel (1983, p. 3)".' Therefore, he continued, 'No one can afford the risk incurred by ignoring information. It is simply too costly. If it is already true for developed countries, how much more true it is for developing countries, which have very limited resources and many other priorities?' Since the mid-1990s, the World Bank also has been promoting the application of knowledge for solving economic problems. The term Knowledge Economy (KE) has been coined to reflect this increased importance of knowledge. A knowledge economy is one where organisations and people acquire, create, disseminate, and use knowledge more effectively for greater economic and social development (www.worldbank.org). The World Development Report 1998-99 of the World Bank, launched in October 1998, made knowledge and information a central theme for socio-economic development. The report focuses on two types of knowledge- and two types of problems-that are critical for developing countries:

- How-to knowledge, such as nutrition, birth control, engineering, or accounting. Typically, developing countries have less know-how than industrial countries, and poor people have less know-how than wealthier people.
- Knowledge about attributes or characteristics, such as the quality of a product, diligence of a worker, or creditworthiness of a firm. The report describes this lack of knowledge as "information problems" and argues that this in turn leads to market failures, such as lenders' refusal to offer loans to poor people, because of the difficulty in assessing their ability to repay (<http://web.worldbank.org/>).

Since then, there has been a flurry of research and corresponding activities to design and implement information-focused development projects especially in the developing

countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Both traditional and non-traditional initiatives have been undertaken to make knowledge and information available to the grassroots people. The traditional initiatives focus on setting up libraries in the rural areas while the non-traditional initiatives focus on providing information services through extensive use of Information and Communication technologies (ICTs). At this point, one thing needs to be made clear. The use of ICT should be considered as a means of making information available to the rural people, not an end. So, here ICT's role is mainly as a facilitator or assistant, which enable the information providers to reach a large number of people in a quick and effective way. Sometimes, we see a general tendency to over emphasize the importance of ICT. But we have to keep in mind that, ICT itself is not the ultimate goal, it is a means or way for achieving that goal. We do not use ICT for ICT's sake; we use it as a tool for adding value to various services and for improving our life. Therefore, while designing information services initiatives with the help of ICT, we must not forget that if the target beneficiaries cannot receive their required information at their times of need, all these computers, telecommunication lines and sophisticated gadgets would mean nothing, at least, as far as 'information services' are concerned. This is not to indicate that technology is less important or that technology and information service have any conflict or contradiction between them. Rather, this is to indicate that, when the 'means' overshadows the 'ends', it makes the fulfillment of objectives difficult and uncertain. Too much glorification of the 'technology' factor and too less consideration of the 'human' and 'information' factor may well jeopardize the question of 'development' itself. This concern is echoed in the words of Gabriel Accascina. While discussing the role of information technology in poverty alleviation, Accascina (2000) commented, '...the benefits of IT for poverty alleviation are really about the benefits of the information that is made available via IT. The technology itself is not the point.' The same axiom applies to information services as well. ICT, therefore, should be viewed and applied in its proper perspective.

CHAPTER 2

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY, METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

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Rationale

Unprecedented advances in the fields of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and increasing recognition of information as a raw material for development have created a ripple effect in the development sector and we see many information-focused development initiatives to be undertaken in various parts of the world. Telecentres, rural information centres, rural technology centres, etc. are prime example of these initiatives. In a study sponsored by the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), ITU and IADB, Francisco J. Proenza, Roberto Bastidas-Buch and Guillermo Montero commented that, 'Telecenters have the potential to help break down some of the largest barriers to development that are presently faced by low-income populations, particularly in rural areas. Use of a telecenter would enable a rural inhabitant, for example, to gain on-line access to: distant productive assets and services; opportunities to learn better practices through formal and informal sources; to crucial market intelligence through informal networks that enhance bargaining power; to information on projects, financing institutions and options and support for the rural population; to expanded distant job opportunities and telework; and to persons with similar interests willing to work for a common cause.' (Proenza, Bastidas-Buch and Montero, 2001). Bangladesh, also, has been in the forefront of these activities which has resulted in large scale information and technology centered initiatives in the rural areas of Bangladesh.

These activities have opened up new scopes and opportunities not only for replicating multifarious 'information interventions' in the rural and less-privileged areas of the country, but also for the exploration, analysis and evaluation of the true potential of these efforts. The role of information as a driving force for rural and, broadly speaking, socio-economic development of a country has been more or less established in our society. But a lot has still remained to be achieved. This is an evolving sector, and we are likely to witness much more activities in this field in the coming days. Therefore, more research initiatives need to be performed in this sector to explore the true potential of information for rural development. The present research aims to do that by exploring how information and knowledge can assist rural communities in improving their livelihood and designing an information dissemination structure that will benefit grassroots people of Bangladesh by providing basic information in areas like agriculture, education, health, environment and social development. The importance of this kind of initiative lies in the fact that, although the need for information for socio-economic development is well recognized by all quarters, the exact ways and means in which information can be best utilized for livelihood development of the rural people, especially ultra-poor and marginalized communities are yet to be explored extensively. Recognition of the significance of information in rural development has resulted in many new and innovative exercises in the form of rural information centre, rural technology centre or telecentre. However, many of these initiatives are still being run on an experimental basis. For example, various models of telecentres could be seen in various parts of the world. One of these models can be termed as a 'network model', where hundreds of telecentres form a vast network going beyond the national boundaries. The top layer constitutes the regional network, which goes down to the national level and then the divisional, district or lower levels. Another model is the 'franchise model' in which, local entrepreneurs buy a franchise and are empowered with equipment and training to deliver a standard set of information services. At the same time, they invest in the local facility and are encouraged to implement revenue-generating services

alongside their development-oriented obligations. The third model is 'community entrepreneurship model', where the concept of entrepreneurship moves from the individual to the community, a Community Based Organisation (CBO) takes up the role of entrepreneur and usually there are working inter-relationships among the community entrepreneurs. Thus, a loosely connected network is built among the telecentre operators. Besides these models, some other models and/or a combination of different models are tried out in various parts of the world by telecentre operators. Although there is difference of opinion as to the comparative superiority or inferiority of these models, nobody has yet been able to give any conclusive judgment on this issue. There are many other issues related to the collection development, service design, service quality, performance measurement etc. of rural information centres which would require intensive and extensive research endeavours to form any conclusive opinion. At present, a whole plethora of research and development activities are going on in various parts of world on these issues. The present study is a continuation of this endeavour, focusing particularly on the aspects of need assessment and the designing of an information dissemination system for rural Bangladesh. Based on the findings of the survey and review of literature, it aims to come up with a model plan for information dissemination in the rural areas and concrete recommendations for implementing the model plan. In the view of the researcher, these two things are crucial for ensuring the timely and effective supply of livelihood information to the rural and marginalized people, which, in turn, would pave the way for sustainable rural development through capacity building and awareness raising among the rural communities.

Methodology

As information is increasingly being considered as an instrument of social change, casual observers as well as development activists and specialists alike have taken an active interest in the issue of information and social development. However, establishing a tangible link between information and development has proved to be a difficult task and although development activists and theorists as well as development organisations are

frantically trying to step up their information-focused development activities, a sure-success formula of information's role in development is yet to be devised. Nevertheless, it has neither undermined the importance of information nor has weakened information-focused activities of GOs and NGOs in developed as well as developing countries. On the contrary, the volume and intensity of information-centered development activities has increased manifold in the recent times. In Bangladesh, setting up of 4,501 Union Information and Service Centres in every part of the country is but a very recent example of this trend and belief.

Considering this, the present research has endeavoured to illustrate how information can best serve the most fundamental needs of the rural people of Bangladesh (and other developing countries) and what basic information-infrastructure is needed to make information available to the grassroots people. The **general objective** of the research, therefore, is to explore how information can be used for improving the livelihood of the rural people of Bangladesh and to design a sustainable and comprehensive information acquisition and dissemination mechanism. The **specific objectives** are:

1. To examine the existing structure of information delivery systems in the rural areas of Bangladesh;
2. To investigate what information are needed by the rural people to improve their livelihood; and
3. To design an information collection, processing and dissemination infrastructure which will be both sustainable and effective in the long run.

Research method and data collection tools

With a view to fulfill the above objectives, it was necessary to select appropriate methodologies for conducting the research. Because of the inherent characteristics of the study and the unique nature of the research objectives, survey method was deemed relevant for achieving the best results. Since surveys are effective to produce

information on socio-economic characteristics, attitudes, opinions, motives, etc., a survey covering the wider cross-sections of the rural people in Bangladesh is likely to identify the major features of information behavior of the rural people of Bangladesh, existing systems and mechanisms of information dissemination as well as shed light on an ideal system of information dissemination.

The tools used for data collection, analysis and the designing of the proposed information dissemination system are as follows:

Consulting existing literature

Review of existing literature is done with an aim to bring clarity and focus to the research problem, improve the research methodology, broaden the sphere of researcher's knowledge and contextualize the findings. In the present case, a wide range of information regarding information needs and information seeking behavior, information and rural development, rural information systems, etc. are being published in various parts of the world. Many of these information are available online which provide a rich understanding of the trends of information focused development activities. Besides, there are many printed sources of information including text and reference books, journals, magazines, newsletters, etc. It was necessary to consult as many sources as possible to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue. This is indeed a formidable task, because there is not only a huge volume of existing information on various aspects of information and rural development, but the pace in which new information and data are generated is also tremendous. To make the effort worthwhile, the researcher was faced with the task of achieving a fine balance between comprehensiveness and preciseness. Online Journals and web sites of organisations working on information-centered development activities proved to be two most significant sources for obtaining relevant information. In many cases, web sites of GOs and NGOs led to further print and online sources of information which proved quite valuable. Annual reports and other publications of NGOs also provided necessary

information. In all, the researcher believes that, in spite of the sheer magnitude of print and non-print materials on the issue of information and rural development, he succeeded in providing a comprehensive picture of the literature available on this issue.

Direct observation through field visits

In an attempt to understand the information needs and explore the ideas, beliefs and opinions of the rural people regarding the role of information in development, it was decided that all seven administrative divisions of the country would be covered by the study. Considering the importance of ensuring a balanced coverage of the rural populace as well as reaching the marginal and most disadvantaged groups living in the remote and far-flung areas, two districts from each division were selected for undertaking the survey, which consisted of direct observation, questionnaire, interview and Focus group Discussions. The researcher made extensive field visits in some of the selected areas to know about the existing information dissemination mechanisms, assess information needs of the people and have formal and informal talks with individuals and concerned organisations. It gave the researcher necessary insights and information as well as a sense of direction for effectively completing the study. The researcher held informal discussions with potential opinion leaders including local representatives, teachers, NGO officials, students, rural clubs, rural health workers, etc. They expressed their views regarding the information requirements of the rural people as well as the nature and characteristics of an effective and sustainable mode of information dissemination to the grassroots people. These views and opinions have enabled the researcher to attain a comprehensive understanding of the existing information delivery system in the rural areas, general expectations of the rural people from the information providing agencies and various problems that hinder the availability of information to the rural and marginalized people.

Survey through questionnaire

Two separate sets of questionnaires were prepared for collecting data from two groups of people: the rural people and the information providers. The first groups comprised rural people from 15 districts of the country, which are: Tangail, Rajbari, Mymensingh, Chittagong, Comilla, Patuakhali, Pirojpur, Narail, Jhenaidha, Kushtia, Sirajganj, Bogra, Sylhet, Sunamgonj and Rangpur. The second group included information providers including representatives from organisations, institution and networks who are presently engaged in providing information services for the rural and grassroots communities. The researcher consulted a wide variety of questionnaires dealing with similar issues for preparing the ideal questionnaires for this study. A comprehensive understanding of the livelihood style, social system and information requirements of the rural people was necessary for the construction of an effective questionnaire. Direct observation, discussion with rural people and opinion leaders as well as reading books on research methodology assisted the researcher in preparing both the questionnaires. In total, 28 villages from the above mentioned 15 districts were selected and 20 questionnaires were served in each village. In order to ensure balanced representation from various sections of the community, the questionnaires were distributed among various groups of people (illiterate, semi-literate, literate, etc.) in equal numbers. A major difficulty was faced while serving the questionnaire to the women. Although it was found during the FGDs that women were not reluctant to voice their concerns and engage in debates with their male counterparts, in case of filling up the questionnaire, the scenario was quite different. Female respondents were much more reluctant than males to fill up the questionnaire. The reluctance ranged from shyness to out and out suspicion. In spite of the fact that they were proposed to take help from facilitators in filling up the questionnaire, they expressed their reluctance to comply. However, most of the males who were approached, readily agreed to cooperate and most of them were not only willing, but quite enthusiastic also.

Although it was not always possible to attain absolute equality in this regard for obvious practical reasons, every attempt was taken to make sure that some kind of balance is achieved in the distribution and filling-up of the questionnaire. Stratified random sampling method was used for collecting data from the rural people. By nature, it could be termed disproportionate stratified random sampling since proportionate number of samples could not be achieved for the filling-up of the questionnaires. The researcher was careful in allotting sample fractions so that no stratum could be overrepresented or underrepresented, which might have led to skewed results.

The questionnaires were translated into Bengali and volunteers read out the questions to the respondents to ensure clarity and proper understanding. The second questionnaire, prepared for the information providers, was distributed among representatives from 40 information providing agencies including rural libraries, information resource centres and community information centres. Both traditional and technology based information centres were selected for the distribution of the questionnaire. In this case also, the questionnaire was translated into Bengali and volunteers read out the questions to the respondents whenever necessary.

Major issues confronted during questionnaire preparation and design

- *Enumeration of the population:*

As is it evident from the research objectives, the research endeavours to assess the information needs of the rural people of Bangladesh and, based on the findings of the fact finding surveys, design an appropriate, effective and sustainable dissemination system. Since, excepting the indigenous communities living in the Hill Tracts and other areas, Bangladeshis are generally a homogenous people, it was not difficult to have at least a general understanding of their informational behaviour. Based on that understanding, the researcher decided to pick up 15/20 localities in all administrative divisions of the country and distribute the questionnaires among the rural people by ensuring the best possible equilibrium in terms of literacy, sex, economic status, etc.

Although it was not possible to ensure gender balance, all other criteria were met in the end. The researcher himself and, in many instance, volunteers designated by him, collected the information through serving the questionnaire. The volunteers explained the questions to the respondents whenever needed and assisted them in filling-up the questionnaire, while being careful not to influence the thought-process of the respondents or their responses in any way.

- *Literacy of the respondent:*

Questionnaires require that the respondents can read. While this might seem initially like a reasonable assumption for many adult populations, for a country like Bangladesh, this cannot be taken for granted. Because, still a large portion of the rural people of Bangladesh are illiterate. Therefore, a simplified version of the questionnaire was prepared in Bengali and volunteers (who served the questionnaires) were given hands-on training and instruction so that they can assist the respondents (including the illiterate and semi-literate people) in filling-up the questionnaire effectively. The questionnaire distributed among the information providers, too, was translated into Bengali and necessary explanations and clarifications were made by the data collectors.

- *Cooperation from the respondents:*

Conducting surveys, especially among the rural people, poses multifarious challenges. Since this kind of interventions are not common in the rural areas, the rural people tend to be hesitant, suspicious and in some instances, openly hostile to the person serving the questionnaire. However, in this case, the researcher faced no significant challenges in this regard and the male population cooperated with the volunteers quite wholeheartedly. However, cooperation from the female population was must less spontaneous, which has resulted in gender disparity among the respondents.

- *Problems and prospects of information provision in the rural areas*

Rural librarians and information workers face a lot of challenges in running the libraries/information centres within a very limited budget and fulfilling the information needs of rural people. Therefore, in order to propose practical recommendations as well as a sustainable information dissemination mechanism for the rural areas, it is

important to learn about the present condition of the rural information workers and also their perception about the “information infrastructure” and its potential. For that reason, the designing of the questionnaire for the information providers had three key focuses:

- i. The job status and other personal information of the information workers;
- ii. Mode of operation in rural information centres; and
- iii. The perception of the information workers about the problems and possibilities of rural information services.

Variables of the questionnaire

The questionnaire served among the information users was divided into five sections. The first section focuses on the demographic aspect and collects name, age, gender, education and other demographic information of the respondent. The second section collects information about the economic condition of the respondent, e.g. sources of income, average monthly income, etc. The main objective of collecting these information is to determine the financial ability of the respondent in acquiring information and information services. Main focus of the third section is to determine the respondent’s perception about information, i.e. what he/she thinks about the value of information in his/her life. In the fourth section, an attempt has been made to ascertain the information needs of the respondents and the sources they usually consult for receiving these information. It also assess the frequency of information receiving by the respondents from the usual sources. The fifth and final section, the longest one, examines the respondent’s preference of various information channels and their opinions regarding the comparative merits and demerits of these channels.

The second questionnaire, the one served among the information providers, is divided into two sections. The first section collects personal information of the respondent including information about his/her language proficiency and computer literacy. It also determines the level of job satisfaction of the respondent. The second section

determines the respondent's information providing activities, his/her perception about information needs of rural people, comparative merits/demerits of various information sources and media and his/her opinion about the problems and prospect of rural information services.

Study areas and sample size

As mentioned earlier, the questionnaires were served in all seven administrative divisions of the country, namely: Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barisal, Sylhet and Rangpur. A total of 560 persons from 15 districts responded to the questionnaires. The number of villages covered is 28. While choosing the study areas, i.e., villages for serving the questionnaires, an attempt was made to ensure that the widest possible geographical coverage of the country is achieved. Therefore, wherever possible, adjacent districts, upazilas and localities had been avoided so that the information collected represent diverse cultural, geographical and socio-ethnic settings. One of the main limitations in this regard, admittedly, has been the omission of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) which is predominantly inhabited by non-Bengali indigenous people. This area could not be covered due to volatile political situation in the area and lack of time and opportunity by the researcher to visit the area. Excepting this exclusion, all attempts have been made to give a fair representation of the rural people of Bangladesh. Therefore, disaster-prone coastal belts (Barisal) as well as monga-stricken northern areas (Rangpur and Kurigram), remote and far-flung villages inhabited by hardcore poor as well as semi-urbanized rural communities – all have been fairly represented in the study sample.

A total of 27 information providers (rural librarians, information professionals, telecentre operators, etc.) responded to the questionnaire prepared for the information providers. Operating information services in the rural areas is an exciting, and, at the same time, an unrewarding and often challenging task. Motivation level of the information professionals working in the rural setting is generally found to be low or, at

least, lower than their urban counterparts. On the other hand, the sense of voluntarism and social welfare among the rural information professionals tend to be much higher than the urban information professionals. There are instances where rural information professionals do their job on a completely voluntary basis and do not take any salary. In these cases, their motivation level is quite high. While designing the questionnaire of the information professionals, conscious attempts were made to gather their information, ideas, concepts and convictions as comprehensively as possible. Although the number of questions in this case was much less than in the questionnaire for information users, the questions were more focused and pin-pointed, with an intention to have a clear understanding of the existing scenario of information provision in the rural areas, problems and prospects.

Tools used in data analysis

Although more than 700 questionnaires were served among the rural people in 15 districts, a total of 560 filled-up questionnaires were received back. On the other hand, 40 questionnaires (prepared for information providers) were served among the rural librarians and telecentre operators and 27 filled-in questionnaires were received back. All these questionnaires were given appropriate codes and the raw data were input into two separate databases created using MSAccess software. Subsequently, these data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 12.0 and necessary tables were generated.

Focus Group Discussion

The purpose of focus group discussions is to gain knowledge about a particular topic or need by interviewing a group of people directly affected by the issue. As opposed to individual interview, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) allows to observe participants engaging in dialogue, sharing ideas, opinions, and experiences, and debating with each other to find out and identify the various dimensions of the issue at hand. FGDs are unique in that, they bring out the participants' spontaneous reactions and ideas and let

the researcher observe group dynamics and organisational issues. The researcher conducted a number of FGDs in various parts of the country to supplement the findings through questionnaires and direct observations. While choosing participants for the FGDs, the researcher was careful to ensure wider participation of people from various strata of the rural society. A total of seven FGDs were done in the following localities: Dharmapur (Noakhali district), Razpur (Lalmonirhat district), Sarai (Rangpur district), Nagarbathan (Jhinedah district), Baravita (Kurigram), Adda (Comilla) and Kalaiya (Patuakhali district). Seven to eleven participants took part in every FGD. With the exception of a few, the number of women in the FGDs was almost equal. It was observed that, contrary to the popular belief, the rural women are now much more vocal about their socio-economic rights and they do not hesitate to demand these rights, whatever the circumstances are. The researcher found this trend quite strong particularly in Noakhali, Lalmonirhat and Rangpur, where the male participants were compelled to agree to or accept the views and arguments of the women participants after prolonged debate and arguments-counter arguments. It clearly shows that, the traditional male dominated rural society is slowly but surely giving way to a more balanced, just and egalitarian society. Admittedly, we are still in the early days of this transformation, but there can be no doubt that the situation is changing. It can be attributed to the spread of literacy among men and women, the activities of human rights groups in the far-flung areas of the country and also to the fact that, rural males are becoming more accommodating to the ideas of women rights and gender equity.

Limitations of the study

The research has been conducted in fifteen districts of the country covering different geographic regions of the country – with an aim to know about the diverse information need of the rural people of Bangladesh. Besides the grassroots communities, the survey also covered 27 rural librarians and information workers to know about the information providers' viewpoint. Moreover, the activities of various organisation, institutions and networks working in rural Bangladesh for ensuring people's access to information,

especially development information have been discussed and analyzed. Seven Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted in various rural areas of the country also have been instrumental in providing valuable insights into the thoughts and perception of the rural people regarding information's role in development and the ways it could be best utilized for improving livelihood. Based on these discussions and findings, a comprehensive and sustainable information delivery system has been recommended. Admittedly, a more comprehensive picture of the information needs of the rural people of Bangladesh could have been drawn if more people and more areas could be covered by the survey. However, considering the homogeneity of the people of Bangladesh and the comprehensiveness of the research, the researcher believes that, the current research endeavour would contribute significantly in the understanding of the information needs and problems of the rural people of Bangladesh and the ways in which information could be made available to them in a manner which will be effective as well as sustainable in the long run.

CHAPTER 3

RURAL INFORMATION SERVICES: BANGLADESH AND ASIAN EXPERIENCES

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Rural people and their information need

This is commonly believed that no country can achieve sustainable development unless the grassroots and marginal people are integrated and included in the mainstream development efforts. This understanding has resulted in a more comprehensive view of development, especially community development. The new emphasis on development is more towards achieving improvements in the quality of life leading to higher human development, equity and empowerment especially of the rural poor, which can play a major role in national development (Sharma, 2004).

As indicated earlier, the role of information in the socio-economic development of a country is now well established. People need information for different reasons (Takalkar and Ramadevi, 1999). These needs include:

- Basic needs: health, water supply, sanitation, shelter, etc.
- Economic needs: where to sell product, whom to contact for marketing of products, etc.
- General information needs: where to find what, policies and services to get benefited.
- Agricultural needs: how to produce better crops, information on poultry, dairy, animal husbandry, etc.
- Educational needs: text books, teaching aids and general education.
- Recreational needs: sports, culture, entertainment.

- Capacity building needs: where to receive training, how to attain skills, etc.
- Career-related needs: how to find employment, what to do for self employment, etc.

Alegbeleye and Aina (1985, p. 13) indicate the following informational needs of rural communities:

- Neighborhood: Information needs in the neighborhood includes problems of water supply, electricity supply, environmental sanitation, refuse disposal, road maintenance and drought.
- Health: Information on how individuals can, prevent different diseases that affect them, and awareness of available healthcare delivery and what it costs.
- Agriculture and allied occupations: Such information needs include planting treated seeds, soil conservation, prevention of plants and animal disease, fertilizer application, farm machineries, recommended thinning practices, proper storage of farm products, marketing techniques, cooperative activities and other agro-cultural activities.
- Education: Information needs of the existing rural schools, needs of the illiterates and semi-illiterates. They need to have relevant information that will develop in their interest and support of teaching and learning processes.
- Housing: Rural public need information about where they can obtain loans to build houses and the type of materials to be used and where they can be easily obtained.
- Employment: rural communities need information on employment opportunities on taxation, investment opportunities, banking and other financial activities.
- Transportation: They need information on the cost of bicycles, motorcycles and vehicles and where to obtain them. They need information about road construction and maintenance.
- Religion, Recreation and Culture: Information is required on religions, recreations and cultural activities.

- Welfare and Family matters: Information is required on problems of marriage, childcare, juvenile delinquency, etc.
- Legal matters: Information is needed on laws that affect the rural dwellers. Such law ranges from marriage to land.
- Crime and Safety: Information is required on how to prevent crimes, report crimes, role of the law enforcement agents etc.
- Policies and Government: Information is needed on political rights of the people and how they can exercise such right.
- Land: Information is needed on land tenure systems, acquisition and transfer of land etc.

Mchombu (1996) identifies the following common information needs of the rural people:

- Information on income generation (projects, non-farm incomes, and money-saving initiatives).
- Community leadership.
- Literacy support.
- Basic economics (petty business, finance/loans and how to get them, and survival of small businesses).
- Government policies on rural development (health, agriculture, education, cooperatives, etc.).
- Soil conservation, fertility restoration, and soil erosion.

In short, while the basic information needs of rural and urban people are more or less similar, the rural people have some special needs. Foremost among these needs is the need for agricultural information. Besides, the nature and scope of their needs (especially, needs relating to land, legal matters, environment, education, commerce, etc.) also is different from that of the urban people.

Rural information service infrastructure

Like most other sectors, the information service infrastructure in the rural areas is also weak and insufficient. Although the rural people feel the need and urge for information, they generally do not express this need and urge in a way which their urban counterparts do. As Barron and Curran (1980) point out, "What are my information needs today?" is not one which the average citizen ... asks himself each day. This does not mean that citizens do not have information needs, but that survival, educational, entertainment issues just do not find expression in the same terms that occur to some information scientists, library educators and librarians ... (p. 620)" Barring a few exceptions, rural people in all developing countries rely heavily on informal and non-institutional sources for their day-to-day information. These sources include friends and relatives, community leaders, religious leaders, local influential people, elderly persons, school and college teachers, public representatives, GO-NGO workers, and educated persons in general. Besides these informal sources, they frequently take assistance from the following institutional and formal information sources.

Rural Public Library: The rural public libraries have been in existence for a very long time. These libraries have been operating in some form or other in almost every country in the world. A public library is effectively suited to promote information education, spread of literacy and dissemination of information to all citizens irrespective of class, creed, race and religion. It is worthwhile to mention what the D. P. Chatoopadhyay Committee for formulation of National Policy on Library and Information Systems in India recommended: "the most important task before the Government is to establish, maintain and strengthen the free public libraries in the country and enable them to work as a system. The main thrust in this area should go to the rural public library. A village or a village cluster with an adequate population should have a community library which will also serve as an information centre. Resources of different agencies engaged in the work of public health, adult education, local self government and such others may be pulled to build up this complete centre (Chatoopadhyay, 1998, p. 12)." It is indicated

that, rural public libraries can function as organised resource centres where all the agencies involved in public welfare may go on supplying regularly all their up-to-date information brochures and publicity materials for proper dissemination of information to the people calling on the libraries for such enquiries (Das and Khan, 2004).

A properly functioning rural public library can have a lasting impact on the lives of rural poor. The rural public library can function effectively when it:

- gives priority to the needs of the users,
- accommodates users in all levels,
- responds always to the users,
- supports the users to express and identify their actual requirements,
- handles intelligently the errors committed by the users,
- displays its available source documents and documents on current affair (Lahiri, 1996).

Rural Clubs/societies: One important aspect of rural life is the abundance of various clubs, associations, organisations and societies. These clubs are usually founded and managed by rural youth and the main focus generally remains on sports and cultural activities. However, many such clubs play a role in sharing information with rural people by arranging various programmes like discussion meetings, rallies, theme-based sports and cultural programmes, fairs, competitions, video screening, etc. While the people living in towns and cities have numerous ways to entertain themselves, rural people have very limited ways and means to do so. Rural clubs enable the rural people to enjoy their leisure times through constructive entertainment. In the same way, they allow the rural people to learn new things, come across new ideas and share their own thoughts and ideas with people from outside. Many rural clubs run public libraries, operate Youth, Children's and Women's Forum and play an indispensable role in knowledge sharing dissemination of information through their activities.

Government agencies: Governments of the developed and developing countries alike are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of making development information available to the grassroots people. This has inspired the governments to promote e-governance, establish rural library and information centres, develop digital information infrastructure in the remote and inaccessible areas and encourage rural people, development practitioners, researchers, social and cultural activists, etc. to generate and share information on various issues relating to socio-economic development like poverty reduction, agricultural development, population control, human rights, climate change, disaster management, etc. Extension services of various ministries and government agencies are providing sector-wise information services for rural people with strong focus on agriculture, environment, human resource development, education, etc. Talero and Gaudete (1995) observe, 'Government intervention to harness information for development is necessary on several fronts: as policy-makers, as major users of information technology, and as compensating influence against market failures. Also, government must supervise and coordinate education, the key to human economic development.'

Rural NGOs and CBOs: Rural areas of most of the developing countries are characterized by high concentration of Non Governmental Organisations and Community Based Organisations and many of these organisations extend formal or informal information services to the rural people. Some NGOs maintain libraries which can be used by development practitioners as well as rural community members. Other NGOs/CBOs provide general and specialized information services on critical development issues like health, environment, capacity building, education, self-reliance, employment, agriculture, etc. They also organise information sharing and awareness raising activities like seminars, study circles, discussion meetings, day observation through rallies, video screening, fair, display, etc. In countries like Bangladesh, these community based organisations have emerged as one of the major information providing agencies in recent times. In many cases, the NGOs/CBOs have emerged as the

main organisations fulfilling the information needs of rural people and implementing library development activities. For instance, the biggest NGO in the world, BRAC has been actively involved with the establishment of rural libraries in various parts of Bangladesh and, in this way, has spearheaded the rural library movement in the country. Following the eleven-year civil war in Sierra Leone, organisations like The Sabre Foundation became very active in restoring the national library in Freetown and providing librarians and library users with basic information technology training courses. They have also been crucial in the development of the library's collection after rebuilding (Dutta, 2009).

Traditional folk media: Traditional folk media can play a vital role in imparting knowledge and conveying information to the rural people. Rural areas in most of the developing countries are a long way from global information superhighway, and they suffer from different kinds of communication problems. In many rural villages there are no satellite dishes, computers or televisions. But although these villages lack modern, technology-based communication infrastructure, they contain a rich communication environment, i.e. traditional folk media, which predates modern electronic media by many years. In many parts of the world, rural people are suspicious about modern communication media. It has been observed that, these media lack cultural credibility to the vast majority of rural people. In these cases, receptivity to outside messages can be enhanced by the use of traditional folk media that are often an integral part of rural life and that use the visual and oral expressions that are commonly understood by villagers. Traditional folk media are cultural resources that accumulate indigenous knowledge, experiences and expressions passed down from generation to generation. Woven into proverbs and poems, songs and dances, puppet plays and stories, rhythms and beats, they are embedded with a strong sense of cultural identity which can be a potent force for development. In many cases, these media are the traditional conduits of indigenous knowledge, experience and culture. Creative use of these cultural resources in

communities where they are popular and well entrenched can be a subtle and effective way of introducing development ideas and messages.

Communication professionals and thinkers also appreciate the role played by traditional folk media in rural development. They view these media as an alternative or a complement to modern mass media. Traditional media have been used in countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, in family planning campaigns, health care programmes, environmental protection projects, and adult literacy programmes, among others. Some of the advantages of traditional folk media are that they do not require large capital investments and there is not a dependence on expensive communication technologies that are liable to break down. Traditional media can be used "live", and are likely to have the greatest impact when audience members can interact with the performers and artists and even participate. Alternatively, they can be coupled with other media such as radio and television (SDRE, 1998).

Rural Mass Media: The rural mass media include rural press, rural radio, participatory video, rural television and other means of broadcast targeted at the rural people.

Radio: Radio is the most dominant form of rural broadcast media. It is directed specifically to rural people and their information needs. Rural people's information needs are often ignored by national radio networks and the rural radio approach is an alternative to narrow, city-centred urban radio. All over the world, radio is one of the most widespread and popular tools of communication. It is, therefore, a very appropriate communication technology to address food security, poverty reduction, environmental protection and a host of other areas of concern to rural populations. It is inexpensive, has wide coverage and is readily available, even to very remote rural populations. Programme production is relatively simple and local stations can easily create their own content. Community participation is a fundamental characteristic of rural radio - live public shows, village debates and participation in the actual

management of the radio station are some examples of its participatory nature. Rural radio fulfills a number of versatile functions. It is:

- an important mechanism for rapid diffusion of development information in a diversity of language and to widespread, often remote geographical areas
- a channel for interactive communication, for dialogue and debate on the major issues of rural development;
- a platform for democratic and pluralistic expression of the opinions, needs and aspirations of rural communities;
- a tool for cultural expression and entertainment, and a means of collecting, preserving and enhancing the oral and musical heritage of rural communities;
- a medium to collect local information on social issues, which is essential for defining, planning and implementing development efforts;
- a means of raising public awareness and motivation; and
- a tool which, combined with other media, can be used for training and the transfer and exchange of knowledge and technologies (SDRE, 1998).

Participatory video: Small format participatory video has also been in extensive use in some parts of the world as a tool for rural and agricultural development. It is considered as a highly persuasive and effective communication medium. Video makes it possible to overcome barriers of language and illiteracy; it visually demonstrates new ideas and techniques and standardizes information so that it is transmitted accurately from technical sources to farmers. With some basic training, rural people can prepare video presentations about community development concerns in local languages. Editing can be done in the camera and through immediate playback video production results can be quickly viewed. Presentations can even be shown in areas without electricity using battery-powered monitors. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations has applied participatory video for rural and agricultural development in Africa based on experiences that have been successful in Latin America using a methodology called "rural audiovisual pedagogy". This methodology uses participatory video as a communication tool for mediating between rural people's needs and the possible

sources of information and expertise to respond to those needs. This is achieved through the production and use, with local communities, of video documentaries and training presentations. Used in this way, video can empower rural residents to actively participate in development by articulating their ideas and taking part in decisions; by recognizing the value of the skills they already possess while gaining new knowledge; and by planning and carrying out local development activities (SDRE, 1998).

Television: Another communication medium adaptable to rural areas is television. This technology is already in operation in many developing countries. For example, the Indian government has been experimenting over the years with a Delhi-based television programme 'Krishi Darshan' (Farm Forum). This programme is designed to inform farmers about new agricultural techniques. Three thirty-minutes programmes are telecast each week to a set of villages surrounding Delhi, with community receivers in the village for viewers. With the development of NASA satellite programme, future transmission might also utilize satellite intermediaries to broadcast to an increasing number of villagers (Broehl, 1978). *Maati O Manush* (Land and People) is a hugely popular programme on agriculture, which was broadcast by Bangladesh Television for a very long period. It created mass-awareness about various agricultural issues and played a vital role in distributing agricultural information.

Rural Press: The rural press can act as a medium for community communication, disseminate information and knowledge about nutrition, health and hygiene, improved farm practices, family planning measures and development plans to those sections of the society where the information is needed the most (Gupta, 1999). Rural people, who sometimes find it difficult to grasp the meaning of language used in national newspapers and magazines, appreciate the easy-to-understand language of rural newspapers and other media. Since reading is basic to the understanding of the working of a host of social, economic and political institutions, the rural press by cultivating and

reinforcing the reading habit performs an important role in enhancing social and political awareness (Devi and Singh, 2004).

World Wide Web: Although Internet is still overwhelmingly used by the urban people, it is gaining grounds in the rural areas as well. The World Wide Web is becoming an important source of information for the rural people of not only the developed countries but also the developing ones. Thousands of web sites are being developed which are based on local contents and are available in local languages. Initiatives on e-agriculture, e-health, e-learning, etc. are becoming quite popular even in the most economically backward countries in the world. Strengthened by government and corporate support, Internet-based development initiatives are appreciated and accepted by the grassroots people. A major thrust of these initiatives is to digitize the government services in different areas so that rural people can not only receive up-to-date information on various issues, but also can avail themselves of the services provided by the government and non-government organisations.

Mobile phones: These days, mobile phones have been playing an increasingly dominant role as a medium of communication and also as a provider of various services. Globally, the number of mobile phone subscribers has surged nearly 25 per cent annually for the last eight years. Decreasing cost of mobile phone handsets and call rates have been enabling people from low income groups to use mobile phones not only for communication, but also for a whole range of other services taking photographs and listening to songs. Many information service providers have been using this ubiquitous nature of mobile phones to provide information to the grassroots people. Hundreds of thousands of people living in the rural areas of the developing countries receive regular updates, news and information on agriculture, disasters, health, human rights, education, climate, etc. on their mobile phones. With the increasing penetration of mobile phone networks in the rural and outlying areas, mobile phones are expected to

play a more dominant role in the dissemination of information to the rural people in the coming days.

Community Information Centre/Telecentres: Telecentres or Community Information Centres (CIC) is a comparatively recent phenomenon which has drawn the attention of development enthusiasts and general people alike. Over the last few decades, hundreds of telecentres have been established in many parts of the world, catering to the information needs of millions of grassroots people. A telecentre provides basic ICT services and useful information to the rural people (Proenza, Bastidas-Buch & Montero, 2001). It is a common point of access for multiple users (often an entire community), providing a range of ICT services including Internet, fax, word processing, and even specialised information retrieval or applications (e.g. distance education) (Caspary, 2002). Some of the services offered by telecentres include:

- World Wide Web browsing, emailing, computer, and office facilities;
- Formal and informal training in the use of the technology;
- Local business support services, particularly data-processing services;
- Electronic information access;
- Telework opportunities, particularly the generation of new job opportunities through telework;
- Local government information and meeting space (Qvortrup 1989, p. 61-62).

Barbara Phillip and Dennis Foote (2007) have identified three distinct set of functions usually performed by telecentres. They have grouped these functions as Informational, Transactional and e-Governance functions.

Informational	Transactional	e-Governance
Agriculture	Communication	Downloading and submission of forms
Education (general)	Desktop publishing, printing	Status of pending work
Computer training	Photocopying	land records
Job listings	Obtaining loans and insurance	Ration cards
Health (general)	Entertainment	Government certificates

Informational	Transactional	e-Governance
Government schemes and procedures	e-Banking/remittances	Licenses/permits
News	e-Commerce transactions	Grievance redress
Market prices	matrimonial services	Below-poverty-line lists
Weather	Photography	Vehicle registration

Table 1: Different types of functions performed by telecentres

In a study sponsored by the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), ITU and IADB, Francisco J. Proenza, Roberto Bastidas-Buch and Guillermo Montero commented that, 'Telecentres have the potential to help break down some of the largest barriers to development that are presently faced by low-income populations, particularly in rural areas. Use of a telecentre would enable a rural inhabitant, for example, to gain on-line access to: distant productive assets and services; opportunities to learn better practices through formal and informal sources; to crucial market intelligence through informal networks that enhance bargaining power; to information on projects, financing institutions and options and support for the rural population; to expanded distant job opportunities and telework; and to persons with similar interests willing to work for a common cause' (Proenza, Bastidas-Buch & Montero, 2001).

Electronic Doorway Library (EDL): This technology-centred initiative is a new concept being experimented in India. As proposed by the Developing Library Network (DELNET), these EDLs will be attached to an existing facility in a village like school, *gram panchayat*, cooperative society, youth and voluntary association, etc. The EDLs will give special attention to the requirements of children, women and people with disability. Information support on five areas, viz. health and welfare, agriculture, education, general information and small scale industries will be provided. For this, information resources on the above mentioned areas will be selected and developed.

Kiosk-on-Wheel: This initiative has been introduced by the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur. This is in fact a mobile information kiosk for rural areas. It is a dust-

proof unit on board a cycle rickshaw, called *InfoThela*. It will connect to the web through a wireless system. It has a battery bank that will be charged as the entrepreneurs pedals from street to street, village to village top provide information and email services. This initiative resembles with the *Infomediary* initiative of D.Net, Bangladesh.

Rural people's knowledge: a vital part of rural information infrastructure

Whenever the question of information services arises, the general tendency of most of the people is to think about services provided by people from outside or abroad, people living in towns and cities, who "give" information and knowledge to the rural people. This notion is indeed wrong and biased. Because it assumes that rural people themselves are unable to generate information or knowledge; they are always dependent on outsiders living in cities for information. Modern development thinkers challenge this notion by exploring areas where rural people's own knowledge and information prove extremely valuable. In his seminal work "Rural Development: putting the last first", Robert Chambers explores this issue in great detail. Chambers observes that, 'In rural development, the centre-periphery biases of outsiders' knowledge are reflected in the concentration of research, publication, training and extension on what is exotic rather than indigenous, mechanical rather than human, chemical rather than organic, and marketed rather than consumed.' (Chambers, 1983, p. 77). He identifies four dimensions of the knowledge generated by rural people, which are:

- a) *Farming practices*: Many of the practices of small rural farmers which were once regarded as primitive or misguided are now recognized as sophisticated and appropriate. Modern scientific research has proved traditional farming methods practiced by small farmers of remote rural areas more scientific, eco-friendly, productive and logical. For examples, the practice of mixed cropping (growing two or more crops simultaneously on the same land) was regarded by outsiders as backward and irrational, but modern agricultural research has proved that it has many advantages, including: different rooting systems exploit different levels

in the soil profile for moisture and nutrients, one crop may provide a favorable micro climate for another, etc.

- b) *Knowledge of the environment*: Rural people's knowledge of the observable environment has proved to be extremely valuable. Especially, the observation of the people who live in environments with much diversity is quite authentic and scientific. Besides, rural people's knowledge of soil and land types and climate are also very strong and sound. Chambers has cited examples from the Philippines, Nigeria, Somalia and Kenya which prove that rural people in these countries can make sound judgments about various environmental phenomena although they have little or no formal education.
- c) *Rural people's faculties*: A strength of rural people's knowledge is the faculties which maintain, extend and correct it. These may include acute observation, good memory for detail, and transmission through teaching, apprenticeship and story-telling. Such rural knowledge is at the same time vulnerable and adaptable. It is continuously lost through death and is continuously renewed and corrected through observation (Chambers 1983, p. 89).
- d) *Rural people's experiments*: Rural people also generate new knowledge and technologies through tests and experimentations. The experimental approach of rural people is centred mainly on agriculture; which is implicit in the selection of seeds or clones. An excellent example of this experimentation is "Hari Dhan" (*Hari paddy*) invented by Haripada Kapali, a farmer from the Jhenidah district of Bangladesh. In spite of being illiterate, Haripada Kapali has invented this super quality paddy with the help of relentless experimentation and his instinctive knack for farming. This paddy costs little to cultivate and the farmers can get 18 to 20 *maunds* paddy per *bigha* by cultivating *Hari Dhan*.

Robert Chambers observed, 'In most countries of the third world, rural people's knowledge is an enormous and underutilized national resource' (1983, p. 92). Likewise, John Hatch contended that the small farmers' expertise represents 'the single largest

knowledge resources not yet mobilized in the development enterprise ... we simply cannot ignore it any longer (1976, p. 17)'. Therefore, considering the ephemeral nature of rural peoples' knowledge, this knowledge must be captured, processed, documented, institutionalized and shared so that people from all corners of the globe can be benefited from this. Rural people, development workers, researchers, librarian and information scientists and GO-NGO workers should work in a concerted and coordinated way to make this happen. The knowledge generated by the rural people would immensely enrich the global knowledge repository on rural development. For sharing this knowledge with rural people from all over the world, both traditional and non-traditional rural library and information services should be strengthened. At this stage, we would briefly discuss about the major types of rural library and information agencies.

Rural information services: Asian experiences

Rural library and information services in India

In India, mainly three kinds of agencies/institutions are making efforts to provide information services in the rural areas. These include: i. Government/semi-government/autonomous agencies ii. Non-governmental organisations/associations and iii. Corporate agencies. Chatterjee (2004) has furnished a number of examples of these initiatives:

Government initiatives: Government of different States of India have taken different initiatives (almost all are ICT based), to disseminate information among the rural people. These include:

- a) Akshay Kendras (Kerala): Akshay Kendras are information kiosks set up in the rural areas. Through these kiosks, the government is setting up rural broadband wireless networks. The villagers can receive essential government services like paying electricity bills, getting birth certificates, etc. through these kiosks.

- b) CLIC Project (West Bengal): Under this initiative the State government is establishing around 1500 Community Library and Information Centres in such villages where there are no public libraries.
- c) Community Information Centres (Arunachal, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura): Located in local schools, colleges or suitable government buildings, these centres provides email and web access to the rural people.
- d) Jana Mitra Scheme (Rajashtan): Under this UNDP funded scheme, information kiosks have been set up in rural areas that provide access to information pertaining to government services.
- e) Lokmitra Project (Himachal): Under this initiative, technology based information centres provide easy access to government information and the facilities of e-governance to the rural people.

Other such initiatives include National Agricultural Technology project (Andhra), National Institutive of Rural Development (Andhra), Raj Nidhi Scheme (Rajasthan), Wired Village Project (Maharashtra), etc.

NGO initiatives: According to a rough estimate, around one million NGOs are working in India. Many NGOs are undertaking information service initiatives for the rural people. Some of these initiatives are:

- a) Drishtee Project: It is a platform for rural networking and marketing services for enabling e-governance, education and health services. It runs with the help of a software that facilitates communication and information interchange within a localized intranet between villages and a district centre.
- b) Gyandoot Scheme: Under this initiative, twenty villages in a tribal area of India have been interconnected through an intranet owned by the community. 32 Wired Village Centres or information kiosks are operational under the name *Soochanalayas*.

- c) *GRID Centre*: General Resource and Information Dissemination (GRID) centres consist of an information kiosk and a data bank coordinating with government agencies. It provides farmers with information, feedback and training in collaboration with local self-help groups.
- d) *Information Village*: Under this initiative, 'Information Shops' have been set up in 11 villages in Tamil Nadu which provide information services to villagers. The project's databases include details of around 130 government programmes for low income rural families, local market price for grains, local farming input prices, etc.
- e) *SARI Network*: Under the Sustainable Access in Rural India (SARI) Project, 38 far-flung villages in Tamil Nadu have been wirelessly connected with a server containing information-rich databases. An information kiosk set up in each village meets the needs of the people of the concerned villages.

Corporate Initiatives: Several corporate houses have also been providing information services to the rural people through ICT based initiatives. Some of these are:

- a) *Amul's DISK Net*: Well known dairy company Amul has developed a network of Dairy Information System Kiosks. At last count, 2500 such kiosks have been set up. These kiosks also offer telephony, market intelligence and other information services.
- b) *Hindustan Lever's iShakti*: This project has set up more than 1000 information kiosks, delivering information services to several thousand villages. The kiosks chiefly offers audio visual information services in the fields of education, health, employment, agriculture, etc.
- c) *ITC's e-chaupal*: This project was launched in 2000 and has since set up approximately 3000 information centres covering a population of around 1.2 million in five states in India. E-Chaupals provide services and information in areas like weather and market prices, scientific farm practices, family planning, etc.

Other such initiatives include Ogiivy & Mather's 'Param', Parry's 'Indiaagriline.com', etc.

Rural library and information services in Thailand

There are different patterns of library and information services in the rural communities in Thailand. These patterns include: rural public libraries, learning centres, and village reading centres, under the public library system; a bookmobile service, part of a university library extension programme; and a combined library, within the school library system. *The public library system* is within the Department of Non-Formal Education, in the Ministry of Education. While the public library is under the District Non-Formal Education Centre, it is also under the Centre for the Promotion of Informal Education within the same Department. Such a structure makes implementation of the policies at the local level ineffective because the library and the non-formal education centre compete with each other for scarce resources. There are at least 10 *university library extension programmes in the country*, which provide more or less the same services to different rural communities. The concept of a combined library was introduced by UNESCO in 1992. Presently, a number of schools all over the country follow this pattern.

There are 845 public libraries at provincial and district levels in Thailand (Siltragool, 2007 cited in Ahmed, 2009). Under the current public library system, rural public libraries are located in district headquarters and they act mainly to support informal education, non-formal education and local information provision. Community learning centres and village reading centres operate as extensions of public library services to rural dwellers. Moreover, various forms of mobile and outreach library services have been organised by public libraries to bring books and information to rural people. Community libraries can be found throughout Thailand. They differ from public libraries in that they are created by and for local communities and usually are not supported with government funds. These libraries often provide informal education services, such as literacy instruction, computer training and extension activities (Ahmed, 2009). All service patterns under the

public library system reflect a large number of constraints in terms of organisational structure, funding, and human resources. Despite good leadership and commitment to the community of both administrators and staff, certain factors have contributed to the ineffectiveness and slow development of public library service in rural areas. These include: a low level of authority of public libraries; a lack of good planning and management; a lack of adequate budgets and of professionally trained personnel; and not enough appropriate library resources (Cheunwattana, 1999). Cheunwattana observes that, 'administrators assigned to plan and supervise public libraries are usually educators and not trained in library and information science. Despite their commitment and enthusiasm, they lack a professional understanding of planning and management of library systems and services. They equate "literacy promotion" to "library promotion," and thus concentrate efforts and resources on non-formal education activities. Librarians and other library staff feel that they are not appropriately assigned to work according to their professional training. With low status, dim career prospects, and low morale, they feel overwhelmed by too many responsibilities.... on the contrary, the bookmobile service and the combined library are managed by professionally trained librarians and staff. Teacher-librarians and project workers are highly satisfied and enthusiastic with their jobs despite their low professional status and lack of career advancement (1999).'

Rural library and information services in Pakistan

There is no organised public library system in Pakistan. According to a survey conducted in 1996 there were 302 public libraries mostly located in large cities and towns. The existing public libraries are under the charge of municipal and social bodies. The majority of these libraries are not in very good shape. Only a few are properly staffed and one seldom finds a qualified librarian. The services of these libraries are quite limited and the main sources of income are regular grants from the annual budget of the municipal body and the subscriptions charged to the public (Haider, 1998). During the 1980s, 4,373 box libraries were established in rural areas but their fate is unclear

(Khurshid, 2000). The 1998 National Education Policy provides for the establishment of rural public libraries up to the union council level, but no practical step has been taken so far. The literate people in rural areas quench their thirst of information through personal libraries, private subscription libraries, school/ religious school libraries, mosque libraries and shrine libraries.

The concept of Multipurpose Community Telecentres is entirely new in Pakistan. Services provided by a typical MCT are available separately to a great extent in urban areas and to some extent in rural areas. For instance, there are internet cafe's, public call offices, pay phone shops, fax shops and computer training centres all run on commercial basis. The only examples of community-based information services in rural areas are three Cyber Community Centres (CCCs) established in 2001. The first such CCC in the country was launched in Gwadar in south-west Balochistan in March 2001, followed by one in Mithi in south-east Sindh, and Usterzai Payan, Kohat in NWFP. These CCCs were set up by the Sustainable Development Networking Programme (SNDP) of the IUCN in collaboration with local NGOs (i.e. Baanhn Beli at Mithi, Rural Community Development Council at Gwadar and Al- Asar Academy at Usterzai Payan, Kohat). The purpose of these centres was to serve the local community by providing them the opportunity to access the rich information resources available on the internet (Siochru and Rashid, 2001). The latest information collected about these three CCCs reveals that one centre (Usterzai Payan, Kohat) is restricted to the internet and other software training for the students of a community school. The internet facility is not offered to the general public. However, the other two centres are serving the general public.

Recently, a number of Telecentre initiatives are being planned in Pakistan. PTCL is planning to set up tele-info-centres in rural areas. Proposed services include national/international PCO, fax, Internet, email, voice mail, word processing, document printing, document scanning, computer hands-on training, photocopying and multi-media on payment.

Rural library and information services in Nepal

Approximately 86% of Nepal's 26 million people live in rural areas. The rural people of Nepal are overwhelmingly dependent on subsistent agriculture for their livelihood. They lack access to basic services such as education and health care, and consequently migrate to urban areas, often in search of employment. There is no infrastructure in the vast rural areas of Nepal for the easy access of the rural people to information. Traditionally, the country's library and information infrastructure has been very poor. Besides the traditional libraries established earlier, schools and colleges also have their own libraries. Recently, as part of government initiatives, new public libraries are being opened in different areas of the country. In some places, local people are playing an important role in the establishment of these libraries, while NGOs also taking active interest in establishing rural public libraries.

'Rural Education and Development Nepal' (READ) helped community libraries whereas another NGO named 'Room to Read' established libraries in the community schools in the villages. Both these NGOs also provide assistance to the already established community and school libraries. The READ Nepal opened 50 community libraries in 39 remote districts of the country and 'Room To Read' opened 1445 school libraries in 24 districts of the country. In the 2006-07 fiscal year, the Government of Nepal distributed US\$57,000.00 among 81 public libraries of 32 districts as grant to uplift their services among the rural community. The government has passed the National Policy on Library and Information Services in 2007 which is expected to accelerate the library movement in the country.

In association with various NGOs, Nepal National Library has initiated a nation-wide reading campaign to raise awareness among the community people about the importance of books and information. Nepal National Library has also been organizing basic library management training for the librarians from different rural areas. All the 75 districts in the country have district information centres, although only a few of them

are fully functional. The Ministry of Education and Sports also has taken initiative to establish one Youth Information Centre in each Development Regions. These Youth Information Centres would cater to the information needs of the youth communities of the country.

In recent times, a number of technology based information service initiatives also have been undertaken by various agencies. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has undertaken a project titled 'Digital Broadcast Initiative' in collaboration with an international NGO to provide critical information on a range of development issues important to the community people of Nepal. It is a broad partnership of several groups working with the continued support of the government of Nepal through three project teams: Content Development, Outreach and Assessment. The teams work collaboratively on determining the information needs of underprivileged people, writing and producing relevant and engaging audio and multimedia programmes to address these needs, broadcasting these programmes directly to communities via satellite and FM radiocast, integrating broadcast programming into existing outreach work being done by partner community organisations, collecting ongoing feedback and input directly from communities and including it in programming, and monitoring and assessing the overall impact of the initiatives (Equal Access, 2011).

Rural library and information services in China

Among China's 1.3 billion people, two-thirds live in rural areas, where poverty and illiteracy levels are high. Because most public libraries are located in cities, and many charge for access, China's rural residents have little contact with books, let alone digital information. At present, a large number of GO and NGO level initiatives are being implemented in China with an aim to make development information available to the wider cross sections of rural people. Two such initiatives are:

The China Evergreen Rural Library Service (CERLS): CERLS has formed partnerships with public school libraries to provide free access to computers and the Internet to students, teachers, and members of the public in rural communities. Since its founding in 2001, CERLS has added 10 public school libraries to its network, serving more than 1 million people. CERLS schools go out of their way to reach those least likely to seek out their services. Teachers travel to remote villages with a laptop computer to teach farmers about new agricultural techniques and environmental issues. The schools also create mobile library to reach herdsmen with information. Service stations have been set up wherever locals gather, including cultural activity centres and fine art shops. CERLS not only provides computer hardware and software to school libraries but it also offers critical training on how to use information technology, automate library operations, and promote information literacy. School librarians are trained in system operations, classification, and online cataloging, as well as how to teach in a classroom setting, how to develop a library collection, and how to create effective outreach programmes. These librarians then train 15 to 30 students at each school on how to use technology and teach their fellow students. Finally, teachers and librarians learn to encourage inquiry-based learning — using information resources to learn and explore independently.

FarmNet: A FarmNet is a network of rural people and supporting intermediary organisations, such as extension services, using ICTs and conventional communication media to facilitate the generating, gathering and exchanging of knowledge and information. Operated by farmers and their organisations, FarmNet links farmers to each other and to the resources and services that they need to improve their livelihoods through agricultural productivity, profitability and food security. FarmNet uses existing organisational and social groupings of rural people and incorporates grassroots communication networks such as farmer-to-farmer exchanges and traditional media. It combines the organisational and communication networks of rural people with conventional media, such as rural radio, and with the appropriate use of the new ICTs. When agricultural knowledge and information are harnessed by organised groups of

farmers through a FarmNet, operated in collaboration with intermediary support services, farmers can obtain lower- cost inputs, improved transportation links, better crop storage arrangements and more profitable negotiation with produce buyers.

In recent times, governmental efforts promoting and establishing information service systems in rural the rural areas of China have increased considerably. Government has been investing huge sums of money in building organisational and physical networks of information service in various rural areas of China. Local government in many areas have issued policies, adopted measures and invested heavily in human and financial resources in strengthening public awareness and training. They actively have promoted the extension of the network and development of human resources. As a result, the overall information service in rural areas nationwide has greatly improved.

Rural library and information services in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has 87,319 villages, home to approximately 70% of the 143 million people of the country. Until 1951, Bangladesh was almost completely a rural-agrarian country with 95.67 percent of the population living in rural areas and only 4.33 percent in urban areas. Urbanization started to increase quite rapidly and it increased to 5.19% in 1961 and then very rapidly to 8.78% in 1974, 15.54% in 1981, 20.15% in 1991 and 23.39% in 2001 (BBS, 1991 and BBS, 2001). That means, still approximately 70% of the people of Bangladesh live in the rural areas. Like essential services and facilities including electricity, clean water, sanitation and natural gas, information services provided to the rural people is also insufficient.

Bangladesh is generally regarded as a country with considerable development potential in spite of its many problems. The presence of one of the largest concentrations of Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in the world is reflective of the activities done towards rural and community level development in Bangladesh. Main focus of these NGOs and CBOs is undertaking

development activities at the rural and grassroots level. But most of these organisations are engaged in micro-credit and similar kinds of activities. Only a handful of them are working in the field of information dissemination and social advocacy through information-centred activities. The activities of these NGOs and other bodies are building information-consciousness in rural Bangladesh, although more initiatives in this sector are needed to make the role of information for rural development recognized by all. Gradually, the link between information, poverty alleviation and eradication of illiteracy also is being appreciated at the GO and NGO level. It is now generally accepted that the flow of information from and to the rural communities is an essential precondition for the development of rural Bangladesh towards eradication of widespread poverty (Akbar, 2004). Experience of Bangladesh and neighboring countries also shows that rural people too are appreciating the role of information in the improvement of their livelihood. Rural people require information *inter alia* on supply of inputs, new technologies, early warning systems (drought, pests, diseases), credit, market prices and their competitors. The success of the Green Revolution in Asia and Southwest Asia indicates that giving rural communities access to knowledge, technology and services will contribute to expanding and energizing agriculture (Munyua, 2000).

Recognizing this fact, more and more initiatives are being taken in Bangladesh to integrate the rural population with mainstream development interventions. Information-driven activities are in the forefront of many of these initiatives. Traditionally, three models of rural information services are popular in Bangladesh. These are:

i) *Traditional rural libraries*: Collection of these libraries predominantly consists of books, newspapers and magazines. These are operated by local philanthropic organisations, clubs, cooperatives, NGOs etc. BRAC Gonokendra Pathagar is a major example of such libraries. These Union level libraries are operated with the active involvement and participation of rural people. After the local community arranges a

place without rent and a fund (of at least 25,000 Taka), BRAC extends its assistance by providing 1000 books and other library materials. In latest count (2008), there are 1856 Gonokendra Patahgars in the whole country. Besides, there are numerous small rural libraries all over the country some of which have gained national prominence. Dihi Union Public Library in Jessore and Shah Agricultural Library in Naogaon are two such examples.

ii) Technology based information centres/telecentres: A telecentre is a common point of access for multiple users (often an entire community), providing a range of ICT services including Internet, fax, word processing, etc. The government is a major player in this sector, who have established 4501 Union Information Resource Centres (UISCs) all over the country in 2010. GrameenPhone, the largest mobile phone operator in Bangladesh also have more than 500 technology based Community Information Centres (CICs) in various parts of the country. Besides, hundreds of telecentres are operating in the rural areas of the country many of which are member of Bangladesh Telecentre Network (BTN), which provides leadership and guidance to the telecentre movement.

iii) Mobile libraries/information centres: These are information extension services operated through boats, buses, rickshaw vans, bicycles etc. They take library/information services to the doorsteps of rural people and try to reach the most marginalized of rural people. Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha, an NGO based in Natore has been providing library and information services to the people in the waterlogged areas by boats. The services include children's education, libraries, training on sustainable agriculture, healthcare, adaptation strategies for climate change, waste management, computer education and Internet access. Another noteworthy service is D.Net's *Infolady*. An info lady is a female information service provider who possesses a laptop or classmate computer, internet modem, headphone, webcam, digital camera, photo printer and a mobile phone on her bicycle for giving the entire livelihood information services at a cheaper rate.

These three major models of service provision could be presented through a simple diagram:

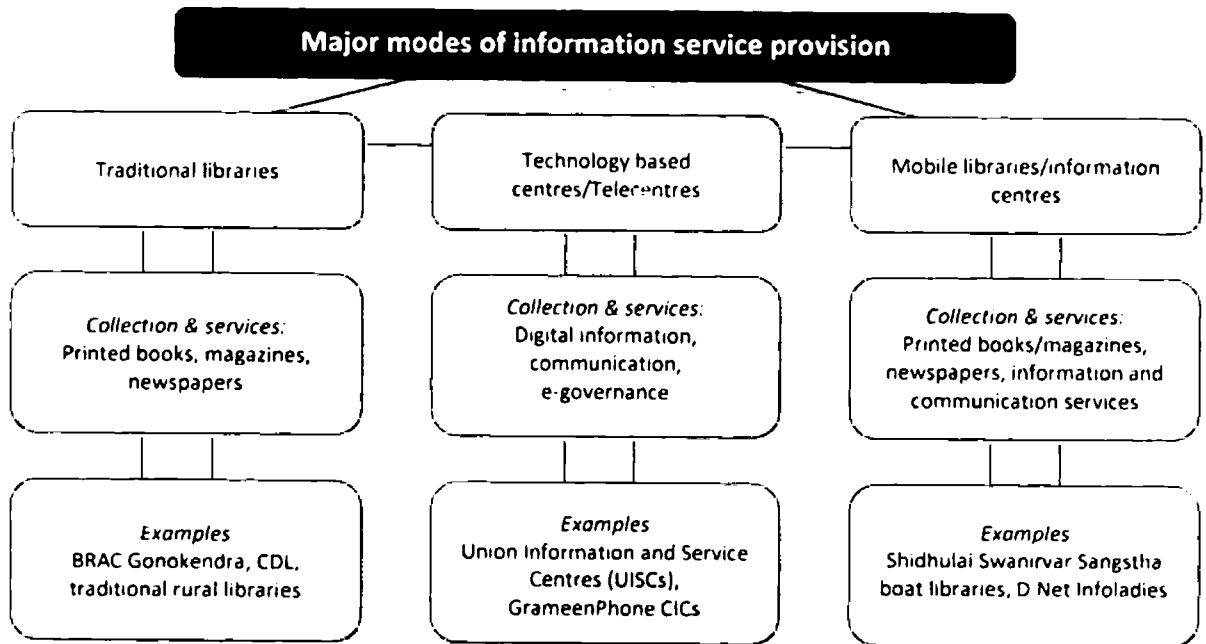


Figure 1: Major modes of information service provision in Bangladesh

Although Iqbal (2004, p. 57) has stated that the number of rural libraries in Bangladesh is approximately 4000, no proof has been found to support this statement. Rather, a survey of National Book Centre conducted in 1993 found that there were approximately 850 rural libraries operating in Bangladesh. The Directory of Libraries (*Granthagar Nirdeshika*) published by the National Book Centre in 2003 listed 1603 libraries. Among them while many libraries are situated in rural areas, there were many which were located in urban and semi-urban areas. Considering all these, it can be said that, there is no acceptable statistics regarding the number or condition of rural libraries of Bangladesh. The statistics of National Book Centre is not comprehensive and in the foreword of the Directory, the Director of the NBC admits that there is shortage of man power in the NBC to do this task (National Book Centre, 2003). NBC has taken initiative

to bring out another edition of the Directory of non-government libraries, which is likely to be published in late 2011.

As for the ICT-based information service initiatives, there are much more information about this sector than the traditional one and this sector seems to be more or less well-coordinated. Most of the ICT-based information centres are, in fact, telecentres, which aims to fulfill not only the information-demand of the rural people but also the demand for technology and technological services like email, web browsing, etc. It has been indicated that the telecentre movement in Bangladesh has been initiated by Development Research Network (D.Net) in August 2006 with a successful International Workshop on “Building Telecentre Family in Bangladesh: A workshop for Social Entrepreneurs and Practitioners”, held in Rangpur (www.telecentremagazine.net) in collaboration with ‘Bangladesh National Network for Radio Communication (BNNRC)’ and ‘Young Power for Social Action (YPSA)’. International telecentre support organisation telecentre.org, UNDP Bangladesh supported this initiative, which was basically a collaborative initiative of Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP). Fifty seven organisations participated in the workshop to get hands-on idea about why and how to build telecentres and share experiences. Through this workshop, all telecentre practitioners came under a single roof for the first time to talk about Mission 2011, which is about building telecentre in every village by the 40th anniversary of Bangladesh’s independence (www.mission2011.net.bd). In recent times, ICT based information services have gained wide prominence with the setting up of community information centres or telecentres all over the country. Telecentre movement promoted by Bangladesh Telecentre Network (BTN) is attracting a lot of attention from many quarters. Unprecedented growth in mobile phone use and increasing proliferation of broadband Internet also have accelerated the use of ICT for information distribution. At present, six mobile phone service provider companies are working in Bangladesh, covering the whole country. According to data provided by Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), the total number of mobile phone

active subscribers in Bangladesh stands at 79.677 million at the end of August 2011 (www.btrc.gov.bd). It is evident that an information dissemination system centred on widespread use of mobile phones might prove very effective for rural Bangladesh.

Major rural information service initiatives of Bangladesh

Rural people of Bangladesh take resort to various formal and informal media for receiving information. Historically, radio has been a dependable media for disseminating information to the rural people. Almost every household in the rural areas of Bangladesh possessed a radio. These days, radio has taken a back seat with the increasing popularity of television. However, radio is still preferred by millions of rural Bangladeshis especially for news. *Bangladesh Betar*, the state-owned radio service broadcasts its programmes through 11 radio stations situated in various parts of the country. Compared to radio, television is far more popular as a means of receiving information and entertainment. Although Bangladesh has 12 Television channels, only BTV, the state-owned TV channel is allowed to telecast programmes terrestrially. For this, unlike their urban counterparts, an overwhelming majority of rural people are unable to watch the private TV channels. However, with the expansion of cable network, a large number of rural *haat-Bazaars* are now covered by the services of private TV channels. These channels telecast news, movies, dramas and other programmes which are hugely popular among the grassroots people. However, like radio, news is arguably the most popular programme on the private Television channels. These days, the country has also seen massive proliferation of two telecommunication technologies: mobile phone and Internet. According to International Telecommunications Union (ITU)'s estimate, Bangladesh had 556,000 Internet users in September 2009. The majority of Internet Service Providers of the country cover only the urban areas. The most effective way for the rural people to get connected with the Internet is the modem-based wireless Internet service provided by the mobile phone operators. However, because of high cost, lack of awareness and weak telecommunications infrastructure, Internet use by the rural people of Bangladesh is still

quite negligible. As compared to this, the use of cellular phone in the urban as well as rural areas of Bangladesh has reached an unprecedented level. As per Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC)'s estimate, Bangladesh had 54.15 million mobile phone subscribers as of February 2010. Every district of the country is now covered by the six mobile phone operators and hundreds of thousands of new subscribers are added to the number of existing cell phone users. Cell phones have tremendously affected the lives of millions of people not only in cities and towns, but also in distant villages and outlying localities. Low cost of mobile handsets and highly competitive call rates of mobile phone operators have enabled the small-income groups, even the unemployed people to own and use mobile phones. Rural people also receive information and advisory services from newspapers, social workers, government officials (agricultural extension workers, health workers, livestock and fisheries officials, etc.), NGO activists, human rights activists, clubs and CBO members, cultural activists, etc.

If we look at the formal and institutional information service infrastructure, the role of both traditional and non-traditional information service providers becomes evident. Historically, there have been hundreds of rural libraries established in various parts of the country under the initiative of local social workers and philanthropists. Many of these libraries have ceased to exist; many are operating only by name. Although there are remarkable exceptions, on the whole, the rural libraries of Bangladesh are in a very sorry shape. Following few pages give a brief description of some important traditional rural library initiatives of Bangladesh.

National Book Centre, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Government of Bangladesh: National Book Centre (NBC) under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, has been actively promoting rural library movement and reading habit among the community people since long. In an attempt to strengthen rural library movement, NBC has been providing non-government libraries located in district, Upazila, Union and village levels with

financial assistance as well as books. Enlisted libraries receive 50% of the allotted fund in the form of books and the rest in cash. The following table shows the library assistance activities of NBC in the last five financial years:

Financial Year	No. of libraries	Total donation	Financial donation	Book donation
2006-07	1291	17,500,000	8,750,000	8,750,000
2007-08	85	12,500,000	6,250,000	6,250,000
2008-09	480	12,500,000	6,250,000	6,250,000
2009-10	561	12,500,000	6,250,000	6,250,000
2010-11	495	15,998,000	7,999,000	7,999,000

Table 2: Library assistance activities of the National Book Centre

Besides, with an aim to build the capacity of rural librarians, the NBC regularly organises training programmes for rural librarians. On an average, 20 rural librarians take part in a training programme which is arranged at the NBC headquarters in Dhaka. Resource persons from the fields of library and information science, mass communications and journalism, literature, etc. impart training among the participating librarians about various aspects of rural library development and management.

Mosque libraries, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Government of Bangladesh: Bangladesh is the third largest Muslim majority nation in the world and mosques are one of the most common features of the social life of the people of Bangladesh. The country has more than 200,000 mosques which are visited by hundreds and thousands of Muslim everyday. Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has been establishing mosque libraries all over the country since 1978. So far, more than 15,000 mosque libraries have been established under the 'Mosque Library' Project (Rashid, 2004). *Imams* (religious leaders) who are regularly trained by the government-run 'Imam Training Centre', also receive training on the management of the mosque libraries. Main aims of the mosque libraries are to disseminate religious knowledge among the people, promotion of ethical and religious values, eradication of illiteracy, capacity and knowledge building of the Imams, raising public awareness about Islamic culture and heritage, etc.

BRAC Gonokendra libraries: BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), the world's largest Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) has been operating a large number of Union level libraries all over the country which are known as *Gonokendra Patahgar*. Before establishing these libraries, BRAC established some libraries for adolescent girls in 1992 under its Adolescent Development Programme. These libraries were known as 'Kishory Granthagar' (Libraries for Adolescent Girls). Main objective of opening these libraries was to develop reading habits among the adolescent girls and to help them continue their academic pursuits. Subsequently, these libraries continued their existence under various names like Club for Adolescent Girls, School library, Reading centre, Centre for adolescent girls, etc. However, BRAC started their rural library initiative in a more formal way in 1995 with the establishment of union level libraries, better known as *Gonokendra Patahgar*. These libraries aim at improving reading habits of rural people, making them aware about the importance of mass media and to involve them with continuing education and lifelong learning. Extending information services to the rural women also is one of the main thrusts of these libraries. The libraries are run with the active involvement and participation of rural people. After the local community arranges a place without rent (of at least 400-500 square feet) and a fund (of at least 25 thousand Taka), BRAC extends its assistance by providing 1000 books, other library materials and some musical instrument. In latest count (2008), there are 1856 *Gonokendra Patahgars* in the whole country. The total number of members of these libraries stands at about 800,000, and half of them are women. Most of the libraries are established at the courtyard of a local school and many of the students are members of the library. The libraries also have Children's Corner where children can avail themselves of various facilities like book reading, playing indoor games, drawing, etc. *Gonokendra Patahgars* also offer training courses on ICT, horticulture, dairy, hatchery, etc. for the youth community. *Gonokendra Patahgars* have also established mobile libraries especially for elderly people, women and people with disability. In the latest count, about 640 mobile libraries are in operation in various parts of the country with 28,877 regular users (www.brac.net).

Community Development Library (CDL): Established in 1980, Community Development Library (CDL) development organisation has been working with the mission of providing development information to activists and organisations who are committed to promotion of sustainable development, gender equity, social justice, human rights and community education. The primary objective of the organisation is to raise the critical consciousness of the society through catalysts, including academics, planners, development activists, cultural activists, political activists, human rights activists, environmentalists, feminists, community leaders, etc. Apart from a central library and documentation centre, CDL had 24 Rural Information Resource Centres (RIRCs) all over the country which disseminated development information to the grassroots people and members of the civil society. The RIRCs collections comprised books, journals, and magazines on various development issues. They subscribed to local and national newspapers and periodicals. They also collect and preserve news-clippings on critical issues like women, children, disability, environment, education, health, etc. Each RIRC maintains a Women Forum, Youth Forum and Children's Forum which are engaged in various development activities on a voluntary basis. Apart from library and information services, the RIRCs organise study circles, debates, discussion meetings, video screenings, rallies, courtyard meetings, cultural programmes, etc. with an aim to share development information to the wider cross sections of people and inspire people to improve the quality of their livelihood. Unfortunately, following the discontinuation of financial assistances from one of CDL's major donors, the RIRC programme faced a massive setback in 2009. Presently, most of the RIRC have either been closed down or handed over to other local NGOs.

Dihi Union Public Library: Dihi Union Public Library in the Jessore district is the first union-based public library in Bangladesh. It was established on 30 November, 1977. It serves the students, teachers, farmers, small traders and all others without any fee. The library lends textbooks to students for both short periods of time and long periods of

time. The library has different section to serve its clients. These include a philatelic section and an audio-visual section, a social museum, seminar section. It has a well developed arboretum and is involved with environmental issues. The main clients of the library are students from primary to university ages. Because of this, the library conducts competitive exams for primary students and gives scholarship and certificates. Dihi Union Public Library is a UNESCO Library Network member.

Banaripara Public Library: Kumud Bihari Guha Thakurta, a local nobleman of Banaripara area of Barisal district established this library on 15 January 1882 in order to develop reading habit among the local people. Over time, the library has emerged as a major centre of learning in Banaripara and adjacent areas. At present, the library has 5000 books and other library materials. People from all walks of life regularly visit the library to read and meet their demand for information. The library also has a television which is watched by scores of library users. They are usually keen on watching news on the television. The library also arranges various kinds of programmes like discussion meetings, seminars, roundtables, etc. Local Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (Upazilla Executive Officer) acts as the president of the library board. It remains open from 4.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. everyday except Friday and national holidays. The library continues to serve an ever increasing base of readers who find its collection and services invaluable to meet their information and research needs.

Shah Agricultural Information Library: This library has been established by Md. Jahangir Alam, a teacher of Rajshahi Collegiate School, Rajshahi. Observing the rural farmers' inability to meet their agricultural information needs, Mr. Alam founded this library in 2008 at his own home in his native village Kaligram, in the district of Naogaon. The library contains a large number of books and information materials on farming, poultry, hatchery, dairy, etc. It also contains school and college level textbooks so that underprivileged students can use this book for their study. The library remains open from dawn to dusk everyday. Being a non-circulating library, it doesn't allow the users to

borrow books, but any person can come and read books without paying any fee. Upazilla Agricultural Extension Office and Upazilla Livestock Office have extended their helps in running the library. Officers from these two offices regularly visit the library and give advice to the farmers and library users regarding various aspects of agriculture and livestock rearing. The library also organises seminars and workshops on agriculture, fisheries and livestock. It also gives awards to enterprising agricultural workers under 11 categories including best farmer, best cultivator, best worker, etc.

Arjad Ali Memorial Welfare Library: Situated in the village of Panigaon, South Surma Upazila, under the district of Sylhet, the library started its journey in 1995. Founded by a local philanthropist and named after his father, the library caters to the information needs of the rural people, especially youth and children community. It has gradually built up a collection of 3200 books and journals on various issues like health, education, human rights, Persons with Disability (PWD), environment, agriculture, etc. Besides readers service, the library is engaged in various social welfare activities like health awareness raising, providing information services to the rural farmers, sanitation and nutrition activities, training, etc. The library carries out these activities in partnership with various local and national NGOs, community based organisations and networks. Some of their partner NGOs are Association for Rural Development Organisations (ARDO), National Youth Council of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Institute of Human Rights, Green Disabled Foundation, etc.

Vatara Gonokendra Pathagar: This community based library was established in 1998 in the remote village of Vatara under Sarishabari Upazila in the district of Jamalpur. The library has a modest collection of approximately 1000 and subscribes to one national daily newspaper. Everyday, 50 to 60 users visit the library and avail themselves of the reading room service. The users can also borrow books from the library for a period of seven days. The collection mainly comprises novels, story-books and books on general knowledge, which are in high demand among the users. The library regularly arranges

study circles on selected books and gives a “Best Reader” award to the winner of the study circle.

Chandipur Gono Pathagar: This library is located in the village of Chandipur in Bagha Upazila under Rajshahi district. Mohammed Akhtaruzzaman, a local social activist established the library in 2009. It has a collection of 500 books and it regularly subscribes to four daily newspapers and two monthly magazines. Everyday, 20 to 30 readers visit the library. Most of the books of the library are on health, agriculture and religion, while children’s books also constitute a major part of the collection. People from all cross sections of the rural society visit the library everyday, although elderly persons, youth community and children’s are the major users. The library observes important days and organises various events like study circle, book reading competition, blood donation camp, etc.

Master Aiyub Ali Memorial Library: This library was founded by Master Aiyub Ali Memorial Youth Club in 2004. Situated in the village of Hasandi in Laxmipur Sadar Upazila under the district of Laxmipur, the library has a total collection of 2200 books and a number of periodicals. Everyday, approximately 50 persons avail themselves of the service of the library. Registered members of the library can borrow books for a maximum period of seven days. Youth and children communities constitute the major parts of the readers. Fictions and story books are in high demand among the readers, although textbooks and books on religion and science also are quite popular. The library runs on local donations and a small donation received from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. Besides readers service, it carries out some special activities including seminars, observation of national events, scholarship for meritorious students, etc.

Pratiti Alinagar Union Public Library: One of the oldest libraries in the region, this library was founded in 1978 in the village of Alinagar in Gomastapur Upazila under the

district of Chapai Nawabganj. Over the years, it has developed a sizable collection of more than 3500 books and a large number of magazines and journals. It regularly subscribes to five national dailies and one monthly sports magazine. On average, about 100 users visit the library everyday. Registered users can borrow books for a period of one week. Fictions and religious books constitute the bulk of the collection and rural people irrespective of age, gender or social background visit the library regularly. It also arranges various events like seminar, cultural programme, study circle, etc.

Shahid Dhiraj Mizan Smriti Patahagar: Located in Domar under the district of Nilphamari, the library is a result of collective efforts taken by local philanthropists and social activists. One of the oldest libraries in the north-Bengal, the library was established in 1950. Over the years, it has experienced many ups and downs and the total collection of books now stands at slightly over 3500. Besides, the library subscribes to five daily newspapers. Main sources of income of the library are membership fees, local donations and rent collected from a shop owned by the library. A large number of people from Domar municipal area and the adjacent villages regularly visit the library in search of information. Members of the library can borrow books (one book per reader) for maximum seven days. The library regularly arranges book reading festival and poetry competition and publishes a literary magazine.

Binapani Granthagar: This library is located in the village of Dharabashail in Kotalipara upazila under the district of Gopalganj. A local philanthropist named Prasanta Adhikari founded the library in 2001. The library has a total collection of 1500 books and a number of magazines and periodicals. It also subscribes to one daily newspaper. Everyday, 25 persons visit the library on average. Each reader member can borrow a book for maximum seven days. The library collection mainly comprises fictions, religious books and children's books. One notable feature of the library is that, a large number of female readers regularly visit the library and the percentage of women among the readers is approximately 40%. It receives government and personal donations, although

not regularly. The library organises study circles, book exhibition and cultural programmes on a regular basis.

Amboula Hazi Sekandar Ali Islamic Pathagar: Established in 2008, this library is situated in the remote village of Amboula in Agoiljhara upazila under the district of Barisal. Named after a local philanthropist, the library has a modest collection of around 350 books and some magazines and periodicals. It also subscribes to one national daily. Everyday, approximately 15 to 20 persons visit the library. The reader members can borrow books (one book per reader) for a maximum duration of seven days. The inhabitants of Amboula village constitute the bulk of the readers and a large number of villagers visit the library on a regular basis. It occasionally receives government grants and personal donations. Besides readers service, the library arranges study circle and book exhibition, which are primarily attended by school students and the youth community.

Besides, a large number of rural information service initiatives are being implemented with strong focus on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Some of these initiatives are:

Bangladesh Government initiatives

The Government of Bangladesh also has taken up active interest in setting up its own digital information network all over the country. Different ministries and departments of the government are now making arrangements for helping grassroots people receive critical livelihood information staying at their home. Setting up Union Information and Service Centres (UISCs) is one example of such initiatives.

Union Information and Service Centres (UISC)

The Government has already established Union Information and Services Centres (UISCs) in 4,501 unions across the country to disseminate information and deliver

government services to all citizens. The UISCs are located at the Union Parishad complex buildings. Presently, Bangladesh has 4501 Union Parishad. According to relevant government sources, 2436 UPs have their own buildings while the construction of own buildings of the rest UPs has been approved by the government and is underway.

The project to set up UISCs at every Union Parishad of the country was implemented by the government in assistance with the UNDP's Access to Information Programme. Nine thousand people were trained by the DC offices to serve as information officials at the UISCs. The Union Parishad based information centres, equipped with computers and wireless Internet, offer various online and offline services to people at nominal charge. In general, the UISC facilities comprise of laptop, desktops, a laser printer and/or inkjet printer, scanner, internet modem, digital camera, web camera, microphone, speaker, headphone, multimedia projector and screen, UPS etc.

UISCs basically offer three types of services; government services, information services and commercial services. Government Services, like Online Birth Registration, different types of government forms, government circulars and notices, online university admission, examination results, population census data entry, citizenship certificate, citizen charter of Union Parishad. Information Services, like Agriculture, health, education, law and human Rights, tourism, environment and disaster management, science and technology, industry and commerce and employment. All these livelihood information are provided by National e-Tathyakosh (National e-Content Repository) which has online (www.infokosh.bangladesh.gov.bd) and offline (CD) version. Commercial services, like m-Banking, life insurance, English learning, computer training, internet browsing, email, printing, scanning, compose, photocopy, laminating, data entry, photography, phone call, flexi load, mobile ring tone download, video show, video conference, projector rent, passport and visa processing, height and weight measurement, blood pressure measurement, soil test, arsenic test etc. (Mahmud and Asad-uz-Zaman 2011). Many UISC entrepreneurs have introduced innovative services

based on the needs of the rural people. For example, Some UISCs allow local people to talk with their relatives living abroad through *Skype*. Besides, there is demand for relevant data (like schedule of UP coordination meeting) and services (accessing and publicizing fertilizer distribution scheduling, publishing VGD and VGF lists). Mahmud and Asad-uz-Zaman (2011) also indicate that, in order for UISCs to survive successfully in the long run, support from various government and private organisations is being mobilized through partnerships, these entities not only offer people oriented services through these centres, some of them also provide hardware maintenance and other technical support to keep these centres operational. In the forefront of such partnerships are private banks (e.g. Dutch-Bangla, Mercantile, Trust, BRAC) – powered by the upcoming online banking facilities, Life Insurance agency (e.g. *Jibonbima*), telecommunications (e.g. Robi, Banglalink), non-governmental organisations (British Council, Practical Action, Ankur ICT Development Foundation), troubleshooting support organisations (BCS, Cyber Cafe Association of Bangladesh) and government agencies and projects (e.g. Bangladesh Computer Council, Cabinet Division).

The Additional District Commissioner (General) and the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) act as ‘e-governance focal persons’ at the district and upazila levels respectively and monitor and are responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the activities of the UISCs. They review the UISCs’ activities at least once a month. Access to Information Programme (A2I) at the Prime Minister’s Office acts as catalyst to the whole process. Every UISC has two committees: General Committee and Executive Committee. The general committee consists of general users of the UISC who include community people irrespective of class, gender and occupation. One-third of the UISC Committee members must be women. The UISC Executive Committee, comprising 7 to 9 members, is elected by general committee members and the UP Chairman acts the ex-officio chairman of the committee. Primarily responsibilities of the executive committee include day-to-day monitoring of the UISC’s activities and ensuring smooth operation of the UISC. The committee serves for two years.

The Government has taken initiatives for building capacity of the UISC entrepreneurs so that they could serve their clientele more effectively. In early 2010, Access to Information (A2I) Programme at the Prime Minister's Office arranged training for trainers to set up a team of 100 master trainers. Representatives from Bangladesh Compute Council (BCC) and Telecentre entrepreneurs under Bangladesh Telecentre Network took part in that training. Besides, a series of entrepreneur training started in the district level computer labs of Bangladesh Computer Council. Access to Information (A2I) Programme also arranges training programmes for UISC entrepreneurs on a regular basis.

From time to time, various attempts have been made for adding new and innovative services to the UISCs' existing services. As a part of this initiative, the UISC entrepreneurs were employed for collecting demographic information during the last population and housing census. In July 2011, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between BRAC Bank, a leading private sector bank, and the Local Government Department of the Government of Bangladesh and Access to Information Programme (A2I) to use the Union Information and Service Centers (UISCs) to make financial services accessible to people who currently don't have access to banks. The service, named bKash, is designed to provide financial services via mobile phones to both the unbanked and the banked people of Bangladesh.

Other government initiatives

Ministry of Science, Information and Communication Technology also has been setting up Upazila Information Centres with financial support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The ministry plans to set up such centres in all Upazilas of the country within the next year. The Ministry of Agriculture has set up 10 Agricultural Information and Communication Centres (AICC) in association with Integrated Pest Management (IPM) clubs. Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock has developed Fisheries Information and

Communication Centres (FICCs) in 21 locations of the country and a central information centre in Dhaka. Bangladesh Computer Council has established Information technology Centres in 122 educational institutions in 64 districts of Bangladesh. It is hoped that 900 such centres will be established by the next year in different parts of the country. Other ministries also are planning to build up digital information repositories all over the country.

National e-information repository: “Jatiya e-Tathyakosh” or National e-information repository (www.infokosh.bangladesh.gov.bd) has been developed by the “Access to Information Programme” of the Prime Minister’s Office. This information repository contains information related to people's life and livelihood in various sectors of Bangladesh including agriculture, education, health, law and human rights, tourism, employment, citizen services, non-agriculture initiatives, industries and commerce, science and technology, environment and disaster management. It has a search engine, for ensuring access to the information contained in the repository. A total of 148 government organisations and 50 local and foreign non-government organisations have provided information to this online store. Contents of the information cell have been provided in the form of text, audio, video and animation keeping in consideration illiteracy and disability of many people.

Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha (www.shidhulai.org)

Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha has made headlines in world media as recipient of ‘Bill and Melinda Gates Access to Learning Award’ in 2005. This organisation has gained prominence by taking information services to the people in the waterlogged areas by boats. The services include children’s education, libraries, training on sustainable agriculture, healthcare, adaptation strategies for climate change, waste management, computer education and Internet access. Shidhulai’s Boat School collects students from different riverside villages and finally docking at last destination the boat arranges onboard class. After the class the boat drops students at their places and then moves

forward to pick other groups, again it arranges onboard classes and after the class drops students in their villages, and moves forward for other groups. All boat schools have small library facility, but some boats have complete facility of a standing library, for example, 1,500 books, two to four computers with internet access, printer and mobile phones. Children, youths, senior citizens, and particularly women learn computer skills and get information on agriculture, biodiversity, climate change, job opportunities, micro enterprise development and human rights. Late evening literacy classes are arranged on these boats for the parents. Students can borrow the school books from the book library of the boats, which helps them to get better exam results and ensures continuation of education. The neo-literates who used to relapse in to illiterates are now in touch with education using the educational resources of book library. The boats use their solar energy to run the computers. Mobile Internet-Educational Units on Boats are equipped with internet-linked laptop, multimedia equipments and educational presentations. They make their way through the rivers, docking at villages to teach farmers techniques for preventing pollution and erosion, introducing affordable technologies like the bicycle pumps and solar lamps, and promoting environmentally sustainable agriculture, climate change, healthcare and human rights. There are also Healthcare boats which move along the winding rivers, docking at the villages, and arrange onboard medical checkups.

Amader Gram (www.amadergram.org)

The Amader Gram initiative has been started by 'Bangladesh Friendship Education Society' (BFES). This initiative aims at collecting, coordinating, analyzing information on various aspects of the lives of rural people and using these information for improving their livelihood. The information collected under this initiative are being properly processed and preserved. In this way, a rich database of rural socio-economic information is being developed which will facilitate social documentation in the long run. Separate large databases are being developed on 'knowledge sharing and capacity building'. These databases contain a wealth of information on the role of training,

various vocational training courses, training expenditure, training tools, etc. Amader Gram has also created rich databases on primary and mass education and local government. Its other initiatives include: identification and treatment of breast cancer, knowledge centre, literacy for livelihood, rural news online, etc. Amader Gram is setting up 'Technology based community learning centres in collaboration with DFID, Computer Aid International UK and Microsoft Corporation. These centres will enable learners to get together and share their knowledge with the help of technology.

Dhaka Ahsania Mission (www.ahsaniamission.org.bd)

Dhaka Ahsania Mission launched first community learning centre, locally known as Gonokendra, in 1987. There are more than 100 Gonokendras across the country, of which number of ICT-based Kendras is five. As the objectives of the centres were sharing knowledge and information, they started with traditional tools. Each of the centres is functioning as a community-based information centre of local GO-NGO extension departments. People can come to the centres to read newspapers and exchange experience, learn from success stories, get information about innovations which can improve their livelihoods. A few centres started using computer for interactive information communication. However, these centres do not have any Internet connection. Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) supports these centres by supplying books, newspapers, newsletters, magazines, booklets, posters, wall magazines, etc. depending on level of literacy skills of the users. Basic and advanced educational programmes are organised to cater to the learning needs of the local people. Ganokendra members participate in various social activities.

Relief International-School Online (www.connect-bangladesh.org)

Relief International-School Online initiated 'Internet Learning Centre: School Based Telecentre' programme in 2005. Currently 27 Internet learning Centres (ILCs) are in operation across Bangladesh. Each ILC is equipped with 5- 10 computers with UPS for each, one long-backup IPS, one scanner and one digital camera. Connectivity varies from

location to location. In some places ILCs are equipped with broad-band Internet connections and others have dial-up connectivity. The ILCs are located in Upazilla headquarters. ILC facilities are available to student throughout the school-day. ILCs offer education and training programme for school children. The teachers also receive required skill training. The curriculum followed in the education and training programme is developed by global programme. The curriculum emphasizes on project and collaboration-based learning. The Internet facilitates communication, collaboration and sharing with other students. Students can communicate with fellow student in ILCs located in other places and also countries. The Internet is also used as a source of information. A small amount is generally charged for membership of the ILC. The money collected from the membership fees are spent for recurring expenditure.

Youth Community Multimedia Centre (YCMC) (www.ypsa.org)

Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) launched the centre in Sitakunda Upazilla of Chittagong district in 2005. The centre is equipped with computers with CD-ROM, pocket PC, digital video camera, audio recorder, cassette playback, cable TV, cable radio and DVD-players. The centre also uses loudspeakers to dissemination useful information to the community. Bulletin boards are also used for information dissemination. The centre is connected with dial-up Internet connectivity. The target group of the YCMC is local youth. Outreach of the YCMC is ensured through traditional media, like street theatre and group meeting. These traditional communication tools are used for information dissemination and raising community awareness on various important issues. Weekly movie show and cultural events attract community youth to the centre. In-built ethnographic action research helps documenting project learning and linking it back to the project's plan and activities. The project is sponsored by UNESCO. The YCMC generates income through commercial computer training, photocopy and printing for financial sustainability.

Rural Technology Centre (RTC) (www.practicalaction.org)

In order to facilitate technology transfer to the rural people, 'Practical Action Bangladesh' established two Rural Technology Centres (RTC) in Rajoir, Madaripur and Sarishabari, Jamalpur in 2006. RTC engage and promote appropriate rural technologies for meeting the basic needs of the rural population and improving their livelihoods. The centre aims at upgrading traditional technologies and adapting new technologies to make it more diversified and versatile to meet rural needs. The RTC manages and maintains library to preserve printed technology materials for beneficiaries and extension workers. They also maintain a computer and land phone with internet connection which provide information and technology services for farmers, traders, entrepreneurs and other clients. It also offers photocopying, agro-processing and employment information services.

GHAT: Rural ICT centre (RIC) (www.msme.com.bd)

The RIC is run by DEN (Digital equity Network) with its own investment and support from KATALYST, a multi-donor consortium working in Bangladesh. The Rural ICT Centre is a physical infrastructure with basic ICT facilities (phone, computers, printer, scanner, internet connectivity, digital camera etc.). Three RICs, located in Kahalu, Panchbibi and Shibganj of Bogra district, were launched in 2006. All three centres are located in Upazilla headquarters. The motto of this model is developing and promoting ICT services to meet information and advisory needs of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Rural Bangladesh. RICs disseminate business information for the local businesses in selected sectors (e.g., poultry, fisheries, potato etc) that are dominant in the localities. The centre is also a source of various social, health-related, education development, and government information. The RICs are equipped with computers, colour printer, scanner and digital cameras.

Grameen Phone's Community Information Centre (CIC) (www.gpcic.org)

The largest mobile phone operator company in Bangladesh, Grameen Phone launched the CIC initiative by establishing 16 CICs in different parts of the country in February 2006 as a pilot project. At present, more than 500 CICs are operating in the rural areas of Bangladesh. These centres are equipped with at least one computer, a printer, a scanner, a web cam and an EDGE-enabled modem to access the Internet using the EDGE connectivity. The CICs are fully owned by local entrepreneurs with a minimum investment of BDT 80,000. They are run as a franchise of Grameen Phone. Presently, access to passport forms, birth and death certificate forms and other related information are available through the Government websites. Market prices of agricultural produce are also available through the website of the Agricultural Extension Department. The CICs also help students and professionals for gathering reports and news suiting their requirements. Information relating to local and foreign job search sites is available at the centres.

'Information Boat' of GrameenPhone and CARE Bangladesh (www.grameenphone.com)

Grameenphone and CARE Bangladesh have been running the 'Information Boat' or Tathya Tori campaign under which specially designed boats are being used as virtual information hub to fulfill the information needs of rural people. The main aim of this joint initiative of Grameenphone Limited and Care Bangladesh is to provide access to information at the remotest part of the country. These boats provide necessary livelihood information for the rural communities, especially people living in the Char and Haor areas. A typical Information Boat is equipped with computers, Internet and email facilities, as well as photocopiers, fax machines, printers, web cams, video machines and scanners, acts as a complete information hub for the rural communities, moving from one place to another through waterways on a fixed schedule. The first such Information Boat initiated its service in Dhirai of Sunamganj district in September 2008, followed by its second counterpart at Bajitpur of Kishorganj district in June 2009. Information Boats

are also equipped with digital content, such as livelihood and agricultural information, suited for the specific areas served by the designated boats. At the same time, skilled trainers provide training to the local community people on different livelihood options

D.Net: 'Pallitathya Kendra' (www.dnet.org.bd).

With the realization that ICT can play an important role for accessing many livelihood information and knowledge, D.Net conceived the idea of 'Pallitathya' in 2001. D.Net established four 'Pallitathya Kendra' in 2005 in four remote villages of Bangladesh on a pilot basis. The critical elements of the project were:

1. Focus on needs of the poor, rather than focus on the technology
2. Focus on 'no exclusion' policy, so that rural community can think of the RICs for all
3. Focus on 'no refusal policy', so that rural community can rely that whatever problem they have, if they come to the RIC, they will definitely get an advice.
4. Focus on local language demand-driven content, for becoming capable of responding to the livelihood problems of the villagers.
5. Combination of core information service and ancillary services, with a strong focus on earning money and become self reliant.
6. Focus on community relationship and inspiration of local institutions.

The Pallitathya model consists of five basic components: content, multiple channels of information and knowledge exchange, *infomediary* (human interface between information and knowledge-base), ownership and mobilization. The whole system is for operationalization through a common access point, which may be a physical set up situated within a community or can be any type of mobile facilities including human centric access points like *mobile lady* (Raihan (ed), 2007). Each of the 'Pallitathya Kendras' has 3 computers, 2-3 mobile phones, UPS and power back up, digital camera, soil test kits, nebuliser for rent by the local doctors, weighing machine, and livelihood content entitled 'Jeeon-IKB'. The centres are connected to the Internet through Grameen Phone's network and EDGE technology (Raihan. 2007).

BracNet E-hut (www.ehutbd.net)

E Huts are one-stop shops catering to different type of digital services in communities. These are franchisees of BracNet and are owned and run by local entrepreneurs. BracNet works with prospective franchisees and financial institutions to facilitate small scale financing if the prospective franchisees require to start E-hut in their communities. Major services include online browsing, basic computer training, photocopying, scanning, digital photo and laminating. A typical e-hut incorporates Radio modem, Desktop PCs, Switch, Software: Windows/ Linux, MS Word, Illustrator, Photoshop and Scanner/printer/photocopier /digital camera.

GramWeb - One Village One Portal (OVOP) (www.gramweb.net)

GramWeb is a web-based platform developed by Global Communications Center (the joint R&D unit of Grameen Communications, Bangladesh and Kyushu University, Japan) to provide a point of information storage and sharing for the 85000 villages of Bangladesh. The motto of the GramWeb initiative is “Know your village, Share your village”. Its aim is to help the villagers move from being information consumers to becoming information producers. This One Village One Portal (OVOP) movement envisions that each village will have its own website that will be officially maintained by the Village Information Entrepreneur (VIE), ideally an individual or a group of native villagers. VIEs trained under the programme are helping the villagers collect village information and upload it to the respective village website. The villagers can share village treasures and prides; upload news and photos; trade domestic products; promote tourism and even interface with social network services like local matrimony, job-search portals, etc. The villager-friendly content management system and the flexible generic templates of GramWeb enables the villagers for producing various powerful outputs that includes:

- Village Information Profile (VIP) of individual village
- National and regional statistic at a glance

- Individual village ranking to pick the Best Village
- Status comparison of one region (village, upazilla or district) to another
- Village gallery with pictorial, audio and video contents
- Buy and sell advertisement of local products
- Village manpower and talents information
- Wish-list built by the direct participation of the villagers demonstrating their hopes and aspiration about the future development of their village.

Grameen Communications (www.grameencommunications.com)

Grameen Communications, a sister organisation of Grameen Trust, has set up two village computer and Internet Facility Centres in Tangail and Jamalpur district under their Village Computer and Internet Programme. These centres extend computer and Internet services to the rural people. These services are focused on supporting farmers, teachers and students, social activists, civil society members and wider cross sections of community people in acquiring their required information on various subjects. Under their “Grameen Digital Centre” initiative, Grameen Communications have launched another centre in Mirzapur, Tangail which is connected with Grameen Communication’s Dhaka Had Office via microwave link. This centre aims at introducing the youth community of Mirzapur to the use of information and communication technologies. It also provides computer training to the rural youth community at a minimal fee.

CHAPTER 4

ROLE OF INFORMATION IN MAJOR SECTORS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH

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Rural development in Bangladesh

Rural development, even in this age of globalisation, has acquired a central role in international development discourse (Behera, 2006). This has happened as a result of a shift in development paradigm along with the process of globalisation that emphasizes on enlarging people's choices. Rural development, Akhter (2006) argues, rural development has always been a top-down approach. In her view, 'the policy makers at the top have made policies for the people living in rural areas. The major actors of the rural development programmes of the 60s, 70s and 80s were the multilateral and bilateral donor agencies and even private foundations... among them, the World Bank supported the main national programmes called integrated Rural development Programme (IRDP), Women's Development Programme, Rural Works Programme, etc (2006, 97).' In the 90s, these programmes started to be overshadowed by poverty alleviations programme and then on, alleviation of poverty emerged as the main theme of rural development.

A country with the vast majority of its population living in the rural areas, and problems of illiteracy and corruption posing a constant threat to the country's almost two-decade long multiparty democracy, Bangladesh has always been at the centre of many rural development initiatives. One of the most populated and least developed countries in the world, Bangladesh has been grappling with the problem of underdevelopment since

its bloody birth in 1971. Burdened by an excessively large population, lack of resources, widespread illiteracy, corruption and other socio-economic problems, Bangladesh finds it an uphill task to ensure sustainable development for its huge population. According to the last population census in 2001, the estimated population of Bangladesh was 131,269,860, which is believed to be more than 160 million today. The overall density, 890 persons per sq km (2,304 persons per sq mi) in 2001, is much higher than that of most other countries in the world. Approximately 76% of the total population, which is 139 millions, lives in villages (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS], 2001). Agriculture is the main occupation of the people employing 68.5% of the labour force. This sector directly contributes around 32% to the gross domestic products (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS], 1999).

In Bangladesh, in the early seventies the problem of desperate poverty caught the attention of successive governments and elaborate programmes were chalked out to tackle the problem. Successive five years development plans dealt extensively with the issue and suggested various measures for development (Ahmed, 2000). A total of five five-year plans were implemented with the reduction of poverty, productive employment generation, development of rural institutions, development of rural infrastructure, development of small and landless farmers, improvement of technology and skills, promotion of participation of women in rural development as main objectives and focuses. The government of Bangladesh continues to carry out intensive and extensive rural development programmes in the backdrop of past achievements and future challenges. The country is home to many thousands Non Government Organisations (NGOs) engaged in various rural development initiatives. Organisations like Grameen Bank and BRAC have achieved worldwide recognition in their attempt to alleviate poverty in the rural areas of Bangladesh through micro credit and similar interventions. However, all these efforts by the GOs and NGOs are yet to bring about the desired changes in the lives of rural people that they have been envisaging for so long.

Role of information in various sectors

The UN General Assembly in its very first session in 1946 adopted the Resolution 59(I) which states, "Freedom of Information is a fundamental human right and ... the touchstone of all the freedoms to which UN is consecrated (cited in Iftekharuzzaman, 2009, p.1)". It does not require any stretch of imagination to conceive that the use of information has a direct link with various activities and achievements like planning, decision making, performing various tasks, capacity building, etc. When a person is informed, he or she can choose the right option without wasting time, effort or money. When a person knows about the symptoms of a disease, he or she can take prompt measures, such as seeing the doctor and taking medical care, whenever he/she feels or sees that symptom. Rahman (2009), citing Chowdhury (2007), sums this up in a succinct way:

- Lack of market price information puts a farmer in a disadvantageous position in negotiating the price of his/her produce.
- Lack of correct health information puts the poor pregnant woman in a remote village at risk of losing the child.
- Lack of knowledge of legal recourse leaves the abused wife in a perpetual violation of her human rights.
- Lack of knowledge of what relief supplies have been sent by the government to a flood affected area cheats the deserving of their rightful share.
- Lack of law that mandates the government to make public any information that is not a threat to national sovereignty and security sets the stage of corruption at every level of the society and administration.
- Ask a day laborer whether the contractor gave him his allocated share of remuneration at the end of the day; he does not know, and does not even think of asking.

- Ask a parent whether she has received the stipend allocated for her school-going daughter; she does not know and is scared to even ask.
- Ask the villagers if they know what share of the allocated budget is being spent on the bridge being constructed over the small stream; the villagers will typically express grave concern that misappropriation of funds was very likely, but they dare not investigate the matter further since they have no information on how much was allocated and how much was being spent.

In Bangladesh, like all other countries, information plays a critical role in the various fields of development. A sector-wise review would reveal how information could benefit the process of development by affecting the lives of common people. The sectors which have been covered by this review include agriculture, health, legal and human rights, education, market and finance, employment and disaster management.

Agriculture

Historically, agriculture has been the single largest producing sector of Bangladesh economy. It comprises about 30% of the country's GDP and employs around 60% of the total labour force (Wikipedia, 2011). The contribution of agriculture in Bangladesh economy is so large that, it has overwhelming impact on major macroeconomic activities like employment generation, poverty alleviation, human resource development and food security. The need for agricultural information for the rural people, especially rural farmers cannot be over emphasized. Studies have shown that agricultural information influences agricultural productivity in a variety of ways. It can help rural people in making decisions regarding land, labour, livestock, capital and management. Agricultural productivity can also be improved by relevant, reliable and useful information and knowledge (Shibanda, 1991; Chifwepa, 1993; Demiryurek et al. 2008; Ballantyne, 2009). The World Bank also has recognized the need for up-to-date information for accelerating agricultural growth and innovation. According to the World Bank (2007), agricultural development depends to a great extent on how successfully

knowledge is generated, shared and applied. It suggests that investments in knowledge – especially in science and technology – have to be adjusted to rapid changes in the wider agricultural environment.

Rural farmers need regular supply of up-to-date information on all agricultural sectors and sub-sectors. They need constant flow of information on modern technology, seed selection and quality assurance, various cropping system and cultivation process, agriculture insects and diseases, symptom and disease identification, treatment, choice of remedy, fertilizer information, irrigation requirement by crop, soil and season, irrigation input market information, price, Government support, flood forecast and control, commercial agriculture, contract farming, support institution, crop processing, pest control, etc. These information would enable them to carry out various agricultural activities smoothly, which in turn would result in greater agricultural output and sustainability. Ballantyne asserts, 'More than ever, the developing world needs reliable information and knowledge on agricultural issues. It needs this knowledge to be accessible and well communicated. On its own, more information is not enough: access is needed to additional, different knowledge, from different people across the full spectrum of producers, scientists, educators, advisors and policy makers (p. 260).' However, farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs must receive the information on time, and in a manner and format best suited to their needs and their ability to understand. Government agricultural extension workers also could play an important role in this regard by collaborating with information workers. Together, they could supplement and compliment each other to provide most effective information services to the rural people.

Health

The health service sector of Bangladesh has been gradually improving since independence. The Government has invested substantially in the institutionalization and strengthening of health and family planning services, with special attention to rural

areas. Consequently, there has been a substantial improvement in the health status of the people. According to the World Health Organisation statistics, the life expectancy at birth for both sexes increased from 56.1 in 1991 to 64.9 in 2002; male life expectancy has increased from 56.5 years in 1991 to 64.5 years in 2002 and female life expectancy increased from 55.7 years to 65.4 years during the same period. The main reason for the rise in life expectancy is the decline in infant and child mortality due to the successful implementation of the immunization programme as well as disease control programmes such as those for ARI and diarrhoeal disease (World Health Organisation, 2004).

Information on healthcare has always been a major requirement of the rural people. They need information on symptoms, causes, prevention and treatment of various diseases. They also need up-to-date information on other health, sanitation and nutrition issues like obstetrics and general care, diagnostics and prescription, adolescent awareness like precaution from unsafe sex, HIV/AIDS and safety, information about sexually transmitted diseases and precaution, malnutrition, indigenous and herbal treatment, public health service, availability and location of government health care institutions, rights and privileges of the patients, types of services, availability of facilities, charges, location, transportation, appointment, referral system, centre for rehabilitation from drug addiction, sources of sanitary system, cost, government and NGO support available, alternative technology and cost, etc. (D.Net, 2003). Along with special libraries in the health sector, rural and public libraries have always played an important role in catering to the health information needs of rural and marginalized people. Library and information professionals can help immensely in conveying accurate information on these issues to the rural people. Forsyth (2005) argues, libraries are places where information to empower communities to 'reduce child mortality' and 'improve maternal health', can be made available in written, spoken or electronic form. The information could be available in books, pamphlets, audio, audiovisual or web-based forms. There is an abundance of publications which could be made available this

way, in numerous languages. The role of government health workers at the grassroots level also is crucial in this regard. They can work in collaboration with rural library workers for disseminating health information and raising health awareness on health issues. Rural libraries with freely available information in appropriate formats can be key partners with health workers and health initiatives in promoting the behavioral changes needed to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (Forsyth). Ghosh (2005) suggests that public libraries should be proactive in providing information about HIV/AIDS including the use of drama, song and dances, seminars, peer discussion, to provide information in regional languages.

Legal and human rights

Human rights situation in Bangladesh has always been under the 'microscope' of national and international media. Like most other countries in the neighborhood, there have been frequent allegations of violation of fundamental human rights of Bangladeshi citizen at home and abroad. Historically, women abuse (in the forms of rape, women and child trafficking, dowry, acid throwing, polygamy, forced and early marriage), human trafficking, child labor, political turmoil (which frequently ends in armed clashes), etc. have been the major causes of human rights violation in the country. Besides, news media and human rights group also express concern over extrajudicial killings, persecution of minority groups and intimidation of human rights activists, journalists and the opposition.

The nature and intensity of human rights violation in the rural area is different and in most cases, worse, than in the urban areas. Since most of the people are uneducated, poor and unaware of their constitutional rights, they can hardly do anything against the people or groups who violate their rights. Women, children, minority groups and people with disability are more vulnerable to human rights violation than the other groups. Especially women of all ages have to suffer the most. Since they are unorganised, uneducated and unaware, they are even scared to make the slightest protest. If they

could equip themselves with information - about their rights and about the privileges they deserve – they could start claiming their fair share in the society. Forsyth observes, 'Libraries and information services offer secure environments in which women and girls can obtain the information they need to take control of their lives and influence their societies (2005, p. 318).'

From a village library, an abused woman can know about the relevant laws and contact information of legal rights groups, a tortured man can know about his legal rights and things he should do for getting justice, a helpless widow can know what steps should be taken to claim her share in her deceased husband's property. However, the information service providers must take a proactive role in ensuring that rural people find their required information in an effective way. The semi-literate or illiterate person has little ability to find out or process the most relevant information. He/she will naturally rely on the information provider/librarian to find out the required information, do necessary communications (with, for example, legal service providers) and/or explain the information (found in books/other media) to them. This calls for information searching and presentation skills, knowledge on legal matters and a sympathetic, helpful attitude on the part of the information professional. The librarian should create separate files/databases on various legal issues like women trafficking, dowry, acid throwing, women abuse, etc. and preserve relevant news and information in those files. Besides, complete contact details of various legal and human rights service providers, human rights groups, social activists, law enforcement authorities, etc. should be kept in a file from where it would be possible to quickly retrieve necessary contact information.

Education

Historically, illiteracy has been one of the major problems of Bangladesh. According to the 2001 Census, the literacy rate in Bangladesh was 45.3 (Male 49.6 and Female 40.6); among the people over 15 years of age, the rate is 47.5, with male literacy at 53.9 and female literacy at 40.8 (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics

[Banbeis], 2006). However, a recent government survey has showed that adult literacy rate in Bangladesh had reached 48.8% in 2008, 7.3% up from that of 2005. It also revealed that, the literacy rate among females for the first time has surpassed that among males (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS], 2008). The educational system of Bangladesh has three branches, which are: General education system, Madrasah education system and Technical/Vocational education system. There is also a Professional Education System. Each of the three main systems is divided into four levels: Primary Level, Secondary Level, Higher Secondary Level and Tertiary Level. Tertiary education in Bangladesh takes place at 31 government and 51 private universities and two international universities (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2011). The Government of Bangladesh spends 2.4% of GNP on education. This is the lowest percentage in the region. Both India and Nepal spend 3.2% of GNP on education. Pakistan spends 2.7% (USAID, 2007).

Because of widespread illiteracy and low level of awareness among the rural people, they do not always comprehend the significance of education. Many parents send their children to work instead of school. Besides, the school dropout rate among the rural children is also quite high. This calls for greater awareness about the importance of education among the rural people. A coordinated, well-planned information campaign can make this happen and rural school libraries can play a vital role in this campaign. All over the world, innovative techniques are being followed for ensuring that the underprivileged rural children get access to reading materials. Makenzi (2004) narrates an example from Kenya where libraries are being extensively used for helping rural children getting access to reading materials. Reading tents are being set up in rural Kenya, which serve as mobile libraries that are portable and travel from place to place encouraging voluntary reading and consequently the development of literacy. They serve as extension tools to places where there are inadequate or no library services. Rural people, especially students can read text and reference books at the rural library, look for educational information sources using the World Wide Web and consult

directories and handbooks to explore opportunities of higher education and scholarship. The librarian/information worker can assist the students by acting as a facilitator, providing useful information, making important text and reference books available in the library and extending current awareness services to the students and learners by informing them about educational opportunities on a regular basis.

Market and finance

Since more than 90 million people live in rural Bangladesh, the significance of rural market and finance cannot be overlooked. Rural finance in Bangladesh comprises formal and informal financial institutions, small and large, that provide small-size financial services to the rural poor, as well as larger size financial services to agro-processing and other small and medium rural enterprises. Rural finance also covers a wide array of micro-finance institutions (MFIs), ranging from indigenous rotating savings and credit associations and financial co-operatives to rural banks and agricultural development banks. The NGOs operating in the country with Microcredit programmes also constitute a major group of formal institutions providing rural finance.

In spite of the growing tendency of the private banking sector to cater to the needs of rural clients, the rural people still suffer considerably from a lack of adequate financing. Haq (2008) identifies inadequate infrastructural facilities, lack of efficient distribution channels, imperfect market, lack of governance, corruption, lack of connectivity, natural disasters, poor law and order situation, frequent policy change, etc. as the major problems faced by rural businesses. Constant flow of information on rural finance and market can play an important role in solving many of these problems. Because of their isolation, low literacy rate and lack of awareness, rural businesspeople cannot always make informed decisions regarding marketing their products or receiving various financial services. Haq asserts, "Most of the entrepreneurs of Bangladesh apply the traditional hit and miss approach with their businesses. They have little institutional knowledge and have little access to training as very few organisations offer quality

facilities (2008, 3).” If they could receive up-to-date financial and market information in a meaningful way, they would be able to strengthen their financial and marketing activities.

A rural information centre, run by an able information professional can benefit these people immensely not only by providing their required information, but also by educating the rural people on best use of their money and resources. A very large number of rural Bangladeshis make uninformed and wrong decisions regarding production and marketing of agricultural products like fruits, vegetables and crops. They either grow wrong crops at the wrong time or market the products too early or too late, resulting in massive losses. If they are supplied with regular and timely information about production and marketing of goods, this would enable them to make good decisions resulting in maximization of profits and improvement of livelihood.

Employment

In terms of economic development, Bangladesh is considered as a developing country. Unemployment is one of the major problems of Bangladesh and the problem is much more serious in the rural areas. Lack of jobs is forcing thousands of rural people to migrate to urban areas every day. This mass migration is aggravating the already existing serious unemployment situation in urban areas. Considering the fact that more than a million people are added to the labour force every year, the problem of unemployment in Bangladesh is expected to get more serious in the coming years. In spite of substantial industrialization, agriculture still employs about 51.7% of total employed labour force while manufacturing accounts for only 9.7% of the total employed labour force (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS], 2007).

Unemployment is more acute in the rural areas than in the urban areas. This is because the rural people are generally unaware of the job opportunities that are available at both home and abroad. They frequently make wrong decisions regarding selection of

jobs, resulting in serious economic hardship for them and their families. There are many instances when wrong decision regarding selection of jobs leads to unfortunate death of many rural youths on foreign soil. They are also frequently cheated by unscrupulous people who entice them with lucrative offers of jobs. But if these rural youths could be provided with correct information and guidance about job opportunities at home and abroad, they could be spared from this hardship. Rural information centres can play a vital role in this regard. These centres can provide information on availability and future prospects of various jobs in and outside the country, ways and means of getting suitable jobs, necessary qualifications and ways to attain those qualifications. Librarians and information workers could give valuable suggestions to the job-seekers and help them pursue safe and profitable jobs at home and abroad. These centres can also play a role as training centres, equipping the job-seekers with necessary skills, expertise and knowledge to pursue various employment opportunities.

Disaster management

For many in the outside world, the word 'Bangladesh' is synonymous with natural disasters. Bangladesh has experienced seventeen highly damaging floods in the 20th century. Since independence in 1971, Bangladesh has seen floods of a vast magnitude and required external emergency assistance in 1974, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1998 and 2004. According to the Mortality Risk Index prepared by the United Nations' International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), the people of Bangladesh and China are most at risk from various disasters like earthquakes, floods, cyclones and landslides (UNDP, 2004). For a disaster prone country like Bangladesh, timely supply of information before, during and after disasters is extremely crucial. Experience of past disasters has shown that, accurate and timely information can become the determiner of life and death. Highlighting the importance of information in disaster management, Lopez et al. (2007) state, 'Managing disasters is managing information because reliable information is the most important commodity before and after a disaster. Facilitating the access, exchange and diffusion of information will help the actors working in disaster

management to improve decision making processes aimed at reducing risks and disasters.’

Since rural people are most vulnerable to disasters, rural information centres can play a vital role in disseminating disaster related information among them. They can warn rural people about upcoming disasters, inform them about their nearest disaster shelters, advise them how to save lives and properties during disasters and suggest post-disaster activities. Since many of the rural people are illiterate, rural information professionals would know how to convey disaster related information to them. Many rural people are superstitious also, they do not easily accept information given by outsiders. Rural information professionals would know how to convince the rural people to accept the information and act accordingly. Rural information centres can regularly hold different programmes like discussion meetings, workshops, view exchange meetings, study circles, etc. to inform, educate and train up rural people about disaster management. Rural information centres can also act as a platform for linking volunteers, GO-NGO officials, civil society, experts in disaster management and the community people so that more effective collaborative actions could be taken for combating disasters.

Right to information and the need for information infrastructure

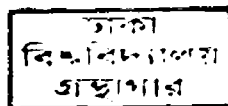
Bangladesh Parliament passed the much-awaited ‘Right to Information (RTI) Act-2009’ on 30 March 2009. This is a landmark event in the history of Bangladesh, because the law recognizes that every citizen has an undeniable right to have information on various socio-economic issues that directly and indirectly influence their lives. This law is particularly beneficial for the common people of Bangladesh because an effective Right to Information Act has the potential to empower people to engage themselves more meaningfully in the democratic process with a view to increase transparency and accountability in the mechanism of governance and also to reduce corruption (Haque, 2008). It is not possible to make information available to the doorstep of rural and marginalised people without a country-wide library and information network. Rural

library and information centres and other information dissemination systems would play a crucial role in the effective implementation of the RTI Act by making sure that rural people receive their necessary information at the right time and in the right format. Highlighting the link between a robust information dissemination infrastructure and proper implementation of the RTI Act, Iftekharuzzaman asserts, 'It goes without saying that the information management system in Bangladesh is archaic, because of which the practical limitations in retrieving and providing information may also be conveniently exploited to deny and deceive information seekers. There is no alternative to developing a modern digital system of information management that would facilitate easy, dependable and secure archiving and retrieval with clear tracking indicators. Without this even with the best commitment and capacity the information system will remain insensitive to the letter and spirit of RTI. The information management system must ensure the largest possible proactive disclosure which is helpful for both information providers and seekers (2010).'

Recognising the role of information for the development of rural areas, the Government of Bangladesh as well as many NGOs are carrying out information services in the remote and far-flung areas. In recent times, the Government has taken up active interest in setting up its own rural information network all over the country. Different ministries and departments of the government are now making arrangements for helping grassroots people receive critical livelihood information staying at their home. Setting up Union Information and Service Centres (UISCs) is one example of such initiatives. The government has already established Union Information and Services Centres in 4,501 *unions* (lowest level local government units) across the country to disseminate information and deliver government services to all citizens. Although it is not clear how the government is going to ensure sustainability of these UISCs, the grassroots people in general seem to be quite optimistic about these centres. As mentioned earlier, Bangladesh is home to many thousands NGOs and CBOs (Community Based Organisations) who work in almost all areas of the country, with particular

concentration in the rural areas. Only a handful of these organisations are working in the field of information dissemination and social advocacy through information-centred activities. The country has been witnessing a revival of the Telecentre initiatives under the helm of Bangladesh Telecentre Network – a broad-based coalition of Telecentre operators. With the government's recent emphasis on the building of 'Digital Bangladesh' by the year 2021, and massive proliferation of mobile phone network throughout the country, it remains to be seen whether the country can fulfill the dream of a 'Digital Bangladesh' by overcoming its acute weakness in technological and physical infrastructure and also the traditional frailties like corruption, political turmoil, population explosion and bureaucratic complexities.

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CHAPTER 5

LITERATURE REVIEW

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This chapter aims to review important literatures on information needs and seeking behaviour of the rural people, state of the rural information services in Bangladesh and elsewhere and the impact of information on development. Needless to say, a huge corpus of literature can be found on various dimensions of rural development, but, for the sake of relevance, we will focus solely on the literature dealing with the role of information in rural development. The rapid progress of information society convinces most of the development thinkers, social scientists and academics to admit the fact that information acts as a major regulator of social development. The reality, however, is not quite so straight forward, because there is no mathematical formula to prove the relationship between 'information' and 'development'. The two can be linked and correlated by citing countless examples, but to prove beyond doubt that information indeed enables development to take place or that development cannot happen without the aid of information, is a little difficult. However, innumerable researches and experiments are taking place all over the world to make development happen through gainful use of information. Some representative literature will be reviewed to give a glimpse of these researches. Besides, literature dealing with various dimensions and manifestations of information services and their influence on rural development also will be covered. The literatures reviewed in this chapter falls broadly into three groups: i) Information needs of rural people, ii) Rural library and information services, and iii)

Role of information in rural development. The context of developing countries in general and Bangladesh in particular will remain as an underlying theme.

Information needs and seeking behavior of rural people

As our foregoing discussions on the value and importance of information have shown, information has established itself as one of the most crucial ingredients of development and progress. Therefore, thinking about the future of human civilization without paying due attention to the production, preservation and distribution of information is thoughtless, hazardous and counter-productive. And for the same reason, we can safely assert that, the people, who constitute the major part of most of the countries' population, i.e. the rural people, must have access to critical development information and the ability to use that information gainfully for improving their lives. However, the assertion that information is indeed important for the well-being of the rural people solves only a part of the development dilemma; because some other very pertinent questions remain unanswered. Foremost among those are: which information is needed by the rural people and how to make the information available at their doorsteps?

At this point, the concepts of 'need' and 'information need' should be clarified. As indicated by theorists like Masclow (1943), 'need' is a psychological phenomenon. Masclow depicts the need hierarchy as a pyramid consisting of five levels: the four lower levels are grouped together as being associated with physiological needs, while the top level is termed growth needs and is associated with psychological needs (Masclow, cited in Pujar, et al. 2008). Wilson (1981) observes that "Need is a subjective experience which occurs only in the mind of the person in need and, consequently, is not directly accessible to an observer". The experience of need can only be discovered by deduction from behavior or through the reports of the person in need (Wilson, cited in Iqbal, 2004, p. 8).

On the other hand, the information need (of an individual as well as a community), is shaped by various internal and external factors, including social, occupational, educational and cultural background of the individual or community in question. Information needs arise out of three basic human needs: physiological needs, psychological needs and cognitive needs (Nicholas, 1996). Information needs centred on the information that would further a job or research or would be recognized as doing so by the recipient (Line, 1979). There are three kinds of information needs: expressed needs, unexpressed needs and dormant needs.

- 'Expressed needs' are the information needs of an individual that are expressed clearly. The expressed needs can be grouped into two categories: 'Information Wants' and 'Information Demands' (Nicholas, 1996). Information wants are what the individual would like to have. An information demand is a request for an information item or product.
- 'Unexpressed needs' are the needs that have not been met. The users are aware of their needs but do nothing about them, either because information provision is not available or due to ignorance.
- 'Dormant needs' are the needs that the individual does not know exist. They do not know that they have an information gap and are not aware of the existence of the information they want. This should create a positive and proactive role for the information professional.

Researchers who apply the social perspective see information users first of all as the members of a particular community, social category or group. They recognize the social placement or a professional role as the most important determinants of users' information behavior (Niedźwiedzka, 2003). As innumerable need assessment studies of rural dwellers have indicated, social standing as well as socio-ethnic-cultural background of the rural people significantly influences their information need and information seeking behavior. If the particular nature of the 'social mix' in the rural society is not considered before designing a library or information service, it will never achieve the expected goals. The researchers should consider the highly differentiated nature of the

rural society. The rural society comprises a complex structure consisting of peasants, small scale farmers, sharecroppers, day-laborers, unemployed and landless people, shifting cultivators, fishermen, plantation workers, artisans, as such. As Kibat (1991) notes, information dissemination that relies on the acquisition of printed matter will reach only a small fraction of the population because of low income (prohibiting the purchase of expensive materials), illiteracy, and language barriers. Quebral (1991) observes, 'Most rural families lack the economic power to break loose and hence normally do not go out seeking information. What the librarian needs to do first is to construct a community profile that describes the population to be served, their information needs, and the sources of that information.'

A number of research interventions have focused on community information needs, although the focus has shifted from 'library centred information provision' to 'user centred information access systems' over time. Making information available at the doorstep of the users, without sitting at the library and waiting for them, is the major focus of the user-centred approach. This approach matches the paradigm shift espoused by Dervin and Nilan from 'traditional' to 'alternative'. These two researchers observe that, in a traditional way, the user is understood in a system oriented way through a study of 'system genera'. In contrast, the alternative paradigm focuses on the 'user genera', understanding a user's needs as seen by the user himself (Dervin & Nilan, 1986). Assessment of information needs of the rural people can be a daunting task. Although we can assume a number of information requirements on the part of the rural people, prioritization of those needs and effectively linking the needs to sustainable development in their lives remains a big challenge. Besides, information need of different communities living even in the same country or region might differ greatly from one another. Not only that; information need of different sections of the same community (divided along the lines of religion, race, occupation, age, etc.) might well be starkly different from one another. This poses serious challenges for information workers as well as development practitioners. Therefore, rural information needs

should be understood, regardless of geographical, socio-economic, political and cultural circumstances and infrastructural discriminations. One of the peculiarities of rural information infrastructure, as opposed to the urban information systems, is the role played by oral culture of oral system in preserving and disseminating information. A large number of rural people are dependent on oral communication, owing to their oral tradition and the fact that many of them are not literate. Durrani (1985) asserts, 'No modern information system will succeed in the rural areas unless it comes to terms with the existing oral system and with those who run it (Durrani, p. 150).'

Some of the earliest studies on the information need and seeking behavior of the rural dwellers were carried out in the United States. Important among those were Stanley, William R. and Kovacik, Charles F. (1972), Drennan, Ann P., and Shelby Anne (1974) and the Appalachian Adult Education Centre, Morehead, Kentucky, USA (Reed, 1974), who prepared a comprehensive library service guide for the community people. Haycock and Wilde investigated 'the perceived information ... needs of eight rural intermountain communities in Colorado, Montana, Utah and Wyoming (1984, cited in Anwar and Supaat, 1998).' Native Americans identified their important information needs as 'those dealing with employment, vocational training, legal and civil rights and health (Patterson 1995).' Bernard Vavrek, in his research (1990, 1993) which is very comprehensive and systematic, discovered that 'both users and non-users indicated that their daily information needs include knowing about current decisions of local government, health and medical services, and local news (Vavrek, 1995).' In the UK, the Library Advisory Council of Wales set up a working party in 1975 which studied the library needs of rural areas (Thomas, 1978, cited in Anwar and Supaat, 1998). The South Molton library project (Venner, 1986, cited in Anwar and Supaat, 1998) and the PIRATE project (Dover, 1988, cited in Anwar and Supaat, 1998).

One of the first systematic studies aimed at analyzing the information needs of rural dwellers were performed by Barron and Curran (1979). The study was undertaken at the

behest of the 'Office of Education' and the 'Department of Health, Education and Welfare' of the government of the United States. The study resulted in an article entitled "Assessing the Information Needs of Rural People: The Development of an Action Strategy for Rural Librarians", which appeared in the Spring 1980 volume of 'Library Trends'. In the very first paragraph of the article, the authors put forward a simple proposition: "people require information and the mission of libraries is to acquire and disseminate information to meet the needs of people in their service areas. The question becomes, therefore, "How can libraries best accomplish this mission?" from there, they moved on to explore some essential issues and themes regarding the assessment of rural user's information needs. Emphasizing the fact that, most rural communities suffer from a sense of isolation from the 'modern' and 'advanced' world, Barron and Curran emphasized the need for realizing the nature of this isolation by library planners and librarians. 'The most important factors that planners of rural library services must take into account are those associated with the penalties of geographical isolation. The next essential step must be to understand more fully the information-seeking behavior of persons who suffer the penalties of that isolation (Barron and Curran, 625)', the writers observe. They went on to add, '... the same isolation which keeps rural citizens remote from "what's happening at your public library" keeps the librarians isolated from preservice and continuing education opportunities (p. 625).' Urging the rural librarians to become more proactive in assessing the information needs of the users, the authors comment, 'As long as librarians continue to remain book- and thing-oriented, instead of information- and people-oriented, citizens will continue to ignore the library. Citizens may see the book as neither crucial to their survival needs nor important to their entertainment needs. Librarians who sit and wait for such rural citizens to present their demands to the system will have a long wait, for sitting and waiting will never raise the citizens' levels of expectations for library service (Barron and Curran, p. 626).'

As it has been already indicated, information needs of the rural people in developing countries are considerably different from that of the developed world. Until recently, most of the information need assessment initiatives in the developing countries centred primarily on the information needs of scientists, technologists, researchers, agricultural workers, etc. (Iqbal 2004, p. 11). However, with the recent surge of interest in new forms and dimensions of rural development, many research initiatives are being carried out especially in Africa and Asia, to assess the information seeking habit of rural, marginalized and underprivileged people. A large number of such initiatives are focused on various occupational groups like farmers, fishermen, small businessmen, etc. while many others deal with information needs of women, elderly people, patients, etc.

The first research attempt for ascertaining information needs of rural people in Africa was made in 1982 when 'an experimental library project' was set up in a village near Ibadan, Nigeria, for the "mainly non-literate community to gain insight into perceived information needs and those of which they were unaware" (Aboyade, 1984, cited in Anwar and Supaat, 1998). Aboyade (1984) himself defined six areas of information need and documented specific requests from users in each category (1984) while researching library use of non-literate peoples for the 1981 RUDIS (Rural Development Information System Research) project. The six areas were health, problems of daily existence, occupation, government and society, recreation and leisure, education and religion. One of the most prominent areas of need was health information. Specific requests included information on the treatment of malaria, pre and post-natal care, nutrition, dealing with infertility, nearest hospitals/medical care, effects of smoking, and environmental sanitation and pit latrines. Problems of daily existence were also highly ranked. Specific requests included water supply, electricity, roads, and employment problems and opportunities (cited in Dent, 2006).

Mchombu (1993) finds that information needs of the rural people of Africa fall into two categories: information needs common to all rural communities and needs that are

location specific. He also identified the following information needs to be most dominant: information on income generation, community leadership, literacy support, basic economics, government policies on rural development, social conservation, fertility restoration, soil erosion, etc. In another study, Mchombu (2000) attempted to analyze the information needs of women in small businesses in Botswana. The study finds that, information on business management, business diversification and financial assistance were the dominant information needs of women business entrepreneurs. Interestingly, more than one fifth respondent commented that they do not have any information needs, which indicate a lack of awareness.

A field study performed by Momodu (2002) to explore the information needs and information-seeking behavior of rural populations in Nigeria found that information needs are usually directly related to the occupations of the villagers. Major areas of information needs include agriculture, health, politics, education, economy, and community development. While literate villagers and school children consider the rural library as a good source of information, most of the respondents rely on information through radio, television, and newspapers, extension workers and agents, and informal networks.

Kebede (2004), while analyzing the information needs of end users in the Sub-Saharan Africa in the digital information environment, asserts that, information needs of end-users in the electronic information environment are different from those of the print information environment. He cites Battenfield (1999), Gashaw (2002) and Liebscher, Abels, & Denman (1997) in support of this argument. Therefore, Kebede proposes that, information needs of end-users in Sub-Saharan Africa and their information behavior in general, have to be seen in light of the digital divide. He concludes that, the information needs of end-users in Sub-Saharan Africa include: content relevant to understand and execute daily tasks, content that is accessible through the capabilities of computers and networks available in the region, content that is accessible, (downloadable/uploadable,

viewable, readable, editable, etc.) within the congested and slow Internet connections, content that can be manipulated, processed, viewed, read, edited, etc., with old versions of poor quality software widely used in the region, Content that can be effectively accessed and used, given the low literacy level that the majority of end-users possess in terms of the treatment of subject matter, presentation, language, etc. and content that can be effectively accessed and used with the low level of ICT skills that the majority of end-users in Sub-Saharan Africa possess.

Njoku (2004) conducted a study to explore the information need and information seeking behavior of the fishermen in the Lagos State of Nigeria. The study reveals that, where and how to obtain credit facilities remain the most important information needs of the fishermen. It also reveals that, most fishermen depend on friends, relatives and neighbours for their fishing information needs, because they are basically illiterates and lack basic infrastructures. The respondents informed that, lack of awareness about where and how to obtain information on modern fishing technology is the most common problem of the fishermen in their attempts to seek information (Njoku, p. 305). Mooko (2005) conducted a field study to understand the information needs and information seeking behavior of women in three rural villages in Botswana. Consisted of interviews and Focus Group Discussions, the study revealed that, most information needs are health related, such as information regarding the causes and remedies of certain diseases. Besides, information relating to job opportunities and training, agriculture, family violence, financial activities, etc. were also found to be important to the rural women.

Like their counterparts in Africa, Asian researchers also have performed a number of intensive as well as extensive research studies to ascertain the information needs of rural people. Interestingly enough, just like the African studies, job opportunity, disaster management, education, health, etc. have appeared as key information needs of the

rural people of Asia. However, various specific, location and occupation-centric needs also have featured among these needs.

Mchombu (1998) extensively analyzed information requirement of rural women. In his view, women's requirements for information falls into three categories: a) basic information needs, similar to the menfolk, determined by geographic (climatic), economic, and educational environment and opportunities; b) strategic gender management information including information to support the change agent role of women in their struggle for upliftment and empowerment; c) information to support execution of the traditional and cultural roles including primary health, family upkeep, and provider of basic provisions for the community. Supaat and Anwar (1998) performed an information need analysis of rural Malaysians. They conducted the study on three villages located in close proximity in Selangor State. Although not a comprehensive study, it revealed some interesting facts about the nature of information need of rural Malaysians. Religious information formed the major part of information need of the respondents. It was followed by information need on family bonding, current affairs, health, education, child rearing, diet, agriculture, shopping, availability of goods and services, politics and business. Seneviratne (2004) attempted to draw a basic outline of information needs of rural people by carrying out a mini survey in a village in Sri Lanka. According to the survey, the following basic categories of information needs were identified: a) Government Information, b) Employment Information, c) Educational Information, d) Health-related Information, e) Agricultural Information, f) Industrial Information, g) Financial Information, h) Marketing Information, i) Information on Legal and Property Related Problems, j) Legal Information on Infrastructure-Related Issues, k) Weather Information, l) Natural Disaster Information, m) Recreational Information, n) Other Location-Specific Information, o) Miscellaneous Needs.

In the last few years, a number of research initiatives have been undertaken in India to assess and analyze the information needs of rural people. Sharma and Fatima (2004)

performed a study on the information seeking behavior and sharing pattern among the rural people of Gwalior district of Madhya Pradesh. They found out that, information relating to daily life activities constitute the most urgent information needs of rural people. This need is followed by need for information on latest developments, occupation, education, entertainment and leisure activities. It also shows that, the rural people consider television to be a useful means of distributing information. A study conducted by Tadasad and Yallapa (2004) revealed that, employment, agriculture, religion, local news and health are the top five subjects on which information is sought by the rural people. It also revealed that, the rural people do not have not much need for information on consumer rights, crime and safety, travel and tourism. The respondents informed that, they need information to meet their basic needs like health, agriculture, education, employment, social welfare, etc. that assists in improving their economic condition and thereby raising their living standards. Basak (2004) conducted a study to ascertain the information needs of fish farmers in the State of West Bengal. The study revealed that, the fish farmers mainly require information on fish cultivation and fish breeding. They need specific information in their field of activities free of cost to enhance the growth and quantity of their products within their limited resources. Meitei and Devi (2004) attempted to analyze the information need of the rural people in the Indian State of Manipur. They found that, more than two thirds of the respondents need information on agriculture, including information on variety of seeds, pesticides, irrigation and weather condition, etc. Almost the same number of respondents require information on education, training and health, while many of the respondents informed that information on business, technology, games and sports and governmental policies and plans are also very important to them. Sahu (2004) conducted a rather comprehensive study on the information seeking behavior of rural people in West Bengal. For this, a sample population of 400 was selected from 12 *Gram Panchayat* areas. The sample population was divided into two groups: the first group comprised people engaged in occupation of farming, poultry and dairy farming, pisciculture and small scale cottage industries, while the second group consisted of people not

associated with any particular occupation. The study revealed that, Most of the farmers require information on weather condition for sowing, while almost all poultry farmers need information on improved breed of birds, control and prevention of diseases, new technology and training and availability of loans. The principle areas of information requirements of dairy farmers are improved breed of animals, prevention and control of diseases, etc. People engaged in pisciculture need information on improved breed of carps, fish food, etc., while people engaged in small scale industries require information on raw materials, new technology and materials, etc. They collect these information from *Gram Panchayat*, subdivisional or district agricultural office, animal resource development office, friends and neighbours, etc. The principal areas of information requirements of the second group are programmes initiated by the government for rural development, local news, sanitation, self employment schemes, national news, etc. Most of them acquire these information from mass communication media like radio and television.

Zhang and Liangzhi (2009) reviewed a number of literatures that explored the nature and extent of information needs of inhabitants of rural China. They argue that, since 1979, the rural areas of China have experienced dramatic economic and social changes, many of which had substantial impact on the information needs of rural residents (Zhang and Liangzhi, p. 64). Dutta (2009) conducted a literature review of studies done on the information needs and information-seeking behavior of the indigenous people of several developing countries. A total of 56 peer-reviewed articles published within the last two decades were reviewed for this purpose. The study reveals that, the information-seeking behavior of rural dwellers in the developing world is centred around survival and basic day-to-day concerns. It also came up with the following broad observations:

- Basic human needs make up the majority of information needs across all countries investigated

- Lack of education remains the primary obstacle to meeting the information needs of the working poor in developing countries.
- While relevant and up-to-date information exists, it is not readily available to these individuals for a number of reasons, including unqualified or unknowledgeable extension workers as well as a lack of computer information systems.
- A digital divide continues to exist in an increasingly digital information world, where those who do not have access to electronic resources are becoming even more marginalized, even though electronic information systems can provide relevant, up-to-date, good-quality information to citizens who need it most.
- Informal information networks are by far the most preferred means of gathering information that individuals feel is reliable and authentic. While extension workers and rural libraries are considered to be good options for finding good-quality information, they are not as heavily relied upon: libraries are mostly limited to those who are literate, and extension workers are not usually a constant presence in rural villages.
- The role of Non Government Organisations (NGOs) in extending information services to the rural people is becoming more and more evident.
- Information and Communications technologies (ICTs) are increasingly being used to provide information services to the rural people.

Liangzhi (2010, p. 4) argues that, 'It is one's information resource base, not whatever is available in his/her social environment nor even whatever is accessible in his/her own information worlds, that produces most information utilities for the individual.' He warns, 'Information service providers need to develop a solid understanding of the information worlds of those they intend to serve; a superficial understanding of possible information needs is not adequate to ensure effective information services (p. 13).

Growing interest of specialists and common people alike in the field of 'information for development' has been a noticeable trend in Bangladesh in recent times. Information is increasingly being linked with development and progress and news media, GOs/NGOs and general people are giving this issue a lot of attention. And in that way, rural development has again taken the centre stage and has become an issue worth talking about. Television programmes like *Hridaye Maati O Manush* (Land and People in the heart), NGO initiatives like Palli Tathyakendra (D.Net) and Knowledge fair (Amader Gram), corporate initiatives like GrameenPhone CIC and government initiatives like *Tathya Batayan* (Information Portal) and Union Information Centres – all have contributed towards a better understanding and greater acceptance of 'information for development' concept. However, in spite of all these attention and enthusiasm, serious scholarly practices in the field of information for development, especially information seeking behavior of rural people have been quite scarce. Iqbal (2004) has reviewed some small-scale research initiatives aimed at exploring the community knowledge and information requirements of particular social groups (infertile women, farmers, etc.) in his Ph.D. thesis. These studies show that, the amount of knowledge of rural and urban underprivileged groups regarding health and livelihood issues is quite poor. However, the studies also indicated that, these groups possess considerable knowledge especially about farming and agriculture and this knowledge is largely indigenous or traditional. As we have indicated, the number of extensive and comprehensive studies on information need assessment of rural people in Bangladesh is quite small. Before embarking on analyzing a few of such extensive studies, we might cite one or two articles which deals, although partially, with the issue of information needs of rural people. Ahmed et al. (1997) observe that small and marginal farmers and agricultural laborers constitute the majority of agricultural workers in Bangladesh and they need information on matters that contribute to an increase in agricultural productivity and related issues. These include grants, subsidies, provision of credit, supply of fertilizers and agricultural implements. They identify problems of daily life and earning a livelihood as the two themes around which the information need of rural people centres. Islam (2006), while

discussing the information services of rural libraries, cites Khan (1997) and mentions that agriculture, health, food, nutrition, environment, technology, business and politics are of the issues on which rural people need information. Uddin (2005, p. 29) observes that, rural people need information on agriculture, health, food and nutrition, environment, appropriate technology, education and training, credit system, business, trade, people, culture and governmental policies and plans.

Non-Government development organisation D.Net carried out an extensive survey (2003) entitled 'Access to Information for Improving Rural Livelihood'. Subsequently, the organisation developed livelihood content suitable for rural community based on that survey. The survey team identified several categories of information sought by rural people in a participatory way, which included agriculture, health, legal rights, education, market information, employment and awareness rising. The study found that, information requirements of rural people in four major fields, namely agriculture, health, legal rights and education were:

Agriculture: Different training on agriculture production process, selection of crop based on soil type, modern technology, seed selection and quality assurance, different cropping system and cultivation process, different agriculture insects and diseases, type and usage of fertilizer, government support programme, etc.

Health: Obstetrics and general care, diagnostics and prescription, adolescent awareness like precaution from unsafe sex, HIV/AIDS and safety, etc., malnutrition, alternative sources of nutrition, indigenous and herbal treatment, public health service, sanitation, related GO-NGO support, etc.

Legal rights: Family law; institutions providing legal aid, accountability of Government officials, government relief and subsidies, property rights, land record system, taxation, land tax payment, calculation of tax, marriage registration system, awareness, rights and obligations of citizens, etc.

Education: Admission to university, college and other academic institutions, syllabus, by subject, university, year, preparation of exams, suggestions, coaching facilities,

availability of residential facilities, cost, location, etc., vocational education, awareness for vocation education, privilege, ethnic preferences in education system, availability, etc.

Iqbal conducted his Ph.D. research on the relationship between information and development (2004). His research revealed that, information about farming constitutes the major information requirement of the rural people. This is followed by information on family planning, flood control/natural disaster management, health, world and current affairs, financial/loan assistance, entertainment and education. Iqbal commented that, a large majority of respondents (41%) did not consider agriculture as their area of information need (2004, p. 91). Besides, the number of participants who expressed a need for family planning information also was not so high. While comparing between the information needs of rural and urban poor, Iqbal found that, in the case of rural informants, entertainment information need was 20% higher than for their urban counterparts. In the rural areas 10% of informants also expressed an interest in information to serve their educational needs.

Rural library and information services

All over the world, rural areas and the people living there are subject to various kinds of discrimination. Quantity and quality of public and private services in every sector, be it health, education, communication, business or employment, is not satisfactory and rural people usually receive low priority when it comes to distribution of national wealth. Naturally, government policy makers as well as non-governmental development enthusiasts have little time to think whether the rural people are receiving enough information. This practice of paying less attention to the information requirements of rural people is one of the major hindrances to development. Kularatne asserts, 'It should not be forgotten that a considerable quantity of raw materials for industry and also food items, are supplied by the people in rural areas. Therefore, rural development should be the basis for development in these countries, and therein lies the importance

of providing development information (1997, p. 117).’ Nwagha (1992) observes that, lack of information has resulted in rural people living in ignorance about vital issues such as preventive health care, good nutrition, appropriate technology and environmental sanitation, which could improve, to a large extent, the quality of their lives.

Traditionally, rural people have been receiving information through various means. Information receiving pattern of rural people has one striking difference from that of the urban people. While urban people are more interested in formal and institutional sources of information, the rural people rely more on uninstitutional and informal sources. Moreover, oral sources of information play a major role in information sharing in the rural setting and information passes from generation to generation in this way, which is seldom seen in the urban setting. Kularatne observes, ‘Information pertaining to rural agriculture, environmental and health issues has been transmitted informally to each successive generation by their elders. In addition, there are institutional methods of communication, such as churches, religious networks, or the local administrative structure, with information filtering through the village chief or headman, political parties, the school, the police, or government service agencies such as agricultural extension and rural health centres (1997, p. 117).’ There are also mediated forms of communication through which the literate, semi-literate and illiterate may all obtain information in the rural areas of the developing countries. These are the forms of mass communication – radio, newspapers, films, posters and, more recently and to a more limited extent, television. Interpersonal communication over longer distances is carried through the mail and telecommunication systems (McAnny, 1980).’ Quoting Wijasuriya (1979), Kularatne observes that, traditional information providers, such as libraries, documentation centres and archives, departments of information and telecommunications, broadcasting corporations, ministries of culture, education, external affairs, trade and commerce, industries, finance and planning, and tourism, and government printers, provide primary information indirectly. Each country thus has its own elements of information provision (1997, p. 117-18). As our earlier discussions have

shown, many technology based news information initiatives like telecentres, community information centres and information kiosks are gaining popularity in the rural areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The issue of making information available to the rural people has received considerable attention of development researchers, library and information specialists and international development agencies. This has resulted in a whole plethora of literature on various aspects of rural library and information services. Mittal (1964) in his book "Organising a Village Library" suggested some objectives for the rural village library, which include: dissemination of authentic news and information, providing motivation for learning, reading and writing, and helping to maintain, enhance and feed literacy among the people, keeping alive and enhancing cultural heritage, increasing vocational competence in raising the technological level of a village occupation, promoting information of the various factions of the village population wherever they exist, helping village institutions and organisations improve their programmes, developing the aesthetic sense and refining taste, and helping people spend their leisure time profitably (cited in Dent, 2007). Woodward (1979) contributed a seminal paper in the *Journal of Information Science* in which he deliberated over the problems and prospects of rural library and information service. He proposed for the establishment of nationally-based documentation centres either covering the whole spectrum of locally available information, or specializing in major areas such as agriculture. He opined that majority of documents to be dealt with by such a centre will be largely non-conventional (1979, p. 262). He also identified some problems which hamper the establishment and effective operation of such rural information centres, which are: lack of professionally trained staff, underdevelopment of the technical infrastructure necessary to support the development of technologically advanced information systems and financial constraints, especially foreign exchange, impeding the ability to purchase the necessary inputs, capital or recurrent, for advanced information systems (1979, p. 263). Citing examples from Sweden, Finland and Norway, Rasmussen (1981) advocated for widespread use of

mobile libraries for providing information services in the rural areas. In Finland, she observes, the mobile libraries sometimes carry books, films, cassettes, while, some other time, it is used as an art gallery or for an exhibition of handicraft produced by local inhabitants. In Norway, the mobile library is a "culture on wheels" and apart from a book-stock, the emphasis is on story telling and folk-singing, with authors and singers joining the library staff. She also asserts that, as more and more rural people become educated, the library's role and priorities will have to be reassessed - which should be a continuous process. Observation, sensitivity and involvement with the community are also important prerequisites for library development (1981, p. 261). Valias (1983) has divided the problems facing the rural information centres in the developing countries into two groups: materials problems and human problems. Materials problems consist of difficulty in acquiring library materials because of insufficient budget, shortage of modern equipment and inadequacies in communication which result in problems in the flow of information. On the other hand, human problems comprise lack of awareness among the decision makers about the importance of information for the country's development process and lack of interest of potential users resulting in an insufficient utilization of already existing information facilities. Durrani (1985) investigated the problem of extending information services to the rural people extensively. He emphasized the need of undertaking investigations to decide on the form and the content of information needed by rural people. He also highlighted that, in absence of organised information services from government authority, rural people develop informal system of information sharing based on oral traditions. He asserts, 'No modern information system will succeed in the rural areas unless it comes to terms with the existing oral system and with those who run it....the foundation of an efficient, relevant information service in the rural areas already exists in these oral services. (Therefore), it remains for the 'modern' information services to build on this formation (1985, p. 150).'

Chijioke (1989) has advocated for the development of reference materials at the local level, i.e. by the rural information service providers themselves. She opined that, the

library should create a card-file directory of persons, organisations, places, etc. of importance to the community. This file would act as the community's memory bank for the wide range of government services and facilities as well as an archive of materials emanating from the community. Besides, the library should emphasize on the collection of practical materials of the 'how to' variety, rather than general literature. Identifying lack of financial and moral support, lack of dynamic leadership, high level of illiteracy among rural dwellers, especially farmers and lack of reading habit among literate farmers as the main problems of rural agricultural library service, Shibanda (1991) has opined that the library authorities need to be aware of the information needs of the rural people, improve their information collection, storage and retrieval system, improve the quality of information provided to the clientele and be aware of and cooperate with all local agricultural organisations in collecting and disseminating information to farmers. As a part of education programme for the farmers, he suggested that the libraries should compile local directories and create local files in addition to leaflets on agricultural sources of information, supplemented by local maps showing information centres or agricultural service points; publicize themselves to the farming community and educate farmers about their rights to access to public agricultural institutions and their personnel for advice and information (1991, p. 146). Mentioning about various community library service initiatives of the Sri Lankan government like the 'Book box project' (where library service is provided to the children with the help of a van), 'Bullock cart library' (where information materials are carried to the rural areas with the help of bullock-carts) and 'Barefoot library service' (where women volunteers provide library services in the rural areas by walking, as they had no means of transport), Corea (1991) highlighted the importance of promoting voluntarism and building nation-wide network of information services so that the most underprivileged and marginalized people also get benefited from these services.

Kempson (1990) suggests some basic principles which should be followed during this design and planning process of rural information service. These include: ensuring

involvement of the community in the planning and running of the information centre, involving existing information workers in the design of the new service, recognizing traditional pattern of information seeking based on oral communication side by side with printed documents, ensuring that the information workers understand the information they are handling so that they could interpret and apply that information to the particular needs of the user, and making sure that the information service acts as a communication channel from, as well as to, the local community. After reviewing the rural information service infrastructure of Tanzania in the early 1990s, UNISIST (1992) suggested that, the rural libraries need to be developed as community centres within the national strategy and not just be simple depositories of education materials. It also proposed that the rural newspapers and printing presses should be considered as a part of rural information service infrastructure so that rural people can get latest information from these sources. Rosenberg (1993) considers rural library service as a sustainable option for providing reading materials to rural peoples. He offered two potential models for rural community information centres/libraries. The first model includes the rural information centre as a library, which provides reading material, and as a referral centre that provides advice to local citizens. This type of establishment is supported by the community financially and administratively. The second model involves rural information centres and libraries as part of a larger public library system, making use of pre-existing structures to provide services and meet user needs. After reviewing various aspects of the 'Rural Libraries and Resources Development Programme (RLRDP)', a programme undertaken by a non government organisation in Zimbabwe, Atherton (1993) argued that, for a rural information service to be successful, it must be located in a place easily accessible to the rural people, information materials should be written in local languages, community participation and involvement in the running of the library should be ensured, voluntarism must be developed among the local communities, the objectives set for the libraries should be attainable and in every case, low cost solutions must get priority. Asamoah-Hassan (1997) asserts that, collection, organisation, interpretation, storage, retrieval, distribution and guiding the use of the information

materials are basic functions of rural information centres and if any of these is missing, the service will be a sub-standard one or will fail altogether. She also urged the libraries for seeking alternative and innovative ways of distributing information to the rural people. The library should take the responsibility of repackaging existing information to make it acceptable and useful, in content and format, and provide counseling and referral services to the rural people, he adds.

Chifwepa (1997) argues that, given the high level of illiteracy, the type of service required by the rural people is information service rather than book service. References and referral services should be an integral part of the services of these centres. He also advocated for collaboration with publishers to ensure constant supply of information. Role of library legislation and national information policies for proper running of rural information centres also was highlighted by him (1997, p. 129-30). Kularatne (1997) maintains that, only providing information is not sufficient for ensuring development of the rural people. In his words, 'If information is to be put to good use, the service component relevant to the message should follow. There is little use in educating peasant farmers about using good seed and fertilizer to achieve a good harvest if there are no agencies to supply these at a reasonable price or on credit at the correct time. (Similarly), if the local health authorities do not provide the matching service the information provided is wasted (1997, p. 119).' He also strongly advocated for undertaking literacy campaigns on a large scale. Citing September (1993), he observes, illiteracy is the key problem in the provision of information since it denies access to all information which exists outside the oral tradition. Mchombu (1999) promoted the idea of specialized rural information centres for women, which will not only be led by women, but also have a whole plethora of information materials suited to the needs of women. The operation of such centres, in his view, should be multipurpose, and customer-driven, with flexible opening and closing hours, to reflect seasonal variation in workload, and coincide with the few leisure hours of women. He suggested that, the centre should have a well pronounced information, communication and networking

strategy, including the production of a simple typewritten newsletter, distributed in the community and pinned on community notice boards which are located where people are likely to gather for other social activities.

Kagan (2000) affirms that, the primary goal of all rural information centres must be to see that the right information reaches the right clientele in the most comprehensible format at the right time. He also insists on the importance of analyzing the diversity of the rural population in order to plan appropriate library services. Interpersonal forms of communication such as information exchange in marketplaces, water sources and places of worship also need to be discovered, he states. Muswazi (2001) highlighted the role of library and information professionals to capture, codify, preserve and distribute indigenous knowledge from the rural areas. He urged the information professionals to utilize information and communication technologies and create web portals through which indigenous knowledge resources linked to external knowledge systems could be shared with a global audience. Iwe (2003) suggests that, the rural library should act not only as a unifying factor, but also as a catalyst among the people. The culture of the people should feature prominently in the library collection, hence things like festivals, marriages, ceremonies, recreations and customs could be photographed and documented and kept in the library for reference purposes. She also urged to formulate long term development objectives because rural development itself is a gradual process which takes a long time to materialize, especially as the majority of rural people are not educated. After reviewing a number of mobile and floating (boat) library services in the rural areas of Thailand, Cheunwattana (2003) observed that, the continued success of these initiatives has been ensured because of giving a lot of importance on reading as continuing education and combining education with entertainment and making learning fun and interesting. Attention to local needs, environments and uniqueness, simplicity, and economical, creative and down-to-earth approach also have contributed to the success of these initiatives, he mentions.

Raju and Karisiddappa (2000) propose to create nationwide rural development information networks connecting all institutes of rural development and others. The network, they observe, could be used for disseminating information regarding training schedule and research findings on rural development. Video conferencing facility could also be established for regular monitoring of progress and conducting seminars. They also propose to develop agricultural marketing intelligence and communication network to connect all agricultural product market centres. They argue that such a network could strengthen rural information provision infrastructure, thus benefiting the rural communities all over the country. Ozcatalbas, Brumfield and Ozkan (2004) state that, if the rural farmers have access to more and better information they will be able to make better management decisions. They identify the importance of information and communication technologies for increasing and disseminating agricultural information and insist that, rural people should be assisted in getting acquainted with these technologies. Das and Khan (2004) explored the role played by public libraries in rural development. Stressing the importance of extending public library network to the remotest parts of India, they suggested that rural public libraries should act as a meeting place for community people and the functionaries of rural development to share ideas and chalk out development programmes. While discussing the problems and possibilities of establishing a network rural information centres for the dissemination of information regarding the government welfare and rural development schemes in the State of Tamil Nadu in India, Thirumagal and Srinath (2004) suggest that such centres could bring government services to the doorstep of rural people and bridge the information gap existing between rural and urban areas. Referring to the Indian Government's attempt to create a digital library containing one million books and making these books available to the rural people with the help of mobile vans with satellite connections, they advocated for the initiation of more projects like this in the rural areas. Satpathy (2004) explored the role of technology based Community Information Centres (CICs) in disseminating information to the rural people in North east India. Referring to the success of some Pilot projects, he asserted that, these CICs

could play a crucial role in hard-to-reach areas by ensuring community people's access to digital information repositories on health, education, public service, etc. Singh, Singh and Devi (2004) advocated for the creation of rural library network supported by a strong computer network. They opined that, such a network will facilitate maximum sharing of information resources among the rural libraries and encourage cooperation among the rural libraries for improving information services. In their view, 'An effective public library networking is a prime need for social, political, cultural, economic, scientific and technological upliftment in any democratic set up (2004, p. 76).' While discussing the role of public libraries in rural development, Pradhan and Dasmahapatra (2004) commented, 'The rural public libraries should primarily and essentially modernize their services towards rural development. Legislative support and finance, proper managing power and staff pattern with an organisational structure, building and equipment, books and other resources, computerization and adoption of IT, etc. are the important aspects which can enable public libraries in rural areas to serve as a viable information centre towards sustainable rural development as well as national development (2004, p. 90).'

Dent (2006) maintains that, the type of information provided by the library as well as the library's involvement with the local community are two determining factors of the rural library's usefulness. Information, she suggests, must be relevant to the everyday lives of the rural people and every effort should be made to link information directly to the needs of the users. Stressing on the librarians' role as 'instructors', de Jager and Nassimbeni (2007) suggest that the rural librarians should play a more active role in designing and implementing 'information literacy' programmes. Citing the successes of such programmes in rural Africa, they argue that information literacy campaigns could encourage public library workers to engage with the most important needs in their communities and to deal with them by using their libraries as a focus. Harande (2009) is of the view that, libraries, given the necessary attention, will play a great role in advancing the level of awareness of the people in developing countries, especially rural

dwellers. He argues that, information services, assisted by information and communication technologies, could enable the rural community to deal positively with the environmental problems, pursue a wide range of activities to increase their productivity, and be more enlightened to promote greater attitudinal change and skills. While analyzing the impact of boat library on the Bangprok community in Thailand, Ahmed (2009) states that, programme events like workshops, training on various income generating activities, entrepreneurship, finance and investment, small and medium enterprises, etc. would attract more people to the library. Lamenting the fact that, scarce resources are wasted on materials and services that may not fit the information needs of the rural users, he urges to conduct comprehensive studies on information needs and seeking of rural populations before planning such projects.

The issue of developing rural library and information services for the socio-economic development of Bangladesh has received considerable attention from researchers over the years. As a country with one of the most predominantly rural population in the world, development of Bangladesh is quite often linked with the development of its rural people. For ensuring easy access of rural people to various development information, various library and information services specially designed for the rural people have been initiated in this country. These services have received continuous attention of the development practitioners, GO-NGO agencies, international development partners and academics. Rashid (1992, 1995, 1996, 2000) and Khan (1997, 1999) have written extensively on this issue. Although Rashid's attempts are mainly focused on the activities of Community Development Library (CDL), a national NGO of Bangladesh, Khan discussed the problems and possibilities of rural library and information centres of Bangladesh in considerable detail. He argues that, the distinctiveness of the socio-cultural-economic setting of rural Bangladesh calls for distinct form and pattern of library and information service. He also asserts that, methods for providing information services must vary according to need (cited in Iqbal, 2004, p. 18). In an article published in the 'Dhaka University Studies', Mannan and

Ahmed (1994) proposed for the establishment of a strong library and information system for rural development research by the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD). They observed that, there is an urgent need of establishing a network of libraries, documentation and information centres dealing with rural development research and its allied subjects, as well as a general need of co-ordination between different information systems so that information relevant to Integrated Rural Development can be drawn from a wide range of disciplines. After analyzing the programme activities of Rural Information Resource Centres (RIRCs), Hoq (2003) maintains that, assessing the impact of information service like that of the RIRCs is not easy. Citing various impact assessment attempts made by donor agencies, the author observes that, in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the effects made by such initiatives, a holistic, all-embracing impact analysis study of rural information services need to be conducted.

Iqbal (2004) proposed for the establishment of community information centres in the rural areas of the country which will cater to the various information needs of rural people. He explains, 'The basic aim of the proposed community information centres is to disseminate information. A library collection would contribute to this aim and could be the nucleus of the centre's information service, supplemented by the centre acting as a base for other information dissemination services in area. There is a need to develop the reading habit in communities as this contributes to better literacy and more effective self-education. It is easy for people to lose the literacy they acquired at school, especially those who leave school at an early age. Making reading materials available would be one way of countering this (2004, p. 137)'. Islam (2006) attempted to analyze the status of rural library and information services in Bangladesh in a paper entitled "Status of Rural Library and Information Services in Bangladesh: Directions for Development". After investigating the activities of major traditional and technology based rural information service initiatives, he asserts that, rural libraries can play a vital role in the socio-economic development of the rural people. He urged information

professionals of the country to work together to develop a comprehensive rural information service infrastructure. Uddin (2005) stressed the importance of continually upgrading the quality of rural library services by adopting information technology tools and techniques. He also stated that, government and community people's support is necessary for enabling the rural libraries to contribute in national development. Islam (2009) asserts that, in order to be successful, the community library initiatives have to imbibe and implement new thoughts and ideas, incorporate state-of-the-art techniques and technologies and ensure the best possible utilization of their ability and resources.' Ahmed (2009) discussed the problems of providing community library services and highlighted the essential features of a community library model that would speed up rural development. He conducted a study in three rural communities in central Thailand and collected data with the help of detailed questionnaire and in-depth interviews. He found that distance, lack of time, lack of knowledge on library use, small size of the libraries and shortage of books were the major contrarians faced by the library users. The users felt that these constraints affected the library's performance as well as decreased the impact of the library activities. The author is of the opinion that community motivation and participation, education and training for the library committee members and volunteers, identification of information needs and problems of the local people, selection of convenient location for the library, local resource mobilization, collection of books written in indigenous language, meeting the information needs of all age groups across the community, access to computer and the Internet and regular monitoring and evaluation are essential features of an effective community library.

Role of information for rural development

The notion that information is an ingredient of and prerequisite for development has been in existence for a long time. This is a matter which has drawn interest from many sectors and has been debated and discussed by people from various disciplines - by philosophers and sociologists, information scientists and economists, cultural activists

and political scientists. It seems that, there is a general consensus among them that information is indeed an ingredient of development, but the exact ways in which information precedes or causes development seem to have spawned new fields for debate. Because no one has been able to determine a unified formula through which it can be proved that information makes development possible in this or that way. The abstract nature of information and the many different ways in which it can be utilized have further confused the matter. As Rasmussen observes, 'Logic dictates that information is an essential resource for social and economic development, but can this be proved or demonstrated? If a development agency ... is considering whether to finance a capital project such as the building of a highway, it undertakes a full investment appraisal. This involves a cost/benefit analysis and an assessment of the rate of return on capital invested. Even with less tangible projects, such as training programmes for rural women, it is possible to assess costs and benefits ... (But) it is difficult to measure the information effect, especially the impact that the use of information makes on national development. It is difficult to quantify benefits and to assign monetary values because the benefits often are not direct. The benefit may be a long way off, geographically or in time, from the actual point of use. A university student who has used the services at the library may well benefit throughout the rest of his life. However, it will be almost impossible to quantify the benefits that result from the investment in the university library. It is almost impossible to disaggregate causes and effects and to attribute quantifiable benefits back to the information service (2001, p. 12).'

In spite of this problem, many authors have attempted to identify the relationship between information and development, while many have been particularly interested to learn how information can contribute in rural development. Since a large number of information focused development activities are being undertaken in the rural areas in recent times, it has been comparatively easier to find evidence and show examples. Another contemporary trend closely related to information focused development

activities is the recent upsurge in the telecentre initiative. Many Asian, African and Latin American countries have been experimenting with the telecentre initiative, and this has brought the notion of ICT for development in the forefront of development agenda. Therefore, while reviewing the literature on information for rural development, the relationship between information and communication technologies and rural development also will be covered, albeit to a limited extent.

Theorists like Fritz Machlup and Marc Porat started researching on the effects of information on development in the middle and later part of the twentieth century. Norbert Weiner recognized that information had a dynamic capacity as a force for social cohesion, which prompted other theorists to undertake studies on the usefulness of information. Stressing the importance of linking up the development process with the use of information systems, UNESCO, in a policy paper published in 1981, asserted that information should be considered in the same manner as food, shelter, clothing, etc., and treated as such in development planning (UNESCO, 1981). Martin (1984) believes that community information services have great potential for improving the livelihood of rural people. However, he insists that before expecting information to play a critical role in development, the developing nations must have a stable government and society in place, have a good communication infrastructure, a reasonable level of literacy and a sound national educational system. He observes, 'Factors more immediately relevant to the library service would include: government policy; the existence of certain public services; at least a cadre of high quality personnel; available information; and demand or, at any rate a need for its dissemination.' Admittedly, ensuring such a favourable environment is not an easy task and it is beyond the ability of most developing nations. Admitting this fact, Martin emphasizes the importance of making relentless efforts for the effective use of information in national development endeavours. In his words, 'Information in itself solves nothing; knowledge is power only when it can be used effectively (1984, p. 388).' Green (1986) stressed the importance of formulating a national information policy for effective use of information in national development. He

advocated for wider sharing of experiences by local organisations and individuals for providing a basis of practical expertise from which a theoretical strategy for creating and running information services could be chalked out. In his words, 'From this liaison a strategic plan would be developed and a model formulated of whom to contact, how to make those contacts, how to obtain funding, how to collect the information, which way to disseminate it, how to promote it both by publicity and by appropriate placement within a community, how to assess its effectiveness and relevance and what criteria to use when deciding between continuation and termination.' He believes that an all encompassing national rural information policy could guarantee unhindered rural as well as national socio-economic development. Bell (1986) argues that, information has become a key area of interest in development issues because it is a field in which growing pressure is being put on countries, especially the developing ones, to formulate information policies. Although he highlights the importance of transfer of knowledge from the developed to the developing countries, he admits that, the developing countries have different priorities, views and interests from the developed ones. He cites Nakamura, who observed, 'A good information system for a developed country is not always adequate for a developing country (Bell, p. 234).' Abubakar (1987) is of the opinion that, the essence of any development, whether national or rural, is to enhance the quality of life of the people. No society can aspire to greater heights economically, socially, politically and technologically without adequate and relevant information. Walker (1988) argues that, development as a process involves, in addition to human, economic, technical and physical factors, information as well.'

McConnell (1990) reviews the role of 'International Development Research Centre' (IDRC) in undertaking various development endeavours mainly in the developing countries of Asia, Africa and South America through information and technology focused programmes. He highlights the problems and challenges faced by the IDRC in strengthening information systems, services and tools for development since its creation in 1970. He maintains that viable strategies must be chalked out by the IDRC

for ensuring effective use of information technologies, sustainability of information services on conclusion of donor support and the provision of services tailored to the requirements of selected target groups. He laments the fact that, 'While society in the north routinely generates and consumes great quantities of information, the south is only just beginning its information revolution. While economies in the north have harnessed the 'Information engine', the south remains disadvantaged by problems of information dependency (1990, p. 16).' He argues that libraries of today must learn to become knowledge counselors of tomorrow for ensuring that information plays a pivotal role in the process of development. Broadbent (1990) maintains that, information services that directly serve the rural people and those that serve planners and decision makers are equally important for rural development. He stresses the importance of linking and facilitating information exchange between these two for making sure that information is making its contributions in rural development. Nassimbeni (1990) asserts that libraries can do much in the alleviation of poverty and propelling the growth of development in the rural areas. She argues that, libraries operating in the rural areas could contribute in the development process by developing and delivering literacy programmes, meeting of study needs, providing assistance and advice for pensioners, developing life-skills programmes, promoting work-skills programmes, teaching child care skills and providing alternative education programmes by way of non-formal education, adult education, etc. Oswitch (1990) has extensively explored the role of information professionals in the process of development. She maintains that, although documentation and information services are considered to be quite important in the process of development, the developing countries cannot always give information services the priority it deserves. She observes, lack of funds for basic materials, lack of personnel, lack of recognition, lack of training facilities, lack of local professional support – these are the common problems faced by the developing countries in undertaking information-focused development projects.

Hughes (1991) argues that information is indispensable in the development of any society, be it economic, social, political or cultural aspects. He contends that in the developed countries, information has become so vital that it has assumed the same status as land, labour and capital as production elements (p. 72). September (1993) is of the opinion that, countries should identify and profile the nature and extent of the information need of various sectors. Referring to the socio-economic condition of his native South Africa, he argues that, information for development ... must be viewed 'in terms of its provision and utilization at grassroots level. Information for scientific, technological and industrial development will always be needed, but its provision addresses development at a level that is different from the grassroots level of coping information. At the grass roots level the provision of information should be aimed at neighborhoods and communities as component parts of the society (1993, p. 73).'

Chaudhry (1993) stressed the need for a national information policy for effective exploitation of information resources of a country. He argues that, without proper policy guidelines and a sound information infrastructure, no country will be able to ensure effective use of information for national development. In his words, 'Adequate legislative provisions and an appropriate policy framework are crucial for the effective development of an information infrastructure in a country. Such provisions need to be integrated into a comprehensive national policy to provide a mechanism of coordination and cooperation among various sectors for better utilization of national information resources. This can be achieved through proper formulation and implementation of a national policy involving all major types of libraries and information centres (1993, p. 231).'

Akhtar and Melesse (1994) explored the role of information for development of Africa. They observe that only financial investments are not enough for ensuring sustainable development, it must be supplemented by investments in information infrastructure. Denoting information as vital tool for sustainable development, they further argue that, scientific information is of paramount importance to the enhancement of production and consumption patterns and to the development of local

technologies; a bedrock for the economic development of the continent of Africa (1994, p. 314). They have identified general lack of appreciation of the role of information, lack of national information policies and inadequate financial resource allocation as the most significant obstacles for the effective use of information for national development. Zijp highlights the central role played by information in the context of development in this way, 'distinction between information 'haves' and 'have-nots' is the basis for the dichotomies between developed and developing, rich and poor ... It is within this context that the concept of development might be understood in 'information terms (1994, p. 3).'

Uhegbu (1997) undertook a study to ascertain whether information dissemination in the rural areas has a positive impact on development of rural livelihood. He conducted a survey on 378 people from 63 autonomous communities drawn randomly from the 27 local government areas in the Nigerian State of Imo. After analyzing the survey findings, he found that grassroots information accelerates self-help development consciousness of the rural dwellers, which prompted him to assert that there is a positive link between rural information dissemination and rural development. He remarked, 'With committed and enlightened citizenry, reinforced by efficient traditional leadership and supported by government, self-help development consciousness will further be awakened among the rural dwellers. When this is done, our rural areas will become great centres of development; thus rural life will flourish, migration to urban areas minimized and rural-based social crimes curtailed (1997, p. 94).'

In a study published in 1997, Jagnayak tested six hypotheses regarding the impact of rural libraries on education, economic, political and socio-cultural development among villagers (Jagnayak, 1997). He surveyed 15 libraries and 450 villagers in rural Kerala, India. The hypotheses were:

- (1) the reading habit of the people has considerably improved;
- (2) the libraries in the rural areas contributed considerably to the educational attainment of the rural mass;

- (3) the agricultural techniques and production have been improved by the activities of the library;
- (4) the people are economically benefited from the resources and different programmes of the library;
- (5) the political consciousness of the people has increased through the activities of the library; and
- (6) rural libraries have contributed much to the attitudinal change of the people.

Jagnayak was able to prove each of these hypotheses. He found that the availability of reading materials improved reading habits, the library helped young users with educational attainment by providing free classes on certain topics of general interest, and that the economic standing of some community members improved as they were able to look for employment opportunities in the local newspapers.

Bellamy and Munyua (1997) analyzed the role played by CABI or CAB International in helping libraries of the developing countries attain sustainability. CABI has been working for more than four decades to meet the information needs of developing countries, with greater emphasis on supporting their efforts to take full advantage of modern information technology in developing their own programmes and resources efficiently. The authors show how CABI is now trying to refocus its activities in relation to information for development. The organisation is assisting the developing countries by strengthening the ability of those countries to build and sustain effective scientific information systems, distributing information resources and publishing information materials. They feel that more organisations should carry out similar kind of interventions. Kularatne (1997) believes countries should do more than only to ensure dissemination of information to the grassroots people. He asserts, 'For development purposes, the mere provision of information is not sufficient. If information is to be put to good use, the service component relevant to the message should follow. For instance, there is little use in educating peasant farmers about using good seed and fertilizer to achieve a good harvest if there are no agencies to supply these at a

reasonable price or on credit at the correct time. There are similar programmes concerning health and sanitation education and if the local health authorities do not provide the matching service the information provided is wasted (1997, p. 196).

Msiska (1998) is of the opinion that, wrong information, or the unavailability of relevant information, will lead to under-development or no development at all (Msiska, p. 193). He stressed the importance of linking up information dissemination activities with literacy campaigns in the rural areas so that rural people can understand the value of information and can effectively use information for improving their livelihood. Ilyas (1998) feels that libraries can play a more active role in socio-economic development through proliferation and strengthening of library networks, library software development, compulsory information technology literacy for library professionals, networking of libraries and other research and development institutions, emphasis on video librarianship and seeking avenues of foreign collaboration to develop librarianship. Adam and Wood (1999) maintain that, developing countries must turn to ICT-focused information services if they want to avoid falling further behind the developed countries in development endeavours. They assert that, the developing countries must adapt and use knowledge to enhance their drive for socio-economic development; otherwise, they would fall back even further. They argue that information and communication technologies can significantly strengthen the information infrastructure at government, organisation and individual levels.

Recognizing the role of information for development at the community and national levels, Parker (2000) focuses his attention on the role of information at the individual level. He highlights the importance of attaining information literacy skills by individuals for effective use of information in personal, academic and professional life. In his view, 'An individual's ability to use information for decision-making ultimately depends, not only on the availability of the appropriate information, but also – and even more importantly – on his or her ability to evaluate that information, to put it in context, and

to use his own judgement as to how, when and where – and to what extent – it should be applied... personal development implies much more than the ability to make decisions or solve problems; it implies both a deepening and a broadening of a person's knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the world in which he lives. This calls for education, for schools, for literacy – and for libraries (2000, p. 236).' Addo (2001) believes that developing countries must create and formalize development indicators based on the socio-economic condition prevailing in these countries rather than imitating that of the developed nations. He argues, 'development problems (of the developing countries) are perceived and formulated through the eyes of the West ... not only the indigenous knowledge of the underdeveloped countries ignored or dismissed, but the nature of the problem of underdevelopment and its solution are defined by reference to the Western scientific world's ordering of knowledge.' He feels that developing nations should actively pursue research and development in information and communication technologies for building solid information infrastructure and making effective use of information in national development. Kargbo (2002) not only thinks that information is an essential ingredient of development, but also believes that information is an undeniable fundamental right for every citizen. 'Like poverty, illiteracy and over population', he argues, 'the absence of reliable information is an epitome of underdevelopment (98).' He analyses the ways in which information energises the very structure of economy and ensures its productivity and unhindered progress. In his words, 'Information links the various branches and actors in an economy by facilitating knowledge about resources, and enabling producers to keep track of shifts in investments, demand and supply. It helps in the effective distribution of goods and services and ensures transactions between actors, thus linking production and consumption. It is a direct input in the form of technical and managerial know-how to productive activity in all sectors of the economy (2002, p. 98).' Manda (2002) argues that rural people in many developing countries do not care much for libraries since they have a mental image of libraries being city-centered institutions, which have little to offer to the illiterate rural people. He believes that libraries must try to change this

'negative' image from the hearts of the rural people. They must prove that they also have many things to offer to the rural farmers, small-business owners, fishermen and as such. For this, in his view, library collections and services should be remodeled, library professionals should attain newer skills and expertise and libraries must get more involved in the transformation of the rural areas. He also urged the rural libraries to support literacy programmes and the development of reading habits of the rural people. Kumar and Chadha (2002) support widespread adoption and use of information and communication technologies to enable rural people access various sources of information and use that information for personal, occupational and other purposes. They feel that information on agriculture, irrigation, land, etc. can be particularly beneficial for the rural people. 'The Land Information System (LIS)', they maintain, 'provides information about market, food pricing, imports and exports, tariffs and quotas, underproduction and overproduction, besides information on soils, hydrogeology and rainfall to support planning activities at various administrative levels. Availability of timely information also allows farmers to make appropriate decisions and boost productivity (2002, p. 205).' Arunachalam (2002) urges to take an integrated view of development and assist rural people in using low-cost technologies to access and use information. He argues, 'Mere provision of information cannot lead people out of the poverty trap. Access to relevant information is only part of the story. People need to build skills and capacities they can convert into additional income (2002, p. 521).' In his view, rural people need information on various alternative and low-cost technologies like mushroom growing, ornamental fish, production of biopesticides, production of high yielding variety of seeds, converting banana wastes into paper and boards, production of green fodder for cattle, etc. He feels that underprivileged rural people can substantially improve their livelihoods with these information and skills. Mchombu (2003) observes that 'If the impact of information on society and on development can be demonstrated to decision makers and politicians, it would increase the support for information as a vital resource in development and wealth creation (2003, p. 111).' He proposes a 'Rural Development Information Centre' model to be implemented in the

rural areas of Africa which would have two basic approaches of information dissemination a) cultural activities, discussion meetings, video shows, etc., b) community information centres. He identifies the following components of his proposed Rural Development Information Centre model:

1. A broad information strategy which includes a resource centre, a range of information exchange activities modelled on the existing patterns of information exchange, and knowledge sharing activities for the whole community.
2. Information facilitators who can organise, facilitate, coordinate and animate rural development and information flow in the community.
3. A multi-channel approach to facilitate a two way flow of information, including oral, cultural/traditional, audio-visual, and print based information.
4. Participation of different rural groups in prioritizing information requirements and managing the affairs of the information strategy.

Richards (2004) argues that use of ICTs opens up two very dissimilar possibilities in the 'information for development' debate. He feels that, while on the one hand ICT can be regarded as a 'key enabler' for rural development, on the other hand, some might view it as a force which broadens the gap between the rich and the poor, thus creating a digital divide which in fact worsens the plight of the rural poor. He advocates for just and considerate use of ICTs for enabling rural people improve their livelihood by using right information for the right cause with the help of ICTs. Iqbal (2004) analyzed the link between information and development in the context of Bangladesh in his Ph.D. thesis entitled 'Building a knowledge society: The relationship between information and development in Bangladesh'. He found evidence in support of the general belief that information contributes in development. He remarked, 'During the interview sessions and focus group discussions respondents and participants provided evidence of getting benefits from various information services which ultimately increased their living standard or help them to solve their information problems. A good number of them believe that better education and training could increase their individual livelihood as

well as the community in which they live (2004, p. 132).’ He asserts that the rural people want to see more investment and initiatives in information generation and dissemination by the government and non-government organisations. He concluded, ‘Rural and poor urban people in Bangladesh still use first-level knowledge to satisfy their information needs and as the first step in solving their information problems ... they understand the need for second-level knowledge and seek this out where possible when first-level knowledge fails. What we need now are better mechanisms and practices which could disseminate the second-level knowledge efficiently and with better coverage as this would ultimately contribute to national development (2004, p. 132).’

Mathur and Ambani (2005) call for thoughtful use of technologies to bridge the digital divide and bring sustainable improvements in the lives of marginalised rural people. They propose, ‘The government, development organisations, the private sector and individual entrepreneurs can jointly help the rural poor cross the digital divide. Innovative ideas, enterprising minds combined with ICT can go a long way in empowering and enriching the vast majority of the developing countries and in the process fuel overall growth (2005, p. 351). They also urge to leverage the full potential of market mechanisms by building up a competitive, private sector market for effectively fulfilling the information and communication needs of the rural and the poor. Forsyth (2005) analyses the role of public libraries in the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the United Nations. She points out that, public libraries can contribute in various ways in the global struggle against poverty, illiteracy, gender inequality and environmental degradation. In her words, ‘An important aspect of the global partnership for development is the recognition and preservation of traditional and indigenous knowledge systems... global partnerships can help provide protection for intellectual property rights. These partnerships could expand the potential for people to benefit from communal intellectual property rights (2005, p. 320).’ Referring to the financial involvement in the setting up of rural public libraries, she warns, ‘It is important to keep in mind that whatever the cost of providing a public

library service to a community, the cost of not providing it is even higher (2005, p. 321).’ Briggs (2005) advocates for more widespread adoption and institutionalization of indigenous knowledge so that rural people can use it for development purposes in a more personalized way. He points out that, a rural farmer or fishermen do not conceptualise knowledge into separate, self-contained entities; but rather develop knowledge as something that is hybridised, mediated and local. The importance of empowering women, particularly women from rural and marginal communities, with necessary knowledge and information has been highlighted by Okiy (2005). She feels that, if women can be given critical information on a regular basis, this will better place them to participate more actively in political activities, know their rights, and be able to canvass them, which would in turn enable them to contribute more meaningfully to democratic government. Reade-Fong and Gorman (2005) inform that Non Government Organisations (NGOs) in the developing countries are playing a dominant role in disseminating information agriculture, housing, income generation, clean water, healthcare, education, family planning, etc. to the grassroots people. ‘In many countries’, they observe, ‘this is the only information available to people, especially in rural and remote areas, and in general it is well received because it has been geared to the literacy and comprehension levels of the local population (2005, p. 49).’ They sense that NGOs should strengthen their information provision role by effectively combining print and electronic information and presenting it to the rural people in a format best suited to their needs and understanding. Nwagwu (2006) stressed the importance of sharing indigenous knowledge on a global scale to benefit all the nations – developing and developed alike. He urges, ‘the international community should realize that true globalisation should incorporate the knowledge systems of all human communities on earth. It may not be possible for all communities to contribute equally, but every human community can make an input in the form of its rich indigenous knowledge, which may often have been excluded from the world store of knowledge for a long time (2006, 177).’ He also puts emphasis on a radical shift in the development thoughts and actions so that the gulf between the rich and poor countries does not broaden further. Alemna

and Sam (2006) observe that most of the contents on the World Wide Web is in English and therefore, rural people are unable to get much help from the Internet. They highlight the importance of developing local content and making it available to the rural people in the developing countries. Participation and involvement of rural people in the creation of content is also important, they observe. Dent (2007) is of the view that all-out efforts need to be taken to ensure that people in the rural areas from all age, sex, occupational and racial groups receive up-to-date information so that they can utilize it for their individual and collective well-being. She particularly emphasizes the need for supplying information to the women communities so that they can pursue various income generating activities with the help of that information and knowledge. This will lead to greater participation of women in economic and political activities and would eventually ensure comprehensive women empowerment, she argues.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND FINDINGS OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

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The main purpose of Focus Group Discussion is to obtain in-depth information on concepts, perceptions and ideas of a group. An FGD is more than a question-answer interaction; during FGDs, group members discuss the topic among themselves, with guidance from the facilitator. Through FGD, the researcher explores the depth and nuances of opinions regarding an issue. It helps in achieving a better understanding of the differences in perspectives, the factors that influence opinions or behaviour, the reaction to actual or proposed events, phenomena or services and peculiarities and special characteristics of the participants by observing their interactions.

As mentioned earlier, seven Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted as part of the present research endeavour. The following table presents necessary statistics and information about the FGDs:

Sl. No.	Location	Upazila	District	No. of participants	Male/ female distribution	Main theme(s)
1	Kalaiya Bazaar, Kalaiya Union	Baufal	Patuakhali	12	7 males, 5 females	Value of information, Problems of receiving information
2	Nagarbathan Bazaar	Jhinedah Sadar	Jhinedah	10	10 males	Existing information services

Sl. No.	Location	Upazila	District	No. of participants	Male/ female distribution	Main theme(s)
3	Sarai Bazaar, Haragach Union	Kaunia	Rangpur	11	10 males	Information needs of rural people
4	Adda Bazaar, Adda Union	Barura	Comilla	10	10 males	Information seeking behaviour of rural people
5	Baravita, Baravita Union	Fulbari	Kurigram	9	5 males, 4 females	Importance of information service, Problems of receiving information
6	Razpur, Razpur Union	Lalmonirhat Sadar	Lalmonirhat	11	6 males, 5 females	ICT and their impact on information service
7	Dharmapur	Noakhali Sadar	Noakhali	11	11 females	Information related problems of women and possible remedies

Table 3: Focus Group Discussions (FGD) at a glance

While conducting the FGDs, the researcher took particular care about the following two issues:

- to approach the focus group with an open mind and as few preconceptions as possible about what participants are likely to say or not say;
- to be aware of differences in race/ethnicity, class and education levels between the moderator and participants. Complete freedom from bias on the part of the facilitator(s) is vital for the success of FGDs.

Every FGD was moderated by a moderator. Excepting two/three occasions, the researcher himself moderated the FGDs. In some cases, an Assistant Moderator also was used to facilitate effectiveness of the FGDs. One or two main themes were selected

for each FGD, although, naturally, other relevant issues came into discussion. Brief summary and key findings of the seven FGDs are presented below:

FGD 1: Kalaiya Bazaar

Kalaiya Bazaar is located in the village of Kalaiya, in Kalaiya Union, in Baufal upazila under the southern district of Patuakhali. Kalaiya is one of the main markets in the regions, which attracts hundreds of people from adjacent areas, especially on Mondays, when a special *haat* is arranged. The FGD was arranged in a house adjacent to the Bazaar, and was attended by 12 participants who included teachers, businessmen, farmers, students and housewives. Maximum educational qualification among the participants was Master degree while minimum was Secondary School Certificate level. All the participants agreed that information is indeed quite valuable in their life and without right information at the right time, it is next to impossible to make important decisions and lead a proper life. Many of the participants felt that if various local-level government officials like agriculture, health and education workers disseminate critical information to the rural people on a regular basis, rural people from all creeds and classes will be able to lead a better life. They informed that, excepting occasional announcement about disasters like cyclone and tidal wave, no information providing mechanism from the government's side seems to be in place. The farmers termed the government agriculture officials to be 'corrupt' and 'inactive' and maintained that farmers are getting almost no information from these officials. The participants observed that steps must be taken so that rural people do not have to travel long distances in search of information, rather then can receive information at their doorstep and without any additional effort.

FGD 2: Nagarbathan Bazaar

This bustling marketplace is located not far from the district town of Jhinedah by the river Nabaganga. It is a popular destination of market-goers in the whole region and people from various parts of Jhinedah district visit this place for shopping and trading.

The FGD was arranged in front of a shop and was attended by 10 males whose age ranged from 26 to 55. They included farmers, students, businessman, traders, day-labourers and service holders. Two or three participants were illiterate while all other had at least SSC level education. The main theme of the FGD was existing information services. The participants observed that, agriculture, health and disaster are the three major areas where they need information. Most of them had heard about the newly established Union Information and Service Centres (UISCs) but none had visited the centre as yet. Besides, they did not have clear idea about the activities of the centres. However, they all believed that these centres could benefit the rural people considerably. One participant, who was a farmer by profession, observed, 'We sometimes see the government health workers visiting households and disseminating information, but agricultural extension officers or other government agriculture officers rarely visit our locality and even if they come, they never visit common people's households. We usually come across the representatives from various insecticides manufacturing companies.' They feel that, radio and television could be two effective means of disseminating information to the rural people. Besides, they strongly advocated for strengthening the UISCs so that rural people could receive all kinds of necessary information from the UISCs. Most of them observed that rural libraries/information centres should carry out additional programmes like adult literacy campaigns, vocational training, discussion meetings, study circles, etc., in order to make their services more effective.

FGD 3: Sarai Bazaar

Sarai Bazaar is located in a central point in Haragach Union under the district of Rangpur. Haragach is known all over the country as one of the main tobacco producing and processing centres. Harmful effects of tobacco on environment and public health also has been a matter of debate and discussion since long. The FGD was arranged in the house of Mr. Shahjahan Bin Hossain, a local businessman, with the participation of Mr. Hossain and nine other persons. Although the key topic of the FGD was 'Information

needs of the rural people', various other issues related with information provision in the rural areas and its challenges were discussed. Most of the discussants agreed that health, agriculture and education are the three main areas where information is needed most by the rural people. Two or three discussants observed that, information on business and trades also is important. They identified poor communication infrastructure to be main problems of receiving timely information. Besides, because of frequent power failure, they fail to receive information regularly from television and radios as well. Only a handful of them have heard about the passing of the "Right to Information" law in the national parliament and the establishment of 4501 Union Information and Service Centres (UISCs) in Union Parishad headquarters. One participant said, 'I have only seen government health workers to visit households and give information, particularly to the women. The activities of agricultural extension workers and officials from other ministries (fisheries and livestock, disaster management, education, etc.) have hardly been witnessed by the participants. National dailies reach Sarai bazaar after 11.00 a.m. Most of the people rely on televisions and radios for receiving information. Although some of them visit libraries, the frequency of library visit is not very high. Most of the participants prefer to receive information through mobile phone, newspapers, radios and televisions.

FGD 4: Adda Bazaar

Adda bazaar is located in Barura upazila under the district of Comilla. Thousands of people from more than twenty adjacent villages come to this market for meeting their daily needs. The FGD was arranged in the courtyard of a house near the market. It was participated by 10 persons who were aged between 20 to 55. Three of them were teachers, three businessmen, two students, one farmer and one Imam from a nearby mosque. The participants named agriculture, health and market and finance to be three main sectors where information is most needed by them. All of them felt that, the role of government officials is the key in disseminating information to the rural people. A participant observed, 'The people living in the rural areas are always busy with their

professional and household works. Many of them spend long stretches of times in fields doing agricultural works. Although they need information on agriculture, health, marketing, etc. very much, they can hardly manage enough time to visit libraries or information centres. That's why it is important to make information reach their doorsteps instead of making them reach out for information. Therefore, the role of field workers of different Ministries, especially the Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Disaster Management, Commerce, etc., in disseminating critical information among the rural people is quite important.' The participants appreciated the governmental step to establish UISCs in every union of the country. However they maintained that only establishing such centres is not enough, they must be provided with enough manpower, equipment, electricity and full government backing to make them effective. They also advocated for carrying out all-out awareness raising campaigns to make the UISCs a popular destination of the rural people. A few participants complained about the alleged corruption of the field workers of the Ministries of Agriculture and Health and observed that, these unlawful practices must be stopped to ensure effective information service for the rural people.

FGD 5: Baravita

The village of Baravita is located in Fulbari upazila under the district of Kurigram. The FGD was arranged in the house of a local teacher and was participated by five males and four females all of whom were inhabitants of Baravita. There were teachers, businessmen, students, housewives, farmers, political activists and a rural physician among the participants. The main themes of the FGD were 'importance of information service' and 'problems of receiving information'. All the participants agreed that information is indeed quite valuable in their lives and timely supply of information health, agriculture, legal rights, education, employment etc. could benefit the rural people immensely. One participant observed, 'To me, information is like light. As we cannot see or do anything in the dark, similarly, we cannot do anything without information.' Another participant observed, 'Rural people need information for various

purposes, foremost of which are agriculture, health, marketing and finance and disaster preparedness. If we can receive all these information from a one-stop centre like outlet, then we can use these information for improving our livelihood.’ They all appreciated the setting up of Union Information and Service Centre (UISCs), although none had yet visited a UISC. About one-third of the participants believed that, their main problem regarding information is that they do not know where to go to information or who to approach. Two participants observed that weak communication infrastructure is the main problem in receiving required information. Only one participant had heard of the passing of the “Right to Information” law, other had no idea about it. Most of the participants agreed that, rural libraries or information centres should provide other services in addition to information service. When asked which services would be most appropriate, they mentioned about skill development training, literacy campaigns and counseling services. The women participants observed that, more efforts should be made for making information available to the rural women. In the words of one female participant, ‘Many rural women are tortured by their husbands and other male members of the family. They are also deprived of their basic human rights. If they can learn about their rights from a rural information centre, they can take necessary steps to uphold their rights. These centres can also provide them counseling and consultancy services and link them up with law enforcing and other agencies.’

FGD 6: Razpur

The village of Razpur is situated in Lalmonirhat Sadar Upazila under the district of Lalmonirhat. The FGD was arranged in a local household, which was participated by six males and five females. There were teachers, students, farmers, housewives and small businessmen among the participants. The main theme was ‘ICTs and their impact on information service’. It was found that, all the participants had at least some understandings about information and communications technologies. To most of them, ICT means computer and mobile phones. Two of the participants used computers at some time of other and all but two had personal mobile phones. Although most of them

did not have clear ideas as to how ICTs can make information reach the doorsteps of the rural people, they all appreciated the setting up of Union Information and Service Centres (UISCs), which, some of them had heard, would help rural people receive information and communicate with people living in faraway places. Only two or three of the participants had heard of digital libraries and those who had heard of it, had only a vague idea about this. However, they all agreed that, if vast amount of valuable information could be digitized and made available to the grassroots people through Internet or mobile phone, it could surely bring about lasting changes in the lives of rural people. They all agreed that, in order to achieve this, power supply in the rural areas should be strengthened and at the same time, ICT infrastructure also should be extended to the remote and far-flung areas. They also appreciated the idea of receiving information on their mobile phones in exchange of a nominal fee. They felt that, information on health, agriculture and market and finance are most important and if these information could be made available to the rural people at a very nominal cost, they will be eager to receive this service. Most of the participants also believed that, strengthening the activities of government and non-government field workers in disseminating information to the rural people is quite important.

FGD 7: Dharmapur

Dharmapur is located in Noakhali district, about 15 kilometers south of the town of Maijdee. The FGD was arranged in the courtyard of a local household. 11 local women, all of them housewives, participated in the FGD. Excepting one women, all participants were illiterate. The participants agreed that information is important for decision making and realizing the rights of women. Most of them agreed that, they have little or no contribution in the decision making process of their respective families. Most of them left the task of decision making to their husbands. However, almost all of them informed that, they were increasingly playing an active role in decision making and that their husbands were now paying more heed to what their opinions and views. One participant said, 'My husband has married again and I have sued him because he did not

take my consent before second marriage. My husband never imagined that I could take legal action against him. However, now he is willing to negotiate and I am expecting to receive a considerable amount of money from him as compensation. This has happened because a neighbor informed me about my rights. If I hadn't known this, I would not have taken legal actions against him.' The participants agreed that, if there is an information centre in the locality, they can visit the centre and receive important information. They believe that such centres can play a significant role in the spread of literacy.' One participant observed, 'Most of the women in the rural areas are illiterate. Men can easily discriminate against women because women are not aware of their rights because of illiteracy and ignorance. That's why I think one of the main functions of the government should be educating the rural women. And libraries and information centre type institutions can make important contributions in this regard.' Almost all the participants had more than three children. One had as many as eight children. They all agreed that, keeping the family small is quite important and if they knew about the harmful effects of big families, they would not have taken so many children.

Major findings of the FGDs

The Focus Group Discussions enabled the researcher to have an in-depth understanding of the way information, or the lack of it, is affecting the lives of the rural people. The FGDs were done in seven different areas, belonging to seven districts and four different divisions. But in the course of the FGDs, the researcher found fundamental similarities in the informational needs of the people, the obstacles they face in receiving information and the way they view information in their life. This is indicative of not only of the homogeneity of the people of Bangladesh, but also of the fact that, the larger cross sections of the people of Bangladesh are increasingly considering information a vital for improving their livelihood. Many participants told the researcher that, although had been unaware of the importance of information in their life, they are increasingly becoming more aware of its value and significance. This can be largely attributed to the spread of literacy, activities of GOs and NGOs, increasing coverage of media, especially

electronic media, and the narrowing of communication gap between the urban and rural areas because of information and communications technologies, primarily Internet and mobile phones. This has positively affected the mindset of rural people and nobody is more benefited from this than the rural women. They are now more prepared and more interested to share their thoughts and voice their concerns. Although, still a lot remains to be achieved in this regard, the fact that rural women are getting a voice of their own and making significant progresses in various sectors cannot be disputed. One FGD was done completely with female participants and three other had significant number of female participants. These female participants were never subdued or dominated by their male counterparts; rather they put forward their arguments and logics strongly, presented their points informatively and participated in debates and dialogues with confidence and conviction. This shows that, the familiar stereotype of rural women - submissive, incompetent and totally dependent on their husbands - seems to have become a thing of the past, and today's rural women are becoming more vocal and proactive; they do not shy away from voicing their concerns and even fighting for it.

The FGDs gave significant insights into the mindset and perceptions of the rural people and gave vital inputs to the researcher for streamlining and rationalizing his thoughts and ideas. The findings of the FGDs supplemented the findings of the survey, and together, they contributed in the designing of the model plan for information dissemination in the rural areas of Bangladesh. The major findings of the FGDs can be summarized as below:

1. Agriculture, health and employment are the three most important issues on which information is needed by the rural people. Besides these, disaster management, market and finance, education, legal rights, environment, etc. also were mentioned by the participants of the FGDs.

2. Rural people are now more aware of their rights as citizens of the country. They are also more aware of what is happening at home and abroad. Prevalence of information and communications technologies (ICTs) , especially mobile phones, and increasing penetration of electronic media in the rural areas have contributed to this increased awareness.
3. Rural people are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of information in their lives. Although this awareness is less evident among the illiterate people, the literate people recognize the value of information more readily.
4. The habit of visiting libraries is not very strong among the rural people. Besides, the practice of establishing libraries in the rural areas has also weakened considerably. As a result, library movement in the rural areas is much weaker than it was before.
5. On the whole, the idea of disseminating information among the rural people with the help of ICTs is appreciated by rural people. It seems that they are not unreasonably opposed to the use of ICTs in various spheres of their lives. Consequently, setting up of Union Information and Service Centres (UISCs) by the government has been hailed as a 'good move' by the larger cross sections of rural people, although many of them remain skeptical about the future of this initiative.
6. Most of the rural people are dissatisfied with the activities and services of the field workers of different government agencies. They are particularly unhappy about the performance of the agriculture extension workers. It seems that these workers have some kind of alliance with insecticides manufacturing companies and many of them serving their own interests rather than that of the government or the common people.
7. Weak transportation and communications infrastructure is a common cause of underdevelopment in the rural areas. Frequent disruption of power is also a major concern. Besides, there are many areas which are yet to be brought under the electricity supply network. Unless reliable power supply is ensured in the rural areas, the availability of information as well as information services cannot be expected.

8. Most of the participants feel that the sources of information should be as close to them as possible. Therefore, setting up of information centres in a place accessible to the wider cross sections of the rural community is vital for the effectiveness of these centres. The opening and closing time of the libraries/information centres also should be convenient for the villagers. A large number of villagers remain busy in the fields almost all the day; therefore, many villagers can visit the centres if they remain open at least until 8.00 or 9.00 p.m.
9. Rural libraries/information centres/telecentres should act like one-stop service centres where the villagers could get as many services as possible. Excessive dependence on only print collections or digital collection is not advisable; rather, a combination of both could be a good idea. Besides their regular services, these centres could undertake adult literacy campaigns, training and social awareness raising programmes so that maximum number of rural people could be benefited from their activities.
10. Educated and unemployed rural youth communities should be more engaged with the activities of rural libraries/information centres. Retired GO-NGO officials and school teachers also should be involved with these centres. Besides, the importance of encouraging voluntarism and mobilizing local resources for ensuring sustainability of the rural information centres also were emphasized by the participants of the FGDs.

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS OF DATA: INFORMATION USERS AND INFORMATION PROVIDERS

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS OF DATA: INFORMATION USERS AND INFORMATION PROVIDERS

This chapter contains a brief analysis of data gathered by the questionnaire based survey. This analysis would provide the factual basis for the recommendations put forward by the researcher and also for the designing of a model plan for information dissemination in the rural areas of Bangladesh.

Analysis of data: Information users

Divisions	N	%
Dhaka	96	17.1
Chittagong	69	12.3
Rajshahi	78	13.9
Khulna	177	31.6
Sylhet	40	7.1
Barisal	80	14.3
Rangpur	20	3.6
Total	560	100

Table 4: Geographical location of respondents

Although a conscious effort was made to ensure equal representation of all administrative divisions of the country, it could not be achieved because of various problems, foremost of which was time constraints and lack of volunteers. Rangpur is the newest administrative division of the country and only one locality in this division was selected for serving questionnaires for the information users. As it is evident from Table-4, Sylhet also received a disproportionate number of respondents while Khulna ranks the highest in terms of respondents' number. Other divisions have a fairly equal number of respondents.

Age (Year)	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	40	41.7	33	47.8	35	44.9	86	48.6	15	37.5	35	43.8	11	55	255	45.5
B	24	25.0	21	30.4	23	29.5	41	23.2	14	35.0	35	43.8	2	10	160	28.6
C	20	20.8	11	15.9	12	15.4	30	16.9	7	17.5	6	7.5	3	15	89	15.9
D	8	8.3	4	5.8	2	2.6	15	8.5	1	2.5			2	10	32	5.7
E	4	4.2			6	7.7	5	2.8	3	7.5	4	5.0	2	10	24	4.3
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 5: Age of the respondents

(Legends: A-18-25, B-26-35, C-36-45, D-46-55, E-Above 55)

Table-5 shows that people aged 18-25 constitute the majority of the respondents, followed by the 26-35 age-group. Together, they form about three-fourth of the total respondents. As the subsequent analysis would show, this comparatively younger age of the respondents have a bearing upon the choice of options in many cases, for example, on the issue of buying computer for home use or perceptions regarding the importance of information and communications technologies. However, the prevalence of youth among the respondents is also indicative of the fact that the median age of the people of Bangladesh is quite low (23.3), even lower than most of its neighbours. (In India, it is 26.2, in Bhutan 24.8, in Maldives 26.2 and in Sri Lanka 30.8).

Sex	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	71	74.0	52	75.4	48	61.5	154	87.0	32	80.0	45	56.3	12	60.0	414	73.9
B	25	26.0	17	24.6	30	38.5	23	13.0	8	20.0	35	43.8	8	40.0	146	26.1
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 6: Distribution of the respondents by sex

(Legends: A-Male, B-Female)

As Table-6 shows, number of female respondents of the survey has been disproportionately lower than the males. Many of the women, who were approached for filling-up the questionnaires, declined to take part in the exercise showing various reasons. A few of them informed that they would fill-up the questionnaire if they receive permission from their father or husband, although the number of women saying so was not very high. However, the female participants of the FGDs showed a great deal interest and their confidence level also was quite high.

Mar. status	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	43	44.8	33	47.8	37	47.4	98	55.4	19	47.5	37	46.3	11	55.0	278	49.6
B	53	55.2	36	52.2	41	52.6	79	44.6	21	52.5	43	53.8	9	45.0	282	50.4
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 7: Marital status of the respondents

(Legends: A-Single, B-Married)

Although almost three-fourth of the respondents belong to the 18-35 age-group, their marital status shows that, slightly more than half of the respondents are married. This, again, is not unusual, considering that people in the rural areas tend to get married earlier than their urban counterparts. Table-7 also shows that, the married respondents outnumber the unmarried ones in all divisions excepting Khulna and Rangpur.

Edu. status	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	7	7.3	7	10.1			27	15.3			6	7.5	2	10.0	49	8.8
B																
C	17	17.7	13	18.8	5	6.4	29	16.4	10	25.0	9	11.3	2	10.0	85	15.2
D	11	11.5	12	17.4	14	17.9	17	9.6	10	25.0	14	17.5	6	30.0	84	15.0
E	19	19.8	12	17.4	26	33.3	34	19.2	6	15.0	26	32.5	5	25.0	128	22.9
F	24	25.0	13	18.8	20	25.6	54	30.5	11	27.5	18	22.5	2	10.0	142	25.4
G	12	12.5	11	15.9	13	16.7	15	8.5	3	7.5	6	7.5	3	15.0	63	11.3
H	6	6.3	1	1.4			1	0.6			1	1.3			9	1.6
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 8: Educational status of the respondents

(Legends: A-Illiterate, B-Semi-literate, C-Primary, D-Secondary, E-Higher secondary, F-Graduate, G-Masters, H-Others)

About one-fourth of the respondents possess graduate degree, which is considerably higher than the national average. However, as Table-8 shows, the educational status of more than 53% of the respondents ranges between primary and higher secondary level. The number of illiterate persons is less than 8%, while none have identified themselves as semi-literate (people who barely knows the alphabets and can read and write a little). The number of master degree holders among the respondents is also considerably high - 11.3%. It should also be noted that the number of illiterate respondents is highest in the Khulna division while there is no illiterate respondents in Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions.

Prof. status	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		AM	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	16	16.7	6	8.7	8	10.3	37	20.9	10	25.0	9	11.3	1	5	87	15.5
B	12	12.5	14	20.3	5	6.4	21	11.9	5	12.5	5	6.3	2	10	64	11.4
C	20	20.8	20	29.0	13	16.7	19	10.7	8	20.0	22	27.5	3	15	105	18.8
D	8	8.3	10	14.5	6	7.7	17	9.6	1	2.5	6	7.5	2	10	50	8.9
E	28	29.2	16	23.2	24	30.8	78	44.1	10	25.0	33	41.3	9	45	198	35.4
F	12	12.5	3	4.3	22	28.2	5	2.8	6	15.0	5	6.3	3	15	56	10.0
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 9: Occupation/profession of respondents

(Legends: A-Agriculture, B-Business, C-Service, D-Self-employment, E-Student, F-Others)

As Table-9 indicates, students constitute the largest occupational group among the respondents, accounting for more than one-third of them. Service holders, farmers and businesspeople are respectively the second, third and fourth largest groups. In Sylhet, as high as one fourth of the respondents are engaged in agricultural works while in Chittagong, their percentage is as low as 8.7%. Students constitute 45% and 44.1% of the respondents in Barisal and Khulna respectively. Majority of the people who chose the "Other professions" category (accounting for 10% of the respondents), are, in fact, unemployed.

Family member	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		AM	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	63	65.6	39	56.5	54	69.2	112	63.3	15	37.5	55	68.8	6	30.0	344	61.4
B	28	29.2	22	31.9	20	25.6	62	35.0	24	60.0	24	30.0	8	40.0	188	33.6
C	3	3.1	4	5.8	2	2.6	3	1.7			1	1.3	6	30.0	19	3.4
D	2	2.1	4	5.8	2	2.6			1	2.5					9	1.6
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 10: Number of family member of respondents

(Legends: A-1-5, B-6-10, C-10-15, D-More)

Slightly less than one third of the respondents come from a family comprising 1-5 members. About one-third of them belong to a family of 6 to 10. According to Table-10, average family size in rural areas of Bangladesh is considerably larger than those in the urban areas. However, with the spread of literacy, family planning programmes of GOs and NGOs and a rise in the general awareness about the harmful effects of population explosion seems to be making an impact in the rural areas of Bangladesh, resulting in lower birth and smaller families. It can be mentioned here that, in Bangladesh, the total fertility rate (TFR) declined from 6.3 births per woman in 1970-1975 to the current rate

of 2.6. However, there is a discrepancy between rural and urban areas, with women in rural areas bearing one more child on average than their counterparts in urban areas.

earn mem.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	85	88.5	44	63.8	74	94.9	165	93.2	33	82.5	73	91.3	16	80.0	490	87.5
B	5	5.2	14	20.3	3	3.8	8	4.5	5	12.5	6	7.5	4	20.0	45	8.0
C	6	6.3	11	15.9	1	1.3	4	2.3	2	5.0	1	1.3			25	4.5
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 11: Number of earning members in the family
(Legends: A-1-3, B-4-6, C-More)

As Table-11 indicates, more than 87% of the respondents have 1 to 3 income generating persons in the family and among them, most have only one person who acts as the breadwinner for the family. Only 8% respondents have more than three persons in the family capable of income generation. In Rajshahi, the percentage of respondents whose families have 1-3 income generators is as high as 94.9 while in Chittagong the percentage of respondents having more than 3 income generating members in the family is 20.3, which is indeed quite high.

Mon. Inc. (Taka)	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A			1	1.4	5	6.4	5	2.8	1	2.5	1	1.3			13	2.3
B	35	36.5	14	20.3	14	17.9	36	20.3			15	18.8	2	10	116	20.7
C	29	30.2	31	44.9	33	42.3	77	43.5	5	12.5	32	40.0	2	10	209	37.3
D	25	26.0	15	21.7	21	26.9	52	29.4	10	25.0	29	36.3	16	80	168	30.0
E	7	7.3	8	11.6	5	6.4	7	4.0	24	60.0	3	3.8			54	9.6
F																
G																
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 12: Monthly income of the respondent's family
(Legends: A-Below 1000, B-1000-5000, C-5000-10,000, D-10,000-15,000, E-More, F-Not applicable, G-Won't disclose)

Table-12 points out that the monthly family income of more than 37% of the respondents is between five to ten thousand Taka, while another 30% report a monthly family income of ten to fifteen thousand Taka. A very small number of respondents (2.3%) report a monthly family income of below 1000 Taka, while almost one-fifth of the respondents informed that their family earns 1,000 to 5,000 Taka a month. An interesting thing to note is that, there was not a single respondent who refused to disclose his/her monthly family income.

Main source of inc.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	31	32.3	8	11.6	30	38.5	86	48.6	27	67.5	17	21.3	2	10.0	201	35.9
B	18	18.8	21	30.4	9	11.5	29	16.4	5	12.5	11	13.8	13	65.0	106	18.9
C	33	34.4	29	42.0	26	33.3	46	26.0	5	12.5	41	51.3	4	20.0	184	32.9
D			8	11.6	6	7.7	12	6.8	1	2.5	8	10.0	1	5.0	36	6.4
E	6	6.3	3	4.3	6	7.7	2	1.1	2	5.0					19	3.4
F	8	8.3			1	1.3	2	1.1			3	3.8			14	2.5
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 13: Main source of income of the respondents

(Legends: A-Agriculture, B-Business, C-Service, D-Self-employment, E-Money sent by expatriate family member(s), F-Others)

According to Table-13, agriculture is the main source of income for more than one third of the respondents (35.9), which is closely followed by service (32.9) and business (18.9). This indicates that agriculture remains to be the mainstay of earning for the rural people, although the number of service holders has increased considerably. A large number of Bangladeshi families are dependent on money sent by family members staying abroad, but this has not been reflected in this survey, because quite a small number of respondents reported foreign remittance to be their main source of income.

Main prob.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	7	6.1	7	10.1	21	20.2	37	16.7	1	2.5	3	3.5	5	14.3	81	12.1
B	36	31.3	24	34.8	35	33.7	64	28.8			24	28.2	17	48.6	200	29.9
C	20	17.4	14	20.3	9	8.7	54	24.3	3	7.5	16	18.8	7	20.0	123	18.4
D	25	21.7	19	27.5	35	33.7	33	14.9	1	2.5	15	17.6	6	17.1	134	20.0
E	21	18.3	1	1.4	2	1.9	6	2.7							30	4.5
F	6	5.2	4	5.8	2	1.9	28	12.6	35	87.5	27	31.8			102	15.2
Total response	115	100	69	100	104	100	222	100	40	100	85	100	35	100	670	100

Table 14: Main financial/income generating problems faced by the respondents

(Legends: A-No earning member in the family, B-Not enough earning members, C-Low salary of earning members, D-Unavailability of employment because of lack of education, E-Others, F-No response)

Since there was option for selecting multiple responses in this question, the calculation has been done not on total number of respondents, but on total number of responses. As Table-14 indicates, however, slightly less than one third of the total responses report that the main financial problem of the respondents is that, they have insufficient number of income generating members in the family, while unavailability of jobs/employment has been chosen as the second major cause of financial problem. Low salary of the earning members is also a major cause of concern while more than 15.2%

respondents chose not to answer this question who are basically the persons who do not have significant financial problems in the family.

Imp. of inf.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	56	58.3	27	39.1	40	51.3	81	45.8	21	52.5	44	55.0	15	75.0	284	50.7
B	23	24.0	27	39.1	18	23.1	60	33.9	9	22.5	32	40.0	4	20.0	173	30.9
C	8	8.3	11	15.9	17	21.8	30	16.9	9	22.5	1	1.3	1	5.0	77	13.8
D	1	1.0	2	2.9											3	0.5
E	8	8.3	2	2.9	3	3.8	6	3.4	1	2.5	3	3.8			23	4.1
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 15: Importance of information in life

(Legends: A-Very important, B-Important, C-Moderately important, D-Not important, E- Don't know)

Many respondents asked for some clarifications of this question. Some asked, 'What, exactly, is meant by information here?' After clarification, most of them reported that information is indeed important in their life, although the extent of importance varied. Table-15 indicates that, about half the respondents agreed that the role of information is very important in their life. Slightly more than 30% think that information plays an 'important' role in their life, while another 13.8% feel that the role of information in their life is moderately important. Very few respondents think that information is not at all important in their life.

Abl. to find/use inf.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	48	28.6	41	33.9	52	31.0	79	29.8	35	51.5	27	20.0	17	21.3	299	29.8
B	38	22.6	28	23.1	27	16.1	58	21.9	18	26.5	33	24.4	17	21.3	219	21.8
C	14	8.3	19	15.7	23	13.7	41	15.5	5	7.4	29	21.5	16	20.0	147	14.6
D	41	24.4	23	19.0	38	22.6	37	14.0	8	11.8	26	19.3	17	21.3	190	18.9
E	20	11.9	8	6.6	28	16.7	46	17.4	1	1.5	19	14.1	13	16.3	135	13.4
F	7	4.2	2	1.7			4	1.5	1	1.5	1	0.7			15	1.5
Total resp.	168	100	121	100	168	100	265	100	68	100	135	100	80	100	1005	100

Table 16: Ability to find or use information

(Legends: A-I know when I need information, B- I know the sources of my desired information, C-I know how to retrieve information from those sources, D- I know whether the information I get are the ones I need, E- I know how to use information to solve my problems, F-No response)

Table-16 shows that, a considerably large number of respondents reported that they know when they need information and also have a fair understanding of the sources of

information. They also seem to have adequate knowledge about information retrieval and evaluation. However, when asked whether they know how to use information for solving various problems of their life, only 13.4% feel that they have that ability. It indicates that, although they strongly feel the importance of information in their life, they need additional assistance in making the best use of information, which highlights the role of information professionals or infomediaries.

Rel. sources of inf.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	25	14.9	21	13.0	9	7.4	60	17.8	6	5.9	32	17.6	9	9.9	162	13.9
B	14	8.3	16	9.9	4	3.3	31	9.2	8	7.8	25	13.7	6	6.6	104	8.9
C	12	7.1	20	12.4	4	3.3	12	3.6	1	1.0	25	13.7	3	3.3	77	6.6
D	46	27.4	44	27.3	47	38.5	79	23.4	32	31.4	37	20.3	18	19.8	303	26.0
E	20	11.9	21	13.0	16	13.1	47	13.9	24	23.5	25	13.7	16	17.6	169	14.5
F	29	17.3	21	13.0	14	11.5	48	14.2	14	13.7	17	9.3	16	17.6	159	13.7
G	9	5.4	14	8.7	15	12.3	46	13.6	11	10.8	16	8.8	13	14.3	124	10.7
H	11	6.5	4	2.5	12	9.8	10	3.0	6	5.9	4	2.2	10	11.0	57	4.9
I	2	1.2			1	0.8	5	1.5			1	0.5			9	0.8
Total res.	168	100	161	100	122	100	338	100	102	100	182	100	91	100	1164	100

Table 17: Reliable Sources of Information

(Legends: A-Religious leaders, B-Community leader, C- NGO activists, D- Learned person(s) in the locality, E-Family members, F-Elderly/experienced person(s) in the neighbourhood, G-Friends, H-Librarian, I-Not applicable)

As it is evident from Table-17, a little more than a quarter of the responses indicate that, learned or knowledgeable persons in the locality are the most reliable source of information to the respondents. They also rely a great deal on family members, elderly/experienced persons and religious leaders for information. Reliability of community leaders, NGO activists and librarians seem to be quite low. This is probably due to the fact that, on the whole, community leaders and NGO workers have a credibility problem in many areas of the country. Low reliability on librarians could be attributed to the scarcity of rural libraries and lack of awareness among the rural people about the role of libraries and librarians in their life.

Most imp. view-point	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	30	25.0	19	17.0	17	19.3	47	23.5	9	13.4	24	23.8	7	18.9	153	21.1
B	46	38.3	34	30.4	51	58.0	72	36.0	34	50.7	36	35.6	15	40.5	288	39.7
C	30	25.0	36	32.1	16	18.2	67	33.5	16	23.9	38	37.6	12	32.4	215	29.7
D	12	10.0	19	17.0	4	4.5	11	5.5	8	11.9	1	1.0	3	8.1	58	8.0

Most imp. view-point	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
E	2	1.7	4	3.6							2	2.0			8	1.1
F	2	1.7	4	3.6							2	2.0			8	1.1
Total	120	100	112	100	88	100	200	100	67	100	101	100	37	100	725	100

Table 18: Viewpoint for interpreting information

(Legends: A-Religious viewpoint, B-Logical and scientific viewpoint, C-Own experience/understanding, D-Other people's opinion/suggestion, E-Others, F-Not applicable)

Table-18 shows that, the majority of responses favour logical and scientific viewpoints for interpreting information. The experiences and personal understanding of the respondents and their religious identities also influence the interpretation of information. Less than 10% responses report other people's suggestions and opinions as an influencing factor, which indicates that, in general, people take an individualistic and independent attitude while interpreting information.

Right to info.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	93	96.9	61	88.4	78	100	173	97.7	40	100	79	98.8	20	100	544	97.1
No	3	3.1	8	11.6			4	2.3			1	1.3			16	2.9
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 19: Perception regarding right to information

According to Table-19, about 97% respondents believe that they have a fundamental right to receive information. This high percentage indicates that people are generally aware of their right to receive information. Among the respondents from Rajshahi, Sylhet and Rangpur, the belief in 'right to information' is absolute and unanimous, because 100% respondents from these three divisions feel that receiving information is their fundamental right.

Type of Inf. needed	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	37	11.2	26	11.9	26	9.3	85	12.9	14	9.7	43	15.4	11	6.5	242	11.6
B	34	10.3	40	18.3	14	5.0	47	7.1	6	4.1	33	11.8	15	8.8	189	9.1
C	52	15.8	31	14.2	58	20.7	98	14.5	19	13.1	52	18.6	16	9.4	326	15.6
D	42	12.7	27	12.3	12	4.3	36	5.4	6	4.1	15	5.4	12	7.1	150	7.2
E	44	13.3	17	7.8	26	9.3	66	10.0	7	4.8	36	12.9	20	11.8	216	10.4
F	28	8.5	11	5.0	17	6.1	53	8.0	6	4.1	9	3.2	13	7.6	137	6.6
G	21	6.4	9	4.1	24	8.6	45	6.8	14	9.7	19	6.8	9	5.3	141	6.8
H	13	3.9	18	8.2	19	6.8	40	6.1	9	6.2	16	5.7	11	6.5	126	6.0

Type of Inf. needed	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I	15	4.5	9	4.1	5	1.8	38	5.7	12	8.3	18	6.5	17	10.0	114	5.5
J	13	3.9	9	4.1	29	10.4	52	7.9	14	9.7	9	3.2	12	7.1	138	6.6
K	17	5.2	16	7.3	16	5.7	39	5.9	18	12.4	16	5.7	17	10.0	139	6.7
L	12	3.6	6	2.7	34	12.1	59	8.9	20	13.8	9	3.2	17	10.0	157	7.5
M	0	0.0		0.0		0.0	2	0.3		0.0	4	1.4		0.0	6	0.3
N	2	0.6		0.0		0.0	1	0.2		0.0		0.0		0.0	3	0.1
Total	330	100	219	100	280	100	661	100	145	100	279	100	170	100	2084	100

Table 20: Type of information needed in day-to-day life

(Legends: A-Agriculture, B-Weather, C-Education, D-Marketing of products, E-Health, F-Income generating, G-Family planning, H-Employment, I-Natural disaster, J-Politics, K-Entertainment, L-Law and rules, M-Others, N-Not applicable)

The responses received in answer to the question - 'What type of information you usually need in your daily life?', are varied and diversified. It seems that people need a whole plethora of information for various purposes. As Table-20 indicates, on average, every respondent has selected 3 to 4 areas where information is most needed in their daily life, resulting in a total response of 2084. It seems that information on education, agriculture and health are most needed by the respondents. A significant number of respondents need information on weather, laws and rules and marketing of products. The finding is significant because it shows that rural people's information need is not confined to one or two areas; rather, they need information on all the major areas and issues.

Inf. sou.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	42	16.2	43	23.5	35	13.3	114	23.9	36	25.7	48	19.4	20	16.9	338	20.0
B	36	13.9	21	11.5	30	11.4	25	5.3	18	12.9	36	14.5	8	6.8	174	10.3
C	30	11.6	15	8.2	30	11.4	24	5.0	11	7.9	16	6.5	10	8.5	136	8.1
D	21	8.1	6	3.3	4	1.5	21	4.4	3	2.1	18	7.3	9	7.6	82	4.9
E	12	4.6	4	2.2	12	4.6	22	4.6	8	5.7	8	3.2	8	6.8	74	4.4
F	12	4.6	15	8.2	7	2.7	18	3.8	1	0.7	11	4.4	6	5.1	70	4.1
G	17	6.6	20	10.9	13	4.9	63	13.2	9	6.4	23	9.3	17	14.4	162	9.6
H	33	12.7	32	17.5	68	25.9	99	20.8	31	22.1	47	19.0	19	16.1	329	19.5
I	37	14.3	17	9.3	59	22.4	76	16.0	20	14.3	32	12.9	16	13.6	257	15.2
J	16	6.2	9	4.9	5	1.9	10	2.1	3	2.1	8	3.2	5	4.2	56	3.3
K	2	0.8	1	0.5							1	0.4			4	0.2
L	1	0.4					4	0.8							5	0.3
Total	259	100	183	100	263	100	476	100	140	100	248	100	118	100	1687	100

Table 21: Usual sources of information consulted by respondents

(Legends: A- Friends, relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, B- Local school/college teachers, C- Library/information centre, D- Local religious leader, E- Local political leader/public representative, F-Local social worker, G- Radio, H- Television, I- Newspaper/newsmagazine, J- Local haat/bazaars/ tea stalls, K- Others, L-Not applicable)

Table-21 shows that, when they feel the need for information, most respondents tend to consult their friends, relatives, neighbours and acquaintances. However, a significant number of respondents favour television (the second most consulted source of information), newspapers/newsmagazines and school and college teachers. Radios and local libraries also are consulted by a considerable number of respondents. Social workers, public representatives and religious leaders also are consulted, although not to a great extent.

	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
Freq.	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	13	13.5	22	31.9	1	1.3	20	11.3	2	5.0	2	2.5	14	70	74	13.2
B	15	15.6	15	21.7	8	10.3	13	7.3	13	32.5	15	18.8	2	10	81	14.5
C	16	16.7	6	8.7	4	5.1	30	16.9	3	7.5	16	20.0	4	20	79	14.1
D	3	3.1	5	7.2	5	6.4	5	2.8	5	12.5	5	6.3			28	5.0
E	5	5.2	2	2.9	16	20.5	10	5.6	8	20.0	4	5.0			45	8.0
F	4	4.2	8	11.6	15	19.2	43	24.3	8	20.0	17	21.3			95	17.0
G	2	2.1			8	10.3	7	4.0	1	2.5	3	3.8			21	3.8
H	38	39.6	11	15.9	21	26.9	49	27.7			18	22.5			137	24.5
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 22-a: Frequency of information receiving from agricultural extension workers

(Legends: A-I can't remember, relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, B-Never, C-Very rarely, D-At least once a year, E-More than once a year, F-More than once a month, G-More than once a week, H-No response)

One of the major duties of government's agricultural extension workers is to disseminate agricultural information and advisory services to the farmers and common people. However, Table 22-a shows that, people's expectations to them remain largely unfulfilled, because 27.7% respondents report that they either can't remember receiving any information from the agriculture extension workers, or have very rarely received information from them. Another 14.1 respondents have informed that they have never received any information from the agriculture extension workers. All three replies (which account for 41.8% of the total responses) are indicative of the poor performance of the said workers.

Freq.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	9	9.4	14	20.3	1	1.3	10	5.6			2	2.5	1	5.0	37	6.6
B	11	11.5	24	34.8	8	10.3	21	11.9	14	35.0	13	16.3	9	45.0	100	17.9
C	29	30.2	7	10.1	2	2.6	19	10.7	4	10.0	17	21.3	8	40.0	86	15.4
D	2	2.1	4	5.8	2	2.6	13	7.3	2	5.0	1	1.3	1	5.0	25	4.5
E	5	5.2	5	7.2	15	19.2	14	7.9	9	22.5	10	12.5			58	10.4
F	5	5.2	3	4.3	21	26.9	44	24.9	9	22.5	11	13.8			93	16.6

Freq.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
G	1	1.0	1	1.4	8	10.3	7	4.0	1	2.5	5	6.3			23	4.1
H	34	35.4	11	15.9	21	26.9	49	27.7	1	2.5	21	26.3	1	5.0	138	24.6
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 22-b: Frequency of information receiving from family planning workers

(Legends: A- I can't remember, relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, B- Never, C- Very rarely, D- At least once a year, E- More than once a year, F- More than once a month, G- More than once a week, H-No response)

Table 22-b shows that, the performance of family planning workers is much better than that of the agriculture extension workers, because 16.6% respondents report that they have received information from the family planning workers more than once a month, while another 10.4% inform that they have done so more than once a year. However, approximately one-third of the respondents report that they have either very rarely received information from family planning workers or never at all.

Freq.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	10	10.4	7	10.1	1	1.3	4	2.3			2	2.5			24	4.3
B	12	12.5	9	13.0	3	3.8	18	10.2	5	12.5	11	13.8			58	10.4
C	24	25.0	22	31.9	5	6.4	32	18.1	6	15.0	19	23.8	17	85.0	125	22.3
D	8	8.3	9	13.0	8	10.3	11	6.2	6	15.0	4	5.0	1	5.0	47	8.4
E	3	3.1	5	7.2	11	14.1	31	17.5	13	32.5	7	8.8			70	12.5
F	5	5.2	1	1.4	23	29.5	12	6.8	9	22.5	15	18.8	1	5.0	66	11.8
G	2	2.1			7	9.0	16	9.0	1	2.5	2	2.5	1	5.0	29	5.2
H	32	33.3	16	23.2	20	25.6	53	29.9			20	25.0			141	25.2
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 22-c: Frequency of information receiving from health workers

(Legends: A- I can't remember, relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, B- Never, C- Very rarely, D- At least once a year, E- More than once a year, F- More than once a month, G- More than once a week, H-No response)

A considerably large number of respondents, about 32.7%, have reported that they have either very rarely received information from health workers or never at all. Considering the huge number of health workers reportedly working in the rural and far-flung areas of the country, this figure seems to be quite high. However, as Table 22-c shows, 12.5% respondents have reported that they have received information from health workers more than once a year while another 11.8% told that they have done so more than once a month.

Freq.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	10	10.4	10	14.5	4	5.1	9	5.1	1	2.5	3	3.8	9	45.0	46	8.2
B	15	15.6	10	14.5	8	10.3	16	9.0	10	25.0	15	18.8	5	25.0	79	14.1
C	14	14.6	13	18.8	4	5.1	27	15.3	7	17.5	18	22.5	3	15.0	86	15.4

Freq.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
D	5	5.2	13	18.8	10	12.8	21	11.9	3	7.5	3	3.8			55	9.8
E	2	2.1	5	7.2	17	21.8	21	11.9	12	30.0	6	7.5	1	5.0	64	11.4
F	5	5.2	5	7.2	9	11.5	12	6.8	7	17.5	7	8.8			45	8.0
G	2	2.1			6	7.7	6	3.4							14	2.5
H	43	44.8	13	18.8	20	25.6	65	36.7			28	35.0	2	10.0	171	30.5
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 22-d: Frequency of information receiving from social welfare workers

(Legends: A- I can't remember, relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, B- Never, C- Very rarely, D- At least once a year, E- More than once a year, F- More than once a month, G- More than once a week, H-No response)

Rural areas frequently attract social development activists and a large number of social welfare organisations, NGOs and community based organisations are operating in various rural areas of Bangladesh since long. However, when it comes to receiving information from social welfare activists on livelihood development and related issues, the reality is not quite optimistic. Because, as Table 22-d indicates, only about 31% respondents report to have received information from this group ever. 14.1% inform that they have never received information from social welfare workers. 30.5% have chosen not to give any response, which, in fact, is practically the same as to saying that they have never received information from social welfare activists.

Freq.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	7	7.3	5	7.2	1	1.3	13	7.3			1	1.3	8	4.0	35	6.3
B	25	26.0	13	18.8	7	9.0	30	16.9	10	25.0	14	17.5	4	2.0	103	18.4
C	11	11.5	20	29.0	1	1.3	16	9.0	8	20.0	15	18.8	3	1.5	74	13.2
D	3	3.1	5	7.2	11	14.1	16	9.0	5	12.5	7	8.8			47	8.4
E	3	3.1	6	8.7	12	15.4	11	6.2	9	22.5	3	3.8			44	7.9
F	8	8.3	4	5.8	18	23.1	10	5.6	5	12.5	8	10.0	1	5	54	9.6
G			1	1.4	8	10.3	10	5.6	3	7.5	6	7.5			28	5.0
H	39	40.6	15	21.7	20	25.6	71	40.1			26	32.5	4	2.0	175	31.3
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 22-e: Frequency of information receiving from public representatives

(Legends: A- I can't remember, relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, B- Never, C- Very rarely, D- At least once a year, E- More than once a year, F- More than once a month, G- More than once a week, H-No response)

People expect to receive information and guidance from the people they elect, i.e. the public representatives. In rural setting, Union Parishad chairmen and members are the public representatives who are most accessible to the rural people. When it comes to receiving information from these groups of people, Table 22-e gives a dismal reading, because the number of respondents who have either never received information from

public representatives, or have done so very rarely, is quite high. Besides, 31.3% respondents didn't give any reply, which is tantamount to saying that they have either never approached the public representatives or have never received any information, suggestions, guidance from these people. This is indicative of the huge communication and credibility gaps between the people and their representatives.

Freq.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	7	7.3	10	14.5	1	1.3	13	7.3	4	10.0	3	3.8	5	25.0	43	7.7
B	24	25.0	19	27.5	14	17.9	36	20.3	7	17.5	21	26.3	4	20.0	125	22.3
C	2	2.1	12	17.4	11	14.1	16	9.0	12	30.0	17	21.3	8	40.0	78	13.9
D	5	5.2	5	7.2	12	15.4	10	5.6	3	7.5	4	5.0	1	5.0	40	7.1
E	5	5.2	4	5.8	10	12.8	5	2.8	5	12.5	6	7.5			35	6.3
F	3	3.1	2	2.9	7	9.0	8	4.5	8	20.0	2	2.5	1	5.0	31	5.5
G					2	2.6	3	1.7	1	2.5	1	1.3			7	1.3
H	50	52.1	17	24.6	21	26.9	86	48.6			26	32.5	1	5.0	201	35.9
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 22-f: Frequency of information receiving from NGO workers

(Legends: A- I can't remember, relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, B- Never, C- Very rarely, D- At least once a year, E- More than once a year, F- More than once a month, G- More than once a week, H-No response)

Since independence, rural areas of Bangladesh have become hotbeds for NGO activities, most of whom are involved in the distribution of micro credit. Unfortunately, because of the activities of some NGOs, the image of the NGOs as a whole has been damaged to some extent. Table 22-f gives an indication of the performance of NGO workers as information providers, which, to put it mildly, is not very flattering. Quite a large number of the respondents have never received any information from the NGO workers or have done so very rarely. More than one-third have refrained from answering, which, also, is indicative of the inactivity of the NGO workers as information providers.

Freq.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	5	5.2	7	10.1	3	3.8	14	7.9			6	7.5	16	80.0	51	9.1
B	27	28.1	20	29.0	15	19.2	41	23.2	19	47.5	20	25.0	2	10.0	144	25.7
C	4	4.2	9	13.0	22	28.2	11	6.2	16	40.0	12	15.0			74	13.2
D	5	5.2	5	7.2	13	16.7	4	2.3	1	2.5	2	2.5			30	5.4
E	3	3.1	4	5.8	3	3.8	4	2.3	2	5.0	1	1.3			17	3.0
F	2	2.1	2	2.9			4	2.3	2	5.0			1	5.0	11	2.0
G	1	1.0					6	3.4							7	1.3
H	49	51.0	22	31.9	22	28.2	93	52.5			39	48.8	1	5.0	226	40.4
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 22-g: Frequency of information receiving from library and information workers

(Legends: A- I can't remember, relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, B- Never, C- Very rarely, D- At least once a year, E- More than once a year, F- More than once a month, G- More than once a week, H-No response)

As it is evident from Table 22-g, only 24.9% respondents have reported to have ever received any information from library and information workers, which is not surprising given the sorry state of library movement in the rural areas and the lack of awareness of the rural people regarding the importance of library service. A staggering 40.4% respondents have not given any reply, which also highlights the deplorable condition of our rural libraries and also the low level of awareness about library and information services among the rural people.

Freq.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	3	3.1	10	14.5	4	5.1	11	6.2			3	3.8	10	50.0	41	7.3
B	18	18.8	14	20.3	10	12.8	35	19.8	12	30.0	21	26.3	4	20.0	114	20.4
C	14	14.6	11	15.9	18	23.1	19	10.7	13	32.5	12	15.0	2	10.0	89	15.9
D	3	3.1	5	7.2	15	19.2	6	3.4	3	7.5	2	2.5	1	5.0	35	6.3
E	2	2.1	3	4.3	6	7.7	5	2.8	5	12.5	2	2.5			23	4.1
F	3	3.1	1	1.4	4	5.1	3	1.7	5	12.5					16	2.9
G	1	1.0	1	1.4	1	1.3	5	2.8	2	5.0					10	1.8
H	52	54.2	24	34.8	20	25.6	93	52.5			40	50.0	3	15.0	232	41.4
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 22-h: Frequency of information receiving from representatives of corporate bodies

(Legends: A- I can't remember, relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, B- Never, C- Very rarely, D- At least once a year, E- More than once a year, F- More than once a month, G- More than once a week, H-No response)

Some corporate organisations, foremost of whom is GrameenPhone, has been carrying out information services for the rural people through community information centres, a form of telecentres. It seems that these centres have largely failed to make their mark, because the majority of the respondents have reported to have received little or no information services from these centres. As Table 22-h shows, a substantial number of respondents have chosen not to attend to this question either because they are not sure whether corporate houses are involved in information providing or, more probably, they do not think that these organisations have ever given them any information worth mentioning.

Freq.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	5	5.2	4	5.8			3	1.7	2	5.0	1	1.3	6	30.0	21	3.8
B	8	8.3	9	13.0	3	3.8	9	5.1	6	15.0	3	3.8	2	10.0	40	7.1
C	9	9.4	13	18.8	1	1.3	15	8.5	6	15.0	5	6.3	10	50.0	59	10.5
D	2	2.1	3	4.3	1	1.3	5	2.8	1	2.5	2	2.5			14	2.5
E	4	4.2	3	4.3	11	14.1	11	6.2	15	37.5	1	1.3			45	8.0
F	7	7.3	1	1.4	22	28.2	28	15.8	6	15.0	6	7.5			70	12.5

Freq.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
G	5	5.2	1	1.4	20	25.6	20	11.3	3	7.5	14	17.5	1	5.0	64	11.4
H	56	58.3	35	50.7	20	25.6	86	48.6	1	2.5	48	60.0	1	5.0	247	44.1
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 22-i: Frequency of information receiving from community leaders

(Legends: A- I can't remember, relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, B- Never, C- Very rarely, D- At least once a year, E- More than once a year, F- More than once a month, G- More than once a week, H- No response)

Traditionally, community leaders have been playing an important role in the lives of rural people because many rural people turn to them for information and guidance, especially when they face trouble or suffer from indecision. Table 22-i shows that, the percentage of respondents who have ever received information from the community leaders is 44.9%, which, in comparison to other groups of information providers, is considerably higher. However, a substantial number of respondents have not given any information in this regard, which means a probable gap between community leaders and common people.

Freq.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A			1	1.4											1	0.2
B																
C			1	1.4											1	0.2
D			1	1.4											1	0.2
E							1	0.6							1	0.2
F	1	1.0									1	1.3			2	0.4
G	1	1.0					7	4.0			1	1.3			9	1.6
H	94	97.9	66	95.7	78	100	169	95.5	40	100	78	97.5	20	100	545	97.3
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 22-j: Frequency of information receiving from religious leaders

(Legends: A- I can't remember, relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, B- Never, C- Very rarely, D- At least once a year, E- More than once a year, F- More than once a month, G- More than once a week, H- No response)

Religion plays a central role in the lives of the people of Bangladesh and more so in the rural areas. Religious leaders include Imams of mosques, religious teachers and persons well versed in religious literature. Many people turn to them for information and advice, not only on religious matters but also on various other socio-economic and personal matters. However, Table 22-j portrays an astonishingly pathetic image of the religious leaders in their role as information providers, because a staggering 97.3% respondents have refrained from answering this question. This is quite inexplicable, given the dominant role the persons engaged in religious affairs play in rural life. This becomes

more surprising when we consider that, in answer to two previous questions, 21.1% respondents informed that they are influenced by religious viewpoints while evaluating information and 13.9% considered religious leaders to be a reliable source of information. A probable cause for the unwillingness of such an exceptionally high percentage of respondents to report the frequency of information receiving from religious leaders could be that, either they do not consider giving religious explanations and clarifications to be information providing activities, or that they are simply unwilling to evaluate the performance of the religious leaders as information providers.

Pref. for receiv. Inf.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	25	11.2	6	3.9	5	2.6	45	10.3	31	23.3	24	11.1	15	13.3	151	10.3
B	36	16.1	33	21.3	17	8.9	39	9.0	33	24.8	42	19.4	18	15.9	218	14.8
C	34	15.2	5	3.2	13	6.8	24	5.5	12	9.0	45	20.7	13	11.5	146	9.9
D	52	23.2	18	11.6	63	32.8	96	22.1	15	11.3	38	17.5	17	15.0	299	20.4
E	55	24.6	57	36.8	75	39.1	125	28.7	25	18.8	47	21.7	20	17.7	404	27.5
F	17	7.6	25	16.1	7	3.6	57	13.1	6	4.5	15	6.9	19	16.8	146	9.9
G	5	2.2	8	5.2	12	6.3	43	9.9	11	8.3	4	1.8	11	9.7	94	6.4
H	0	0.0	3	1.9			6	1.4			2	0.9			11	0.7
Total	224	100	155	100	192	100	435	100	133	100	217	100	113	100	1469	100

Table 23: Preference for receiving information

(Legends: A-Orally, B-By using telephone/mobile phone, C-From books, D-From newspaper/news magazines, E- From TV, F-From Radio, G-From the Internet, H-Others)

Table-23 shows that, most respondents prefer to receive information from television. Newspapers and newsmagazines rank second as the preferred media for receiving information. A considerable number of respondents (14.8%) also favour telephone/mobile phones and verbal communication (10.3%) for receiving information. Although radio played a dominant role in the lives of rural people in the past, it seems that, its relevance in their life is decreasing quite rapidly. 6.4% of the respondents consider Internet as their preferred medium for receiving information, which, considering the low penetration of Internet in the rural areas of Bangladesh, is quite remarkable.

Freq. of news read.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	21	21.9	21	30.4	21	26.9	61	34.5	2	5.0	11	13.8	8	40	145	25.9
B	39	40.6	15	21.7	35	44.9	46	26.0	9	22.5	34	42.5	8	40	186	33.2
C	14	14.6	10	14.5	10	12.8	25	14.1	2	5	9	11.25	1	5	71	12.7

Freq. of news read.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
D	4	4.2	4	5.8	2	2.6	8	4.5	9	22.5	10	12.5			37	6.6
E	15	15.6	9	13.0	10	12.8	13	7.3	18	45	6	7.5			71	12.7
F	3	3.1	10	14.5			24	13.6			10	12.5	3	15	50	8.9
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 24: Frequency of newspaper reading

(Legends: A- More than once daily, B- Once daily, C- Several times a week, but not once a day, D- At least once a week, E- Less than that, F- No response)

Newspaper continues to be a reliable source of news, information and views for the rural people. National dailies do not reach many rural areas of Bangladesh before noon. Still, the readership of newspapers is quite high and Table-24 also supports that. A substantial percentage (59.1%) of the respondents inform that they read newspapers at least once a day. The number of respondents who read newspapers less than once a week and the ones who preferred not to say anything about their newspaper reading habit is quite low.

Most int. news	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	43	18.9	27	16.1	38	19.3	69	14.9	23	16.8	15	8.3	12	10.7	227	15.3
B	64	28.1	33	19.6	63	32.0	72	15.5	30	21.9	29	16.1	16	14.3	307	20.7
C	16	7.0	5	3.0	14	7.1	29	6.3	11	8.0	18	10.0	6	5.4	99	6.7
D	21	9.2	9	5.4	5	2.5	35	7.5	3	2.2	20	11.1	14	12.5	107	7.2
E	7	3.1	4	2.4	11	5.6	16	3.4	4	2.9	10	5.6	11	9.8	63	4.2
F	23	10.1	31	18.5	6	3.0	66	14.2	16	11.7	17	9.4	14	12.5	173	11.6
G	17	7.5	11	6.5	3	1.5	41	8.8	16	11.7	14	7.8	6	5.4	108	7.3
H	19	8.3	18	10.7	24	12.2	37	8.0	22	16.1	19	10.6	11	9.8	150	10.1
I	8	3.5	11	6.5	17	8.6	43	9.3	5	3.6	15	8.3	9	8.0	108	7.3
J	7	3.1	5	3.0	16	8.1	28	6.0	6	4.4	8	4.4	10	8.9	80	5.4
K	0	0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	1	0.7	4	2.2		0.0	5	0.3
L	3	1.3	14	8.3		0.0	28	6.0		0.0	11	6.1	3	2.7	59	4.0
Total	228	100	168	100	197	100	464	100	137	100	180	100	112	100	1486	100

Table 25: News of interest

(Legends: A- Politics, B- Current affairs, C- Agriculture, D- Health, E- Environment, F- Accidents, violence, G-Corruption, H-Entertainment, I-Career, income generating, J- Economy, business, finance, K- Others, L-No response)

As Table-25 reveals, news on current affairs, politics and accidents and violence are considered to be most interesting by the respondents. They find a lot of interest in entertainment news as well. Apart from these, their interest is almost equally divided among other news, namely, news on career and income generating, agriculture, corruption, etc. It is a common scenario in rural haat-bazars that, people spend long

time in reading newspapers and discuss among themselves about various news. They also read newspapers more thoroughly than the urban people do. This, presumably, explains their interest in such varied kind of news.

Books/ Mag. reading	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	71	74.0	45	65.2	62	79.5	117	66.1	27	67.5	62	77.5	16	80.0	400	71.4
No	25	26.0	24	34.8	16	20.5	60	33.9	13	32.5	18	22.5	4	20.0	160	28.6
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 26: Books/magazines reading

According to Table-26, majority of the respondents (slightly less than three-fourth) report that they read books and magazines. However, after deducting the illiterate respondents (8.8%) from the total respondents, we find that 19.8% among the literate respondents do not read books and magazines. This indicates that quite a high percentage of the literate respondents do not have the habit of reading books and magazines.

Type of books/ mag. of choice	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	50	38.5	33	40.7	33	30.3	86	40.0	14	25.0	42	33.9	15	25.9	273	35.3
B	35	26.9	27	33.3	17	15.6	46	21.4	19	33.9	38	30.6	11	19.0	193	25.0
C	17	13.1	8	9.9	17	15.6	23	10.7	18	32.1	18	14.5	13	22.4	114	14.7
D	16	12.3	10	12.3	17	15.6	35	16.3	5	8.9	19	15.3	11	19.0	113	14.6
E	11	8.5	3	3.7	25	22.9	21	9.8			7	5.6	8	13.8	75	9.7
F	1	0.8		0.0		0.0	4	1.9				0.0		0.0	5	0.6
Total	130	100	81	100	109	100	215	100	56	100	124	100	58	100	773	100

Table 27: Preferred type of books/magazines

(Legends: A-Educative, B-Entertaining, C-Text books, D-Religious, E-Political, F-Others)

Table-27 shows that a majority of the respondents (35.3%) like to read educative books, while books on entertainment also is of great interest to them. They prefer textbooks and religious books as well. Only five subject options were given to the respondents and a very negligible percentage of respondents have chosen any option other than these. It shows that their subject choice is quite limited.

Fre. of book read.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	40	56.3	31	68.9	44	71.0	95	81.2	19	70.4	37	59.7	14	87.5	280	70.0
B	17	23.9	12	26.7	11	17.7	14	12.0	1	3.7	19	30.6	1	6.3	75	18.8
C	5	7.0	1	2.2	6	9.7	5	4.3	2	7.4	4	6.5	1	6.3	24	6.0
D	5	7.0	1	2.2	1	1.6	3	2.6	2	7.4	2	3.2			14	3.5
E	4	5.6							3	11.1					7	1.8
Total	71	100	45	100	62	100	117	100	27	100	62	100	16	100	400	100

Table 28: Frequency of book reading

(Legends: A- At least once a day, B- More than once a week, C- At least once a week,
D- At least once a month, E- Less than that)

Table-28 shows that, more than 150 respondents have chosen not to give any response to this question. Of the 400 who have attended to this question, 70% have informed that they read books at least once a day, which is quite a high percentage. Only 1.8% have reported that they read books less than once a month, which, again, is quite remarkable. The table shows that, although more than one-fourth (28%) of the total respondents have not given any information about the frequency of their book reading, a large majority of the remaining respondents read books quite frequently.

Radio in the house.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	52	54.2	39	56.5	29	37.2	89	50.3	27	67.5	22	27.5	18	90	276	49.3
No	44	45.8	30	43.5	49	62.8	88	49.7	13	32.5	58	72.5	2	10	284	50.7
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 29: Availability of radios in the household

The respondents are almost equally split on this issue. As Table-29 indicates, 49.3% have radio in the household while 50.7% do not. There was a time when radios were a common, almost indispensable item in the rural households. With the advent and increasing popularity of other electronic media, especially television and mobile phone (many of which have built-in radios), radios are becoming less and less visible in rural households.

Freq. of radio lis.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	22	32.4	27	58.7	13	24.5	48	44.4	11	39.3	12	54.5	15	75.0	148	42.9
B	18	26.5	11	23.9	11	20.8	25	23.1	5	17.9	10	45.5	3	15.0	83	24.1
C	11	16.2	5	10.9	1	1.9	7	6.5					1	5.0	25	7.2
D	3	4.4	1	2.2	4	7.5	2	1.9	1	3.6					11	3.2
E			2	4.3	4	7.5	5	4.6	1	3.6					12	3.5
F	3	4.4			9	17.0	6	5.6	3	10.7					21	6.1
G	11	16.2			11	20.8	15	13.9	7	25.0			1	5.0	45	13.0
Total	68	100	46	100	53	100	108	100	28	100	22	100	20	100	345	100

Table 30: Frequency of Radio listening

(Legends: A-More than once a day, B- At least once a day, C- Several times a week, D-At least once a week, E-Several times a month, F-At least once a month, G-Less than that)

As Table-30 reveals, quite a large percentage of the total respondents (38.39%) have not attended to this question. Of the 345 persons who have done so, 42.9% reported that they have the habit of listening to radio more than once a day while another 24.1% informed that they listen to radio at least once a day. Together, they account for 66.9% of the radio listeners, which is indeed a substantial percentage. It may be noted that, approximately 20% of the radio listeners listen to radio at least once a month or less than that.

Pro. of int. on radio	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	57	42.5	43	45.7	48	64.0	88	45.6	5	15.2	15	33.3	20	25.6	276	42.3
B	36	26.9	30	31.9	12	16.0	51	26.4	26	78.8	11	24.4	17	21.8	183	28.1
C	15	11.2	16	17.0	2	2.7	21	10.9	1	3.0	11	24.4	17	21.8	83	12.7
D	12	9.0	3	3.2	6	8.0	12	6.2			2	4.4	13	16.7	48	7.4
E	11	8.2	2	2.1	6	8.0	18	9.3			6	13.3	11	14.1	54	8.3
F	3	2.2		0.0	1	1.3	3	1.6	1	3.0					8	1.2
Total	134	100	94	100	75	100	193	100	33	100	45	100	78	100	652	100

Table 31: Programmes of interest on radio

(Legends: A-News, B-Entertainment, C-Weather report, D-Subject based discussion programmes (health, agriculture, etc.), E-Subject based educational programmes, F-Others)

In response to the question: 'what programmes you like most on radios?', a total of 652 responses have been received. Table-31 shows that, more than 42% of the respondents like news programmes the most. More than one-fourth of the responses favour programme on entertainment. Five options were given with this question and all but a

few responses are confined within these five options. It indicates that, the number of programmes of interest on radios among the respondents is not very high.

TV in the house.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	77	80.2	54	78.3	74	94.9	145	81.9	36	90.0	64	80	20	100	470	83.9
No	19	19.8	15	21.7	4	5.1	32	18.1	4	10.0	16	20			90	16.1
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 32: Availability of TVs in the household

As it is evident from Table-32, while only 49.3% respondents have radio in the household, the percentage of people having TVs is 83.9, which is remarkably high. With the decreasing price of televisions and the appearance of innumerable brands in Bangladesh market, the availability of television even in the remotest areas of the country has increased considerably. Many traders sell television sets on installment and at an affordable price, which has enabled many poor families in the rural areas to buy television. However, it may be mentioned that, people in most of the rural areas in the country cannot watch the satellite channels; the only channel they can watch is Bangladesh Television, the government-owned TV channel.

Freq. of TV wat.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	56	62.2	27	48.2	57	73.1	85	54.1	12	30.8	42	56.0	16	80	295	57.3
B	21	23.3	19	33.9	18	23.1	49	31.2	17	43.6	19	25.3	4	20	147	28.5
C	6	6.7	10	17.9	1	1.3	18	11.5	5	12.8	6	8.0			46	8.9
D	3	3.3			1	1.3	4	2.5	2	5.1	1	1.3			11	2.1
E	1	1.1			1	1.3	1	0.6	1	2.6	6	8.0			10	1.9
F	2	2.2							1	2.6	1	1.3			4	0.8
G	1	1.1							1	2.6					2	0.4
Total	90	100	56	100	78	100	157	100	39	100	75	100	20	100	515	100

Table 33: Frequency of TV watching

(Legends: A- More than once a day, B- At least once a day, C- Several times a week, D- At least once a week, E- Several times a month, F- At least once a month, G- Less than that)

As Table-33 shows, more than half the respondents (57.3%) who watch television report that they do so more than once a day. Another 28.5% watch television at least once a day. It shows that regular TV watchers far outnumber the non-regular ones. Through informal questioning, it was known that, many respondents spend hours watching

television. Presumably, TV's place as the electronic medium of choice is more or less secured for the foreseeable period of time.

Pro. of Int. on TV	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	75	37.7	60	45.5	74	37.9	143	41.2	30	45.5	54	40.0	20	22.7	456	39.2
B	73	36.7	45	34.1	62	31.8	114	32.9	28	42.4	43	31.9	19	21.6	384	33.0
C	19	9.5	16	12.1	4	2.1	35	10.1	1	1.5	19	14.1	18	20.5	112	9.6
D	15	7.5	4	3.0	19	9.7	26	7.5	3	4.5	9	6.7	18	20.5	94	8.1
E	17	8.5	7	5.3	35	17.9	28	8.1	4	6.1	9	6.7	13	14.8	113	9.7
F	0	0.0			1	0.5	1	0.3			1	0.7			3	0.3
Total	199	100	132	100	195	100	347	100	66	100	135	100	88	100	1162	100

Table 34: Programmes of interest on TV

(Legends: A-News, B-Entertainment, C-Weather report, D-Subject based discussion programmes (health, agriculture, etc.), E-Subject based educational programmes, F-Others)

News and entertainment are the two types of programmes most liked by the respondents. Together, they account for more than 72% of the total responses. However, as Table-34 indicates, there are a substantial number of people who like subject based discussion programmes, educative programmes and weather reports. Only five options were given to the respondents to pick up their programmes of choice from, and a very negligible percentage of respondents have gone beyond these options. It shows that, they prefer to watch a limited number and types of programmes on television.

Usual source of ent.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	74	66.1	45	52.9	73	89.0	142	71.0	38	63.3	41	50.0	20	64.5	433	66.4
B	15	13.4	11	12.9	2	2.4	19	9.5	19	31.7	10	12.2	8	25.8	84	12.9
C	15	13.4	20	23.5	5	6.1	16	8.0	2	3.3	26	31.7	3	9.7	87	13.3
D	7	6.3	6	7.1			16	8.0			3	3.7			32	4.9
E	1	0.9	3	3.5	2	2.4	7	3.5	1	1.7	2	2.4			16	2.5
Total	112	100	85	100	82	100	200	100	60	100	82	100	31	100	652	100

Table 35: Usual source of entertainment

(Legends: A-TV, B-Radio, C-Cinema, D-Jatra-pala, E-Others)

Table-35 shows that, television is found to be the dominant medium of entertainment for the respondents. About 66% of the total responses indicate that television is the most preferred medium of entertainment to the respondents, while 13.3% favour cinemas and 12.9% radios. Although *jatra-pala* (open air drama/opera) used to be a major source of entertainment for the rural people, it is becoming less and less evident

in the rural areas. Only 4.9% of the responses chose *jatra-pala* to be their preferred source of entertainment.

No. of mob. pho.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0	4	4.2	4	5.8	1	1.3	25	14.1	1	2.5	7	8.8	2	10.0	44	7.9
1-5	82	85.4	52	75.4	76	97.4	141	79.7	39	97.5	69	86.3	13	65.0	472	84.3
6-10	7	7.3	9	13.0	1	1.3	7	4.0			1	1.3			25	4.5
More	3	3.1	4	5.8			4	2.3			3	3.8	5	25.0	19	3.4
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 36: Number of mobile phones in household

Mobile phones/cell phones have emerged as a dominant medium of communication and entertainment among the urban as well as rural people. In recent times, Bangladesh has been witnessing a massive proliferation and prevalence of mobile phones and the rural areas are as affected by this proliferation as the urban areas are. As Table-36 reveals, only 7.9% of the respondents report that they do not have a mobile phone in their home. 84.3% report that they have one to three mobile phones in their home.

No. of per. mob. pho.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0	3	3.3									6	8.2			9	1.7
1-3	79	85.9	64	98.5	76	98.7	151	99.3	39	100	66	90.4	18	100	493	95.5
4-6	4	4.3	1	1.5											5	1.0
More	6	6.5			1	1.3	1	0.7			1	1.4			9	1.7
Total	92	100	65	100	77	100	152	100	39	100	73	100	18	100	516	100

Table 37: Number of personally owned mobile phones

According to Table-37, among the respondents who have mobile phones at home, 95.5% have one to three mobile phones of their own. However, informal questioning revealed that about 90% of these people have only one mobile phone set, although many of them have more than one SIM card. Among the people who have phones at home, only 1.7% report that the phone(s) are not personally owned by him/her, but by some other member of the family. The number of respondents personally owning more than one mobile phone is negligible.

Use of mob. ph.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	81	51.9	56	43.1	74	52.5	134	45.6	39	59.1	66	68.0	18	54.5	468	51.0
B	27	17.3	21	16.2	40	28.4	36	12.2	2	3.0	11	11.3	4	12.1	141	15.4
C	17	10.9	14	10.8	11	7.8	35	11.9	8	12.1	8	8.2	4	12.1	97	10.6
D	12	7.7	14	10.8	1	0.7	22	7.5	6	9.1	1	1.0	3	9.1	59	6.4
E	10	6.4	12	9.2	12	8.5	29	9.9	8	12.1	8	8.2	3	9.1	82	8.9
F	7	4.5	8	6.2			20	6.8	3	4.5	1	1.0	1	3.0	40	4.4
G	2	1.3	3	2.3	1	0.7	7	2.4			1	1.0			14	1.5
H	0	0.0	2	1.5	2	1.4	11	3.7			1	1.0			16	1.7
Total	156	100	130	100	141	100	294	100	66	100	97	100	33	100	917	100

Table 38: Use of mobile phones

(Legends: A-To talk to friends and relatives, B-To stay up-to-date, C-To listen to music, D-To take pictures, E-To collect professional, occupational information, F-To use commercially, G-Because owning a mobile phone is a prestige issue, H-Others)

Table-38 shows that, slightly more than half the responses reveal that, the respondents mostly use mobile phones to talk to their friends and relatives. However, they do many other things by using mobile phones, which include staying up-to-date (15.4%), listening to music (10.6%), collecting information related to their profession (8.9%), taking pictures (6.4%), using commercially (4.4%), etc. The use of mobile phones for entertainment purposes has increased remarkably in recent times and in many cases, mobile phones are used as replacements for radio, music player and camera. It indicates that, new and innovative use of mobile phones is likely to be welcomed by the users.

Mon. mob. ph. bill	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	23	25.0	21	32.3	8	10.4	27	17.8			36	49.3	7	38.9	122	23.6
B	18	19.6	3	4.6	27	35.1	38	25.0	6	15.4	10	13.7	3	16.7	105	20.3
C	14	15.2	9	13.8	18	23.4	23	15.1	6	15.4	6	8.2	5	27.8	81	15.7
D	16	17.4	14	21.5	9	11.7	32	21.1	7	17.9	15	20.5	2	11.1	95	18.4
E	10	10.9	10	15.4	3	3.9	17	11.2	5	12.8	3	4.1			48	9.3
F	11	12.0	8	12.3	12	15.6	15	9.9	15	38.5	3	4.1	1	5.6	65	12.6
Total	92	100	65	100	77	100	152	100	39	100	73	100	18	100	516	100

Table 39: Average monthly mobile phone bill (in Taka)

(Legends: A- Below 100, B-100-200, C-200-300, D-300-400, E-400-500, F-Over 500)

As a result of fierce competition among the mobile phone operators, the call rate has reduced substantially in recent times. This has enabled people of limited financial ability to maintain mobile phones. Table-39 shows that, of the 516 respondents who have given information about their monthly mobile phone bill, slightly less than a quarter

(20.3%) pay below 100 Taka a month as phone bill. Another one fifth (20.3%) inform that they pay between 100 and 200 Taka a month as mobile phone bill. The percentage of respondents who pay between 200-300 and 300-400 Taka is also substantial, which is 15.7% and 18.4% respectively. Moreover, quite a large number of respondents (12.6%) even pay more than 500 Taka as monthly mobile phone bill. It indicates that, a large number of rural people have the ability of pay a substantial sum for communication, entertainment and information dissemination purposes.

	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
Willing?	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	35	38.0	16	24.6	6	7.8	50	32.9	13	33.3	23	31.5			143	27.7
B	29	31.5	19	29.2	19	24.7	50	32.9	1	2.6	37	50.7	6	33.3	161	31.2
C	13	14.1	14	21.5	41	53.2	32	21.1	21	53.8	9	12.3	5	27.8	135	26.2
D	8	8.7	13	20.0	9	11.7	8	5.3	2	5.1	4	5.5	2	11.1	46	8.9
E	2	2.2	3	4.6	2	2.6	7	4.6	2	5.1			1	5.6	17	3.3
F	5	5.4					5	3.3					4	22.2	14	2.7
Total	92	100	65	100	77	100	152	100	39	100	73	100	18	100	516	100

Table 40: Willingness to pay for receiving information on mobile phone

(Legends: A-Not interested, B-Below 50, C-50-100, D-100-200, E-300-500, F-Over 500)

Table-40 shows that, about 92% of the respondents gave information regarding their willingness (or unwillingness) to pay a monthly fee for receiving useful information on mobile phones. The information reveals that, more than a quarter of them (27.7%) have no intention to pay money for receiving information on their mobile phones. However, 31.2% of them informed that they are willing to pay not more than 50 Taka a month for receiving information on mobile phones while another 26.2% informed that they are ready to pay 50-100 Taka for this purpose. People who would pay 100-200 Taka is also quite substantial, slightly less than 9% of the respondents.

Web bro.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	32	33.3	24	34.8	40	51.3	75	42.4	16	40.0	21	26.3	11	55.0	219	39.1
No	64	66.7	45	65.2	38	48.7	102	57.6	24	60.0	59	73.8	9	45.0	341	60.9
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 41: Experience of Internet use/web browsing

Table-41 indicates that, 39.1% of the respondents have the experience of using Internet or browsing the World Wide Web. This includes people who use these services fairly regularly and those who have done so sometime or other in their lifetime. Informal

questioning revealed that, the number of people who are regular user of Internet/World Wide Web is rather small. The table reveals that, the percentage of Internet/Web user is the largest in Rajshahi division and the smallest in Barisal division. In fact, Rajshahi is the only division where Internet/Web users outnumber the non-users, although by a small margin.

Use of email	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	22	22.9	24	34.8	36	46.2	69	39.0	15	37.5	11	13.8	9	45.0	186	33.2
No	74	77.1	45	65.2	42	53.8	108	61.0	25	62.5	69	86.3	11	55.0	374	66.8
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 42: Experience of using email

Table-42 shows that slightly less number of people have the experience of using email (33.2%) than those who have experience of using the Internet/Web (39.1%). Again, more respondents from the division of Rajshahi have experience of using email (46.2%) than their counterparts from other divisions. In Barisal, the percentage of email using respondents is only 13.8%, much lower than other divisions.

Will.?	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	41	42.7	34	49.3	59	75.6	111	62.7	17	42.5	46	57.5	14	70.0	322	57.5
No	55	57.3	35	50.7	19	24.4	66	37.3	23	57.5	34	42.5	6	30.0	238	42.5
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 43: Willingness to receive latest information by using Internet on mobile phone

The respondents willing to receive latest information on various topics by using internet on their mobile phone have a slight majority over the respondents who are not. 57.5% of the respondents inform that they would like to receive this service using their mobile phone. Table-43 also indicates that, the number of respondents most interested to receive this service is highest in Rajshahi division (75.6%) and lowest in Sylhet (57.5%) and Dhaka (57.3%).

Will.?	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	43	44.8	36	52.2	57	73.1	104	58.8	21	52.5	45	56.3	17	85.0	323	57.7
No	53	55.2	33	47.8	21	26.9	73	41.2	19	47.5	35	43.8	3	15.0	237	42.3
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 44: Willingness to pay a nominal fee (less than 50 Taka a month) for using Internet on mobile phone

The number of respondents willing to pay a nominal fee (less than 50 Taka a month) for using Internet on their mobile phone (57.7%) is almost identical with the number of respondents who are interested to receive latest information on their mobile phone by using Internet (57.5%). Table-44 also shows that, almost all of those who would like to receive information on mobile phone from Internet, are ready to pay for this service. Quite a high percentage of respondents from Rangpur (85%) and Rajshahi (73.1%) are willing to pay monthly fees for this service.

Ut. of comp. for comm. people	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	12	12.5	32	46.4	6	7.7	27	15.3	3	7.5	12	15.0	4	20.0	96	17.1
No	74	77.1	24	34.8	70	89.7	117	66.1	37	92.5	60	75.0	12	60.0	394	70.4
I don't know	10	10.4	13	18.8	2	2.6	33	18.6			8	10.0	4	20.0	70	12.5
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 45: Perception about the utility of computer

("Is computer a luxury item and has no utility for the common people?")

Only a few years ago, a common conception among many people was that, computer is a luxury item and, except for some privileged groups of the society, has little practical utility for the common people. This perception has drastically changed in recent times and the number of people who think that computers have no utility for the common people is also decreasing rapidly. This changed perception has spread to the rural areas as well, where the age-old suspicion towards anything mechanical is removing rapidly. The booming computer industry of the big as well as small towns proves this trend. It is also evident in Table-45, which shows that 70.4% of the respondents don't think that computer has no utility for the general public. However, approximately one-sixth of the total respondents still think that computer is a luxury item while another one-eighth have no opinion on this issue.

Buy comp. for home?	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	60	62.5	35	50.7	61	78.2	120	67.8	26	65.0	55	68.8	18	90	375	67.0
No	36	37.5	34	49.3	17	21.8	57	32.2	14	35.0	25	31.3	2	10	185	33.0
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 46: Plan to buy computer for home use

67% of the respondents are planning to buy a computer for home use. The percentage is exceptionally high in Rangpur (90%) and Rajshahi (78.2%), and considerably high in all other divisions. Table-46 also indicates that, the number of respondents who have no plan to buy a computer for home use, at least not in the foreseeable future, is the highest in Chittagong division, where 49.3% respondents inform that they have no such plan.

Comp. pur.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	31	51.7	19	54.3	34	55.7	72	60.0	14	53.8	23	41.8	11	61.1	204	54.4
B	12	20.0	9	25.7	11	18.0	25	20.8	7	26.9	6	10.9	3	16.7	73	19.5
C	5	8.3	2	5.7	4	6.6	8	6.7			3	5.5	2	11.1	24	6.4
D	8	13.3	4	11.4	10	16.4	13	10.8	5	19.2	17	30.9	2	11.1	59	15.7
E	4	6.7	1	2.9	2	3.3	2	1.7			6	10.9			15	4.0
Total	60	100	35	100	61	100	120	100	26	100	55	100	18	100	375	100

Table 47: Possible time in the future for purchasing computer

(Legends: A-Within a year, B-Within 2 years, C-After more than 2 years, D-After more than 5 years, E- Others)

Table-47 shows that more than half the people (54.4%) who informed that they are planning to buy a computer for home use, are planning to do so within a year. Roughly one fifth (19.5%) said that they would buy a computer within the next two years. The percentage of people who would do it after 5 years or more is also quite substantial (15.7%). More than 60% respondents from Khulna and Rangpur division have expressed their intention of buying a computer for home use within a year.

Lib. in the loc.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	74	77.1	48	69.6	15	19.2	123	69.5	34	85.0	23	28.8	14	70.0	331	59.1
No	17	17.7	21	30.4	59	75.6	45	25.4			57	71.3	3	15.0	202	36.1
I don't know	5	5.2			4	5.1	9	5.1	6	15.0			3	15.0	27	4.8
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 48: Presence of library in the locality

Table-48 shows that, 59.1% of the respondents report that there is a library (of any kind) in their locality. However, this knowledge about the presence of libraries in the locality varies widely from division to division. For example, while 85% respondents from Sylhet division and 77.1% from the Dhaka division inform that there are libraries in their locality, 75.6% respondents from the Rajshahi division and 71.3% from the Barisal

division report that there is no library in their area. 4.8% of the respondents have reported that they are not aware of the presence of absence of a library in their locality.

Type of the lib.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Public	24	32.4	14	29.2	4	26.7	56	45.5			2	8.7	1	7.1	101	30.5
Special	11	14.9	23	47.9	2	13.3	10	8.1	1	2.9	18	78.3	9	64.3	74	22.4
Academic	22	29.7	8	16.7	5	33.3	34	27.6	32	94.1	2	8.7	4	28.6	107	32.3
I don't know	15	20.3	3	6.3	4	26.7	22	17.9	1	2.9					45	13.6
Others	2	2.7					1	0.8			1	4.3			4	1.2
Total	74	100	48	100	15	100	123	100	34	100	23	100	14	100	331	100

Table 49: Type of library

Table-49 indicates that, of the 331 people who informed that they have a library in their locality, 32.5% reported that it was an academic library (in most cases school or college library), 30.5% said that it was a public library (in most cases libraries run by philanthropic individuals, clubs, societies, NGOs, etc.) and 22.4% said that it was a special library. 13.6% were not sure what kind of library it was.

Freq. of lib. visit	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Daily	13	17.6	7	14.6	2	13.3	23	18.7	3	8.8	1	4.3	1	7.1	50	15.1
Once a week	25	33.8	18	37.5	5	33.3	33	26.8	3	8.8	12	52.2	9	64.3	105	31.7
Once a fortnight	4	5.4	1	2.1	1	6.7			3	8.8	2	8.7	3	21.4	14	4.2
Once a month	10	13.5	13	27.1	4	26.7	18	14.6	5	14.7	3	13.0			53	16.0
Others	18	24.3	9	18.8	2	13.3	45	36.6	20	58.8	5	21.7	1	7.1	100	30.2
Never	4	5.4			1	6.7	4	3.3							9	2.7
Total	74	100	48	100	15	100	123	100	34	100	23	100	14	100	331	100

Table 50: Frequency of library visit

Of the respondents who have reported about the presence of libraries in their locality, 31.7% informed that they paid visits to the library at least once a week. However, as Table-50 shows, the second largest group among the library goers (16%) includes those who go to the library on average once in a month is. The number of daily library-goers is also quite substantial, 15.1%. 30.2% of the respondents do not have a particular schedule or pattern of library visit. Only 2.7% respondents reported that they have never gone to the library.

Lib. ability to meet req.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	26	35.1	13	27.1	1	6.7	28	22.8	3	8.8	3	13.0	4	28.6	78	23.6
To some extent	37	50.0	32	66.7	12	80.0	64	52.0	18	52.9	10	43.5	8	57.1	181	54.7
No	11	14.9	3	6.3	2	13.3	31	25.2	13	38.2	10	43.5	2	14.3	72	21.8
Total	74	100	48	100	15	100	123	100	34	100	23	100	14	100	331	100

Table 51: Library's ability to meet user requirement

Less than a quarter of the people who have volunteered information on this point have informed that the library they visit has the ability to meet user demands satisfactorily. Table-51 shows that, more than half the respondents feel that the library can meet user demands to some extent and slightly more than one fifth (21.8%) feel that the library does not have the ability to meet user demands. The number of respondents who feel that the library they visit has a moderate ability to meet their informational demands is the highest in Rajshahi division (80%) and the lowest in Barisal division (43.5 %), which also include the people least satisfied with the library's ability to meet user demand (43.5%).

Supp. for a lib. in every vill.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	94	97.9	65	94.2	78	100	175	98.9	40	100	79	98.8	20	100	551	98.4
No	2	2.1	4	5.8			2	1.1			1	1.3			9	1.6
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 52: Support for the establishment of a library in every village

Table 52 reveals that there is overwhelming support among the respondents for the establishment of a library in every village. Over 98% of the respondents support this move. In Rajshahi, Sylhet and Rangpur, this support is absolute, i.e. 100% of the respondents feel that there should be libraries in every village of Bangladesh. Other divisions also show this trend. It indicates that literate and illiterate alike and irrespective of their geographic location, people have sympathy and support for library movement.

Will. to rec. mob. lib. ser.	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	78	81.3	67	97.1	77	98.7	154	87.0	40	100	77	96.3	20	100	513	91.6
No	18	18.8	2	2.9	1	1.3	23	13.0			3	3.8			47	8.4
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 53: Willingness to receive library service at home

The respondents are also very much supportive of the idea of mobile library service and most of them are willing to receive library service at home. As it is evident from Table-53, in Rangpur and Sylhet, 100% respondents are willing to receive mobile library service while the desire among the respondents from other divisions for receiving this is also quite high. The percentage of people willing to receive mobile library service is the lowest in Dhaka (81.3%) and Khulna (87%).

Will-ing?	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	76	79.2	60	87.0	76	97.4	131	74.0	39	97.5	72	90.0	17	85.0	471	84.1
No	20	20.8	9	13.0	2	2.6	46	26.0	1	2.5	8	10.0	3	15.0	89	15.9
Total	96	100	69	100	78	100	177	100	40	100	80	100	20	100	560	100

Table 54: Willingness to pay nominal fee for library service

It is usually said that people are more willing to use libraries for free and there is a general unwillingness to spend money for library service, whatever the amount is. While there is some truth in this view, Table-54 shows that, most of the respondents (84.1%) have expressed their readiness for paying money for library service. More than 97% respondents from Rajshahi and Sylhet division are ready to do so, while the lowest percentage of people who are ready to pay money for library service is also as high as 74% (Khulna) and 79.2% (Dhaka).

Amount (Taka)	Dhaka		Chittagong		Rajshahi		Khulna		Sylhet		Barisal		Rangpur		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A	49	64.5	33	55.0	8	10.5	76	58.0	8	20.5	46	63.9	11	64.7	231	49.0
B	20	26.3	12	20.0	44	57.9	33	25.2	26	66.7	14	19.4	3	17.6	152	32.3
C	5	6.6	7	11.7	13	17.1	8	6.1	1	2.6	2	2.8			36	7.6
D	1	1.3	8	13.3	11	14.5	11	8.4			5	6.9	1	5.9	37	7.9
E	1	1.3					3	2.3	4	10.3	5	6.9	2	11.8	15	3.2
Total	76	100	60	100	76	100	131	100	39	100	72	100	17	100	471	100

Table 55: The amount of money the respondents are willing to pay for library service

(Legends: A-Less than 50, B-50-100, C-100-200, D-300-500, E-Over 500)

Although most of the respondents are ready to pay money for library service, it seems from Table-55 that they favour to pay a modest sum for this service. Almost half of them (49%) are ready to pay less than 50 Taka a month for receiving library service while another 32.3% would like to pay between 50 to 100 Taka. People willing to pay 100-200 Taka account for 7.6% of the willing people and another 7.9% would pay between 300-500 Taka for this purpose. Only 3.2% of them are ready to pay in excess of 500 Taka a month. It may be noted that, in Chittagong and Rajshahi, there is no respondent would like to pay more than 500 Taka for using library, while slightly more than one-tenth of the respondents from Sylhet are prepared to do so.

Analysis of data: Information providers

Age	Number	Percentage
18 - 25 years	11	40.7
26 - 35 years	10	37.0
36 - 45 years	3	11.1
46 - 55 years	3	11.1
Above 55 years	0	0.00
Total	27	100

Table 56: Percentage distribution: Age of the respondents

As Table-56 shows, the age of 77.7% of the respondents ranges from 18 to 35 years (40.7% in 18 - 25 and 37% in the 26-35 age range). This shows that, youth communities constitute the majority of the rural library and information workers. Informal discussions with them revealed that many of them are attracted to this profession out of a volunteering spirit, inspired by a sense of social welfare. Youth communities are usually moved or motivated by such feelings, and the age-range of the respondents proves this. Notably, there was not a single information worker among the respondents over the age of 55.

Average salary	Number	Average...
	9	4161

Table 57: Average salary of the respondents

Table-57 shows that, average monthly salary of them is 4161 Taka. This is an unreliable and unrepresentative figure because only one third of all the respondents volunteered

information in this regard. However, it can be safely assumed that the real average salary of the respondents is much lower because some of them work without any salary while some other receives only a token amount for their service. The researcher is of the opinion that the real average salary of the rural information professional is in the range of 1500 to 2000 Taka.

Year	Number	Percentage
Less than 1 year	2	7.4
1 – 3 years	9	33.3
3 – 5 years	3	11.1
5 - 10 years	7	25.9
10 – 15 years	4	14.8
Above 15 years	2	7.4
Total	27	100

Table 58: Year of experience in the present job

The year of experience of the respondents in the present job is quite varied. As it is evident from Table-58, One-third of them have joined in their present job within the last three years, while another one-fourth have done so in the last 5 to 10 years. The statistics do not say much about any specific trends in job experience, except that approximately half the respondents (48.1%) have been in the present job for more than five years, which indicates an attachment to the job (in spite of low salary).

Sex	Number	Percentage
Male	21	77.8
Female	6	22.2
Total	27	100

Table 59: Distribution of the respondents by sex

According to Table-59, slightly more than one-third of the respondents are male, which shows a dominance of males among the rural information workers. This is quite predictable, given the various social barriers imposed upon women in the rural areas, resulting in their limited mobility and less involvement in jobs and other income generating activities. The researcher is of the opinion that, even the 22.2% presence of female among the respondents of this survey is exceptionally high and the real percentage of female among the rural information workers of Bangladesh is not probably more than 10%.

Marital status	Number	Percentage
Married	18	66.7
Single	9	33.3
Total	27	100

Table 60: Marital status of the respondents

Table-60 indicates that, approximately two-third of the respondents (66.7%) are married while the rest one-third are unmarried. This again supports the common trend of the rural areas of the country, with a low average age but disproportionately high percentage of married people.

Educational status	Number	Percentage
Primary		
Secondary	4	14.8
Higher secondary	14	51.9
Graduate	7	25.9
Masters	2	7.4
Others		
Total	27	100

Table 61: Educational status of the respondents

As Table-61 shows, slightly over half the respondents have finished their Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) level of education and constitute the majority. The second biggest educational group among them are the graduates. 14.8% have studies up to the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) level while 7.4% hold master degrees. There is no respondent who has not studies at least up to the SSC level. Prevalence of HSC degree holders indicate that a large number of rural youth do not continue their education after completing their intermediate level of education.

Reason for choosing this profession	Number	Percentage
I find the job exciting	5	10.2
I want to serve grassroots people through this job	13	26.5
I like the salary package of this job	3	6.1
I like the organisation I work for	14	28.6
Because this is the only job I got	3	6.1
This job will help me learn new things	9	18.4
Others	2	4.1
Total	49	100

Table 62: Reason for choosing the current profession

This is a multiple response question and the respondents were free to choose any number of options they felt appropriate. The responses furnished in Table-62 show that, the choice of options has been quite varied, with the maximum number of responses favouring the acceptability of the organisation the respondents are currently working for as the main reason of their choosing their current profession. However, a good number of responses indicate the respondents' desire to help the grassroots people as a deciding factor in their choosing the current job. The possibility of learning new things as well as the excitement of the job also have been cited widely as the main reasons for choosing this job.

Bengali language skills	Number	Percentage
Excellent	11	40.7
Very good	6	22.2
Good	7	25.9
Moderate	3	11.1
Poor		
Total	27	100

Table 63: Bengali language skills of the respondents

As Table-63 shows, the majority of the respondents have reported that their skill in their native language, Bengali, is 'excellent'. Another 25.9% have termed it 'good' while 22.2% feel that their Bengali language skill is 'very good'. No respondent has reported his/her Bengali language skill to be poor. It may be mentioned that, the respondents were advised to consider their writing, speaking and listening skills while rating their language skills.

English language skills	Number	Percentage
Excellent	1	3.7
Very good	7	25.9
Good	7	25.9
Moderate	9	33.3
Poor	3	11.1
Total	27	100

Table 64: English language skills of the respondents

Table-64 shows that, only one respondent reported to have excellent skills in the language of English. Roughly one-fourth of them informed that their command over the language of English was 'very good', while another one-fourth termed it as 'good'.

However, the largest percentage of respondents (33.3%) said that their English language skill was moderate. 11.1% of them considered their English language skill as 'poor'.

Computer literacy	Number	Percentage
Bengali typing	8	15.1
English typing	16	30.2
Basic hardware/software troubleshooting	4	7.5
Email	4	7.5
Internet searching	10	18.9
Web browsing	4	7.5
Others	3	5.7
NR	4	7.5
Total responses	53	100

Table 65: Computer literacy of the respondents

The information given by the respondents about their computer literacy is also quite varied. It appears from Table-65 that, most of them have moderate command over various tasks performed by computer. 30.2% of the responses indicate that, English typing is the task the information workers are most competent in. Internet searching (18.9%) and Bengali typing (15.1%) also are worth mentioning. However, the number of respondents with good command over tasks like emailing, computer troubleshooting, web browsing, etc. is not very high.

Job satisfaction	Number	Percentage
Very high	2	7.4
High	14	51.9
Just enough	8	29.6
Less than enough		
Not at all	3	11.1
Total	27	100

Table 66: Job satisfaction of the respondents

Table-66 shows that more than 50% of the respondents reported their job satisfaction to be 'high'. 29.6% respondents termed their job satisfaction to be 'just enough' while 11.1% reported that they have no job satisfaction at all. Given the fact that most of the rural information workers are underpaid and many are even unpaid, the reason for such an exceptionally high job satisfaction rate could be their spirit of voluntarism. In informal discussion most of the rural information workers informed that they do the job not for its salary or position, but for the sense of social good the job gives. Since the

salary they receive from the job is not enough, many of them are involved in other income generation activities in their spare times. However, they also informed that, they would have been able to perform the information providing activities more efficiently if their salary had been higher.

Information services	Number	Percentage
Traditional library service	20	46.5
Web browsing	5	11.6
Email	2	4.7
Translation service	2	4.7
Photocopy service	3	7.0
Information services through mobile phone	3	7.0
Reference service	7	16.3
Fax	0	0.0
Others	1	2.3
Total responses	43	100

Table 67: Information services usually provided by the organisations the respondents work for

The information workers predominantly provide traditional library service. Table-67 indicates that, slightly less than half of the total responses (46.5%), coming from 74.07% respondents indicate this to be the most widely sought information service. However, 16.3% respondents inform that they provide various kinds of reference services as well. The third most widely provided service is web browsing service, mentioned by 11.6% of the respondents. Although a number of other services like translation, photocopy, fax, email, etc. were mentioned, none of these services are provided considerably or extensively.

Regularly performed tasks	Number	Percentage
Disseminate information to users from print materials	17	37.8
Disseminate information to users from electronic sources	4	8.9
Give information to users through mobile phone	6	13.3
Assist users in the use of traditional library	9	20.0
Assist users in the use of electronic information sources	1	2.2
Give information to users directly by visiting their home	3	6.7
Act as liaison between users and information providing agencies	5	11.1
Others	0	0.0
Total responses	45	100

Table 68: Tasks regularly performed by the respondents

Disseminating information from print materials constitute the bulk of the tasks regularly performed by the respondents. Besides, tasks like assisting users in the use of traditional library and giving information to users through mobile phones also appear to be regularly performed them. As Table-68 indicates, giving information to the people by visiting their households and assisting users in the use of electronic information sources are two tasks least regularly performed by them. A considerable number of respondents (18.51% of the respondents, constituting 11.1% of the total responses) reported that acting as liaison between users and information providing agencies is also a regular task performed by them.

Methods of assessing information needs	Number	Percentage
By interviewing them formally	18	41.9
By having informal discussions with them	11	25.6
By giving them a questionnaire	3	7.0
I do not assess their information needs	5	11.6
I guess their information needs without asking questions	6	14.0
Others	0	0.0
Total responses	43	100

Table 69: Methods of assessing information needs of users

Table-69 shows that, 41.9% responses indicate that the most widely used method practiced by the information workers for assessing information needs of the users is by interviewing them in a formal manner. 18 of the 27 respondents (66.6%) informed that they follow this method, among others. About a quarter of the total responses indicate that, information needs of the respondents are also assessed through formal discussions and the exchange of questions and answers. 22.2% respondents (representing 14% of the total responses) also try to assess the information needs of the people by simply guessing.

Usually consulted information sources	Number	Percentage
Book	21	24.1
Magazine	12	13.8
Newspaper	19	21.8
Web site	4	4.6
TV	6	6.9
Radio	5	5.7
Email	3	3.4
Individuals who have information	6	6.9

Usually-consulted information sources	Number	Percentage
Concerned organisations	7	8.0
Other libraries/information centres	4	4.6
Total responses	87	100

Table 70: Information sources usually consulted for providing information services

As a multiple response question, it received a number of responses covering a variety of information sources that the information workers usually consult for providing information service. As Table-70 shows, books, newspapers and magazines have been mentioned by them as the most consulted information sources accounting for 24.1%, 21.8% and 13.1% of the total responses respectively. Other than these top three, the share of other information sources is quite low. However, the responses indicate that, concerned organisations, TV and individuals possessing information also play a role as information sources. The responses show that, the information workers predominantly rely on print sources of information for extending their service to the people.

Information mostly required by users	Number	Percentage
Agriculture	3	3.7
Weather	2	2.5
Education	21	26.2
Market of products	3	3.7
Health	10	12.5
Income generating	3	3.7
Family planning	9	11.2
Employment	5	6.2
Natural disaster	6	7.5
Politics	7	8.7
Entertainment	11	13.7
Others	11	13.7
Total responses	80	100

Table 71: Information mostly required by users

Table-71 shows that, 26.2% of the total responses indicate that one of the main issues on which rural people seek information from the library is education. 21 out of 27 respondents have mentioned education as a usually sought after topic. The next most mentioned subject is entertainment, followed by health, family planning and politics. This is in slight contrast to the information received from the users, who mentioned education, agriculture, health, weather and law and rules as five top subjects they need

information on. However, as the above table suggests, the responses have been quite varied, which shows that, rural people come to the libraries in search of information on many different topics. It may be mentioned that, 40.7% respondents also ticked the "Others" option and mentioned subjects not included in the questionnaire. The subjects they mentioned included human rights, government programmes, NGO activities, micro credit, etc.

Information sources most comfortable to collect information from	Number	Percentage
Print	15	46.87
Electronic	6	18.75
Oral	10	31.25
Others	1	3.12
Total responses	32	100

Table 72: Information sources easiest to collect information from

This is a multiple responses question and the respondents were allowed to take more than one option. Table-72 shows that, 55.6% of the respondents consider the print sources to be the easiest source to collect information from. 15 out of 27 respondents hold this view. However, 10 respondents also considered the oral source to be an easy source to deal with. The number of respondents favouring the electronic source is also considerable, although not very high.

Sl. No.	Most effective information material/source	Highly effective		Effective		Somewhat effective		Not effective		No reply		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Book	18	66.7	4	14.8	2	7.4	3	11.1		0	27	100
2	Magazine	7	25.9	14	51.9	2	7.4	1	3.7	3	11.1	27	100
3	Newspaper	15	55.6	7	25.9	2	7.4			3	11.1	27	100
4	Web site	5	18.5	6	22.2	3	11.1	3	11.1	10	37.0	27	100
5	TV	2	7.4	8	29.6	4	14.8	4	14.8	9	33.3	27	100
6	Radio	2	7.4	6	22.2	6	22.2	3	11.1	10	37.0	27	100
7	Email	4	14.8	3	11.1	2	7.4	5	18.5	13	48.1	27	100
8	Individuals who have information	3	11.1	5	18.5	6	22.2			13	48.1	27	100
9	Concerned organisations	3	11.1	5	18.5	3	11.1	3	11.1	13	48.1	27	100
10	Other libraries/information centres	3	11.1	2	7.4	6	22.2	2	7.4	14	51.9	27	100

Table 73: Effectiveness of various information materials/ sources

As data furnished in Table-73 shows, 66.7% of the respondents consider books to be the most effective information material, while the number of respondents who consider

book to be 'effective' is also quite substantial. Out of 27 respondents, only 3 consider book to be an ineffective information material, making it, along with newspaper, the top-ranked information material in terms of overall effectiveness ('highly effective', 'effective' and 'somewhat effective' combined). Magazines, also, have been mentioned by a substantial number of respondents to be an effective information material. One notable fact in this regard is that, quite a large number of respondents have not ventured to rate the effectiveness of information sources like email, individuals who have information, concerned organisations and other libraries/information centres, with highest number of them (51.9%) declining to rate the effectiveness of other libraries/information centres.

Problems usually faced by information workers	Number	Percentage
People are not interested to receive information	10	37.0
People are interested to receive information, but feel embarrassed because of social restrictions	13	48.1
Lack of general awareness about the importance of information	16	59.3
Unfavourable religious environment	7	25.9
Lack of education of the people	22	81.5
Non-cooperation of government officials	7	25.9
Non-cooperation of local political leaders	9	33.3
Non-cooperation of local community leaders	6	22.2
Weak telecommunication infrastructure of the country	6	22.2
Lack of fund	15	55.6
Lack of commitment of the information providers	7	25.9
Others		
Total	118	100

Table 74: Problems usually faced by the information workers in performing their duties

According to Table-74, lack of education of the people, lack of awareness (of the general people) about the importance of information and lack of adequate fund have been indicated by the respondents as the three most common problems they face while doing their duties. A total of 11 options were given to the respondents and all the options received a fair number of ticks, none receiving less than 22.2% of the total responses – which shows that, the problems faced by the respondents are many and varied in nature. A large number of respondents (13 out of 27) report that, although people are interested to receive information, quite often, they feel embarrassed to do so because of various social restrictions. Lack of interest among the community people

to receive information, religious restrictions and lack of commitment of the information providers themselves also have been cited as common problems faced by the information providers in discharging their duties.

Possible measures for solving problems of information dissemination	Number	Percentage
Enough funds should be allocated by the government	19	19.6
Government should formulate more convenient policies for dissemination of information	13	13.4
More non-government initiatives for rural information dissemination should be taken	9	9.3
The country's telecommunication infrastructure must be strengthened	6	6.2
Mobile library services should be strengthened	6	6.2
Massive awareness raising programme should be undertaken	9	9.3
More traditional libraries should be set up	15	15.5
More technology based information service initiatives should be set up	4	4.1
Besides normal activities, traditional libraries should arrange discussion meetings, study circles, etc.	3	3.1
Massive literacy campaign should be undertaken	10	10.3
Economic development of the underprivileged people should be ensured	1	1.0
Others	2	2.1
Total	97	100

Table 75: Possible measures for solving the problems related to rural information services

Table-75 indicates that, the recommendations put forward by the respondents for solving the problems of rural information services, have been quite diverse. Allocation of required funds has been recommended by most number of respondents, closely followed by the setting up of more traditional libraries, formulation of favourable policies by the government, massive literacy campaigns, etc. A number of respondents have also highlighted the need for extensive non-governmental initiatives in the rural library sector. Indicating the necessity of technology-based information services, some respondents have also advocated for the strengthening of the ICT infrastructure of the country. The responses received on this point indicate that, the respondents do not believe that only one or two measures will be enough for solving the problems related to rural information services; rather, they feel that, in order to ensure the success of the rural information services on Bangladesh, a combination of wide-ranging policies and methods need to be adopted.

Possibility for establishing a knowledge-based society in Bangladesh in twenty years	Number	Percentage
Very high	2	7.4
High	14	51.9
Moderate	11	40.7
Low		
Not at all		
Total	27	100

Table 76: Possibility for establishing a knowledge-based society in Bangladesh in twenty years

As Table-76 shows, almost all the respondents believed that the possibility for establishing a knowledge-based society in Bangladesh in the next twenty years is either 'high' (51.9%) or 'moderate' (40.7%). Only a handful (7.4%) rate this possibility as 'very high'. While asked to explain the reasons for their firm believe in a 'knowledge-based' future Bangladesh, most of them told that, the ability of the people of Bangladesh to solve their problems on their own and proceed towards development against all odds is the main reason for this belief. One respondent answered, 'In spite of innumerable problems and underachievement since the independence, the people of Bangladesh have proved time and again that they have the ability to make positive changes in their lives, thereby contributing to the development of the country. Therefore, it can be hoped that, they will be able to transform the country into a knowledge-based one in the future.'

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

As the Literature Review chapter indicates, rural people all over the world need reliable, timely information in different fields for their day-to-day activities. This holds true for Bangladesh as well. That is why a number of government and non-government initiatives have been undertaken in Bangladesh at different times for providing information services to the grassroots people. Under these initiatives, attempts have been made to make information on health, family planning, agriculture, education, disaster preparedness, etc. reach the doorstep of common people. Telecentres (including Union Information and Service Centres), boat libraries and mobile libraries - all are examples of such initiatives.

The present Ph.D. research attempts to assess the information needs of rural people of Bangladesh, and by doing so, indicate how the existing rural information services could be strengthened for benefiting the rural and marginal people in the long run. As it is evident from the foregoing chapters, rural people of Bangladesh suffer constantly from a lack of vital information in different subjects which are directly or indirectly related to their livelihood. The questionnaires served under the study succeeded in gathering valuable information about the information needs and information usage patterns of rural people of Bangladesh. Major findings from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) done under this study have been furnished in Chapter 6. This chapter (Chapter 8) aims to furnish the important findings of the questionnaire survey.

One of the important findings of the study was that, rural people of Bangladesh have diverse and wide-ranging information needs. However, as the previous chapter shows, **information needs of rural people as viewed by rural people themselves and the rural library and information professionals are not quite the same.** A comparative analysis between the two gives interesting insights into the nature of rural people's information needs. While 'education' is reported by both groups as the most sought-after subject, the percentage distribution is quite different. 26.2% of the information providers inform that educational information is in highest demand among the rural people, but only 15.6% of the rural people feel that this is their dominant information need. While as many as 11.6% of the information receivers feel that they need agricultural information, only 3.7% of the information providers feel so. Moreover, while only 6.7% of the information receivers feel that entertainment is one of their urgent information needs, the percentage of information providers who believe so is as high as 13.7%.

In spite of these dissimilarities, it can be safely said that information on education, health, agriculture, marketing of products and law and human rights constitute the major information needs of the rural people. This has been supported by a number of previous studies, foremost of which is the study conducted by D.Net. The following chart gives a comparative picture.

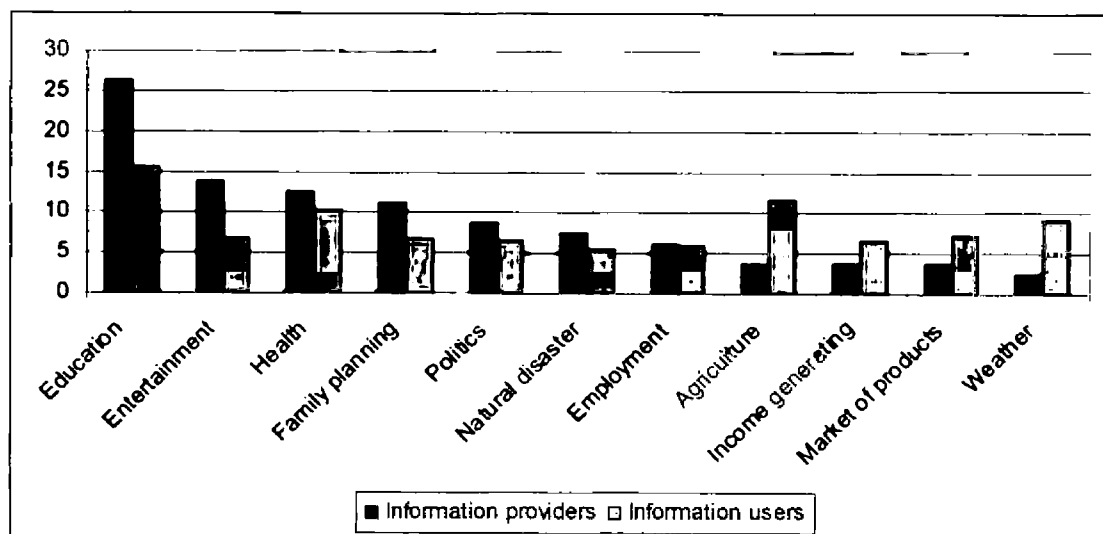


Figure 2: Bar chart showing the key information needs of rural people, the blue bar depicts the rural people's information needs as perceived by information providers while the orange one shows those needs as indicated by information users themselves.

In order for the rural people to effectively use information for solving their livelihood problems, they must have various information-related abilities, namely, the abilities to identify the need for information, consult information sources, access the sources, etc., which collectively constitute their information literacy skills. As the following pie-chart shows, many rural people have the ability to identify information needs and access information from various sources. However, the percentage of people who know how to use information for solving their livelihood problems is not quite high, only one-seventh of the respondents seem to have that ability. This highlights the role of information professionals, who could not only help rural people acquire their required information, but can help them in using that information effectively in their life as well. However, the rural librarians could play this role only if they are trusted and relied upon by the rural people. As experiences from different parts of the world show, this could be best ensured, if and when someone from the rural community acts as librarian. In that case, he/she can understand the real needs of the rural people easily and can deliver accordingly.

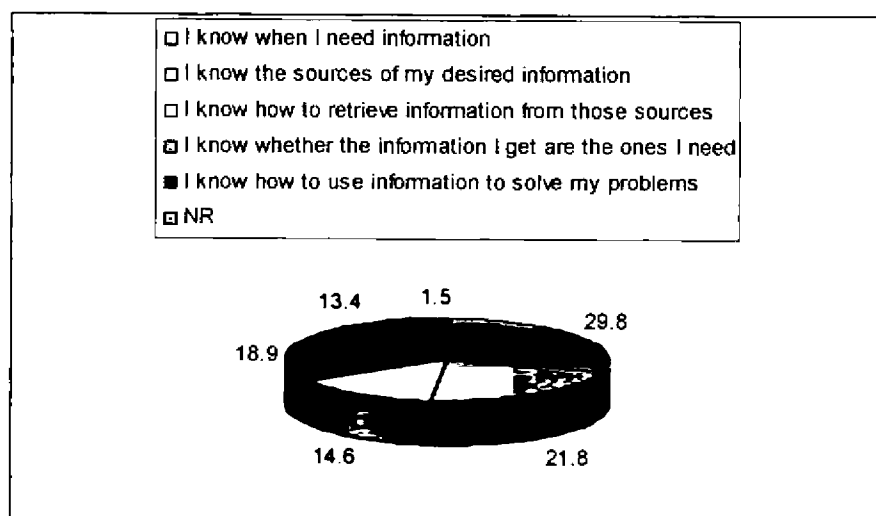


Figure 3: Pie-chart showing information literacy skills of rural people

The study has revealed that, while the rural people consult a plethora of information sources, Informal and personal sources like friends, relatives, local haat-bazaars, etc.

are usually favoured by them. However, they also frequently turn to television, radio, newspapers and library and information centres for required information. In total, television, radio and newspapers account for almost half (45%) the usual information sources consulted by rural people. The following chart gives an overview of the usual sources of information consulted by rural people.

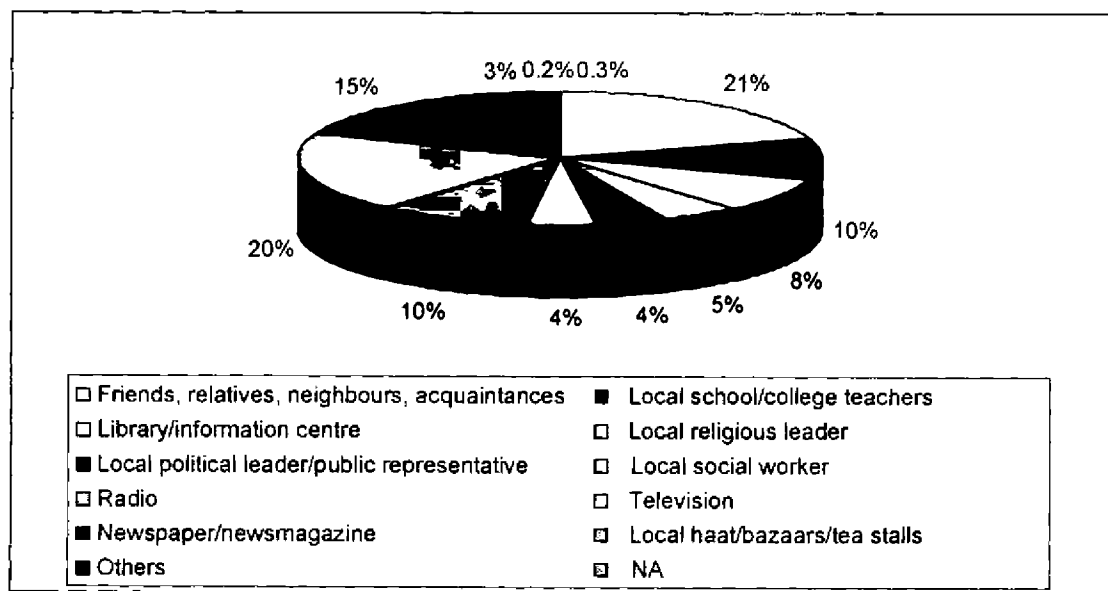


Figure 4: Pie-chart showing sources of information usually consulted by rural people

In order for a rural information centre to be successful, it must make good use of the above mentioned media and sources. In most of the rural areas of Bangladesh, the only available television channel is Bangladesh Television, since these areas are out of the coverage of satellite television channels. Therefore, if the rural information centre could arrange to show the satellite channels, rural people would naturally come to these centres. However, since quite a large majority of rural people watch television for entertainment purpose only, it is up to the library/rural information centres to decide what programmes would the rural populace be allowed to watch. As the present study has found, the TV programme which attract the majority of rural people is news, which is closely followed programmes like movie and drama. A sizable number of rural people also like to watch subject based discussion programmes (talk shows) and various

educational programmes. Therefore, the rural information centre could allow common people to watch these programmes at the library premises. Newspapers and magazines, too, are very popular information media and the more newspapers the library could keep for public use, the better. While travelling in various rural areas of the country, the researcher has found that, daily newspapers do not reach most rural areas before noon. The people who subscribes regularly to newspapers is also very few. However, rural people have great interest in newspapers and people scrambling with one another for getting hold of today's newspaper is a common scene at village bazaars. Libraries/information centres must also preserve newspaper clippings on important topics like health, agriculture, employment, etc. and instruct rural people to use those.

The study also shows that, because of widespread illiteracy in the rural region and also because of age-old tradition, rural people frequently turn to other people for information and advice. This is in sharp contrast to the urban areas, where people usually do not depend upon other people's advice, especially people who are outside the family circle. However, as the following chart shows, **learned and elderly/experienced people in the neighborhood are overwhelmingly favoured by the rural people as reliable information providers**. They are considered to be the most reliable sources of information by almost 40% of the people who attended to the questionnaire. This is no surprise, considering the fact that, rural people habitually rely on local elders (*murubbi* in local dialect) for information, suggestions, advice and directions, even if it concerns very private and personal matters. Family members and religious leaders also are heavily consulted as reliable sources of information. This clearly indicates that, even in this age of globalisation and institutional advances, rural people still predominantly rely upon informal and individual sources for receiving required information. This highlights the need for institutionalizing information sources in the rural area by providing the rural people a reliable, easy-to-access information infrastructure.

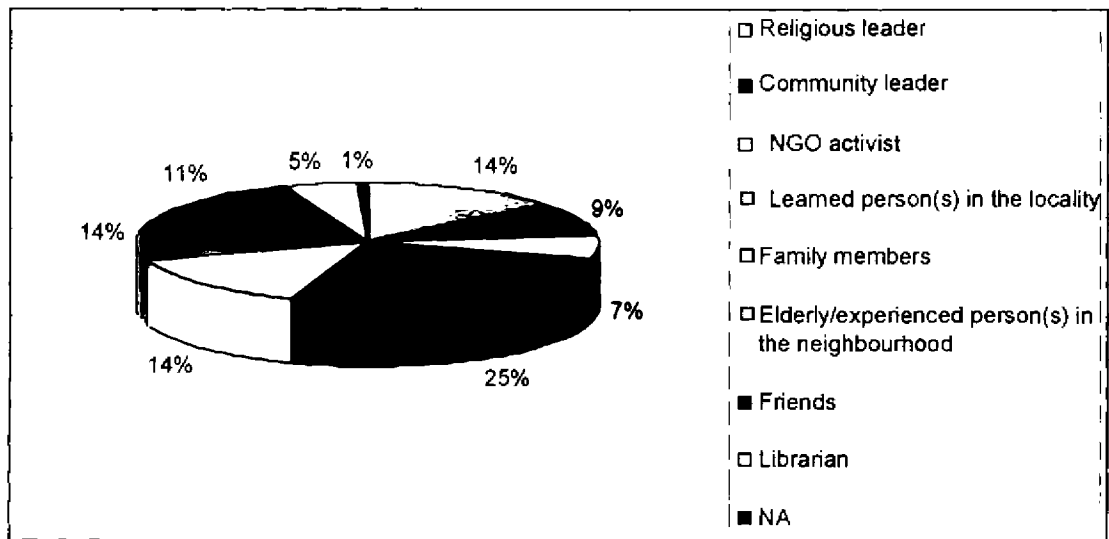


Figure 5: Pie-chart showing information sources deemed to be most reliable by rural people

Significant findings have also been gathered on the issue of news items which are considered to be most important by the rural people. As the following chart shows, current affairs, politics, accidents and violence, entertainment, corruption, career, income generation, health etc. are the news items which rural people want to be kept abreast of all the time. Therefore, it is safe to say that, these items need to be taken into account while designing information services for the rural people.

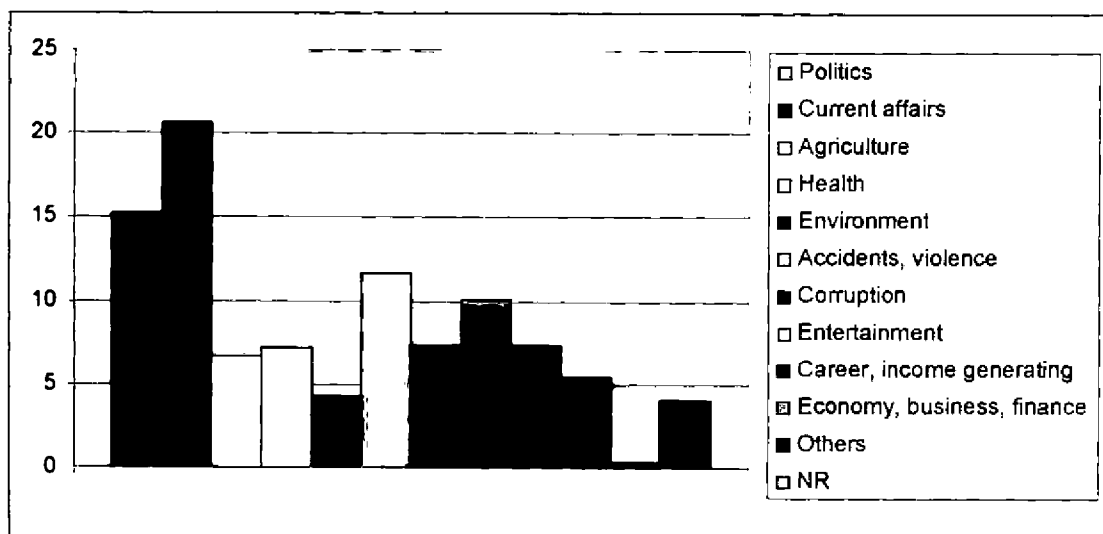


Figure 6: Bar chart showing news items most liked by rural people

While interviewing Union Information and Service Centre (UISC) entrepreneurs, the researcher learned that, they are frequently contacted by people who want to keep abreast of current political affairs from home and abroad. They are also very much keen to get information on health, agriculture, entertainment, jobs and marketing of products. Any rural information centre must take these topics into consideration while developing their information collection. While conducting this research, the researcher came across scores of rural people, many of whom illiterate or uneducated, who were very much keen on national, regional and world affairs. They had a fair understanding on what was happening in the world stage and how that was going to affect their lives in the short and long run. Although their interpretation of facts was not always objective or logical, their curiosity about wide-ranging topics and their efforts to get hold of information on those topics was quite remarkable.

As the success of existing traditional rural libraries shows, **books and magazines still hold great popularity among the rural people as medium of information and knowledge.** The present survey also corroborates this fact. As the following pie-chart shows, books and magazines on education and entertainment are most favoured by rural people. Textbooks and religious books also are greatly favoured by them, although the popularity of textbooks lies mainly among the young people while religious books are favoured mostly by older people. Printed materials, particularly books and magazines, therefore, should not be ignored while planning a rural information centre. This fact is supported by many examples from rural community libraries in Asia and Africa (Aboyade 1984, Atherton 1993, Bristow 1992, Alemna 1995).

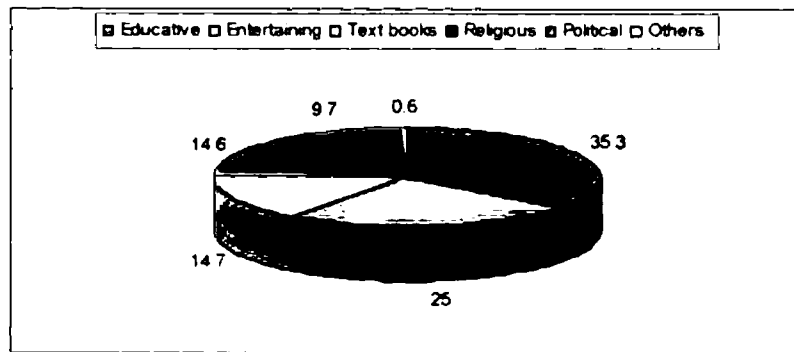


Figure 7: Preferred types of books and magazines by rural people

The survey has found that, slightly less than one-fourth of the respondents have expressed their satisfaction at the services of the local libraries. This highlights the importance of redesigning the services of these libraries taking into consideration the specific information needs of rural people. The question of sustainability of the rural libraries is also quite important. The study found that, **rural people are ready to pay a regular fee, albeit a small one, in order to receive library services.** It goes without saying that the rural libraries must have their own sources of income in order for them to be operational in the long run. One of these sources is the monthly fee given by local people. Since the overwhelming majority of rural people of Bangladesh live below the poverty line, it is quite natural that they are not able to pay much for receiving library service. Of the 84.1% of the total respondents (560) who are willing to pay money for library service, roughly 50% informed that they were not willing to pay more than 50 Taka a month for library service. The following chart shows the amount of money people are willing to pay on a monthly basis for library services.

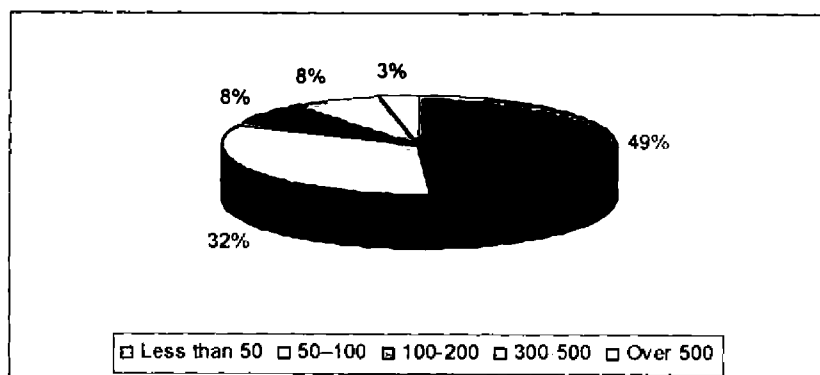


Figure 8: Pie chart showing the amount of monthly fee the respondents are willing to pay for receiving library and information services

It may be mentioned that, with the increasing popularity of Union Information and Service Centres (UISCs), many rural people have started taking their services in exchange of money. They usually visit the UISCs for browsing the Internet, sending email, printing, taking pictures on digital camera, filling-up online forms, making photocopies, etc. The amount of money charged by UISC entrepreneurs for these services varies widely. While some UISCs charge 5 Taka for each computer printout, some charge as much as 30 Taka for the same service. In absence of a uniform service rate, rural people are frequently harassed and overcharged in the UISCs. Therefore, if they are to receive library and information services at an affordable rate, the services must be designed carefully and steps must be taken to implement a uniform service rates in the UISCs and rural libraries.

The questionnaire served among the rural librarians succeeded in yielding important information about their job status, job satisfaction, major services they provide, their perception about the present and future prospects of rural information services and so on. Most of the rural librarians who took part in the survey do not earn much from their job. A number of them, and also other librarians interviewed informally by the researcher, do other jobs in an attempt to make up for their low income from librarianship. However, almost all the librarians surveyed have strong attachment to their job and they perform their tasks with great passion and zeal. In spite of low salary and adverse working conditions, more than 50% of the librarians rated their job satisfaction as 'high', which is quite remarkable. This indicates that, **like social activists, rural information professionals also are driven by the spirit of voluntarism and this spirit of the rural information workers could be used for creating a greater and more effective information dissemination infrastructure in the rural areas of the country.**

The findings of the survey also indicate that the rural librarians have inadequate theoretical and practical knowledge for carrying out their job responsibilities properly. They receive almost no training and are expected to deliver their services on the basis of common sense and common knowledge. As a result, the quality of their service is low and often unsatisfactory to the users. This calls for a completely new approach for rural information works as well as information professionals. Government and the policy makers must realize that rural librarians and information workers are performing a vital task for the socio-economic development of the country and their contribution is no less than that of other professionals. This realization would automatically bring forth necessary changes and improvements in the sector.

An important finding of the study is that, rural information professionals face a number of obstacles while discharging their duties. A sustainable rural information dissemination infrastructure could not be designed without taking proper steps to remove these obstacles. The following pie-chart shows these obstacles:

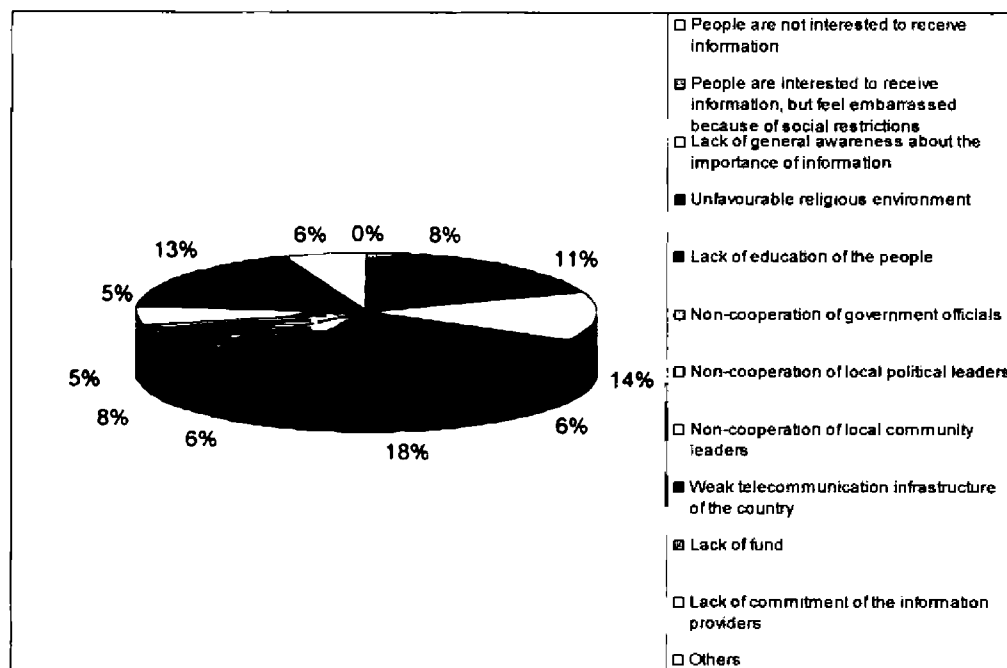


Figure 9: Pie chart showing the major problems faced by rural librarians in discharging their duties

They feel that allocation of enough funds by the government, establishment of more libraries, formulation of library-friendly policies and large scale literacy campaigns are some of the steps which need to be taken to deal with the above mentioned problems.

Another significant finding of the study is that, although many technology based information centres or telecentres have started operating in various parts of Bangladesh, **traditional library services are still preferred by many information providers as well as the larger cross-sections of rural people.** This is evident from the popularity of many traditional rural libraries in many parts of Bangladesh, some of whom have been mentioned in this study. These libraries have proved that, if the library collection can adequately reflect the information needs of the local people and the services could be rendered in an innovative way, rural libraries could become very successful. The following chart shows that, the most common service offered by the sample libraries is traditional library service. Although it is true that telecentres and Union Information and Service Centres (UISCs) do not provide traditional library services, these centres frequently receive request from rural people to provide traditional library service.

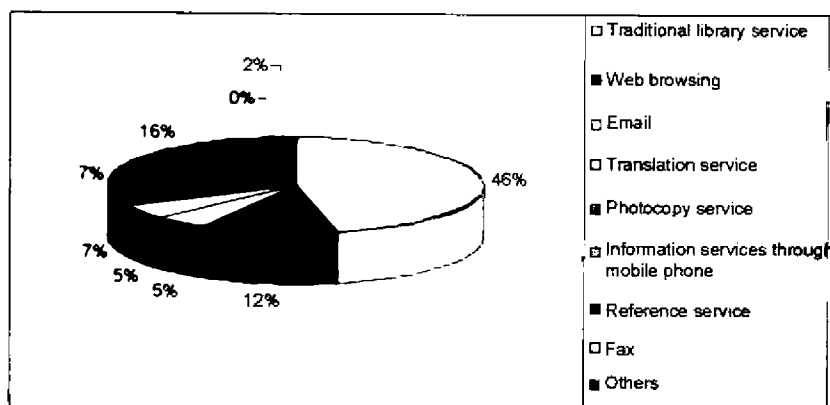


Figure 10: Pie-chart showing the services commonly provided by the rural information workers

Sometimes, critics argue that, the utility of traditional library service to the rural people is decreasing and that, its demand in the future will be even less. But when we consider the unmatched popularity and acceptability of some traditional rural libraries like Shah

Agricultural Library in Naogaon or Dihi Union Public Library in Jessore, we realize that the success or acceptability of a library depends on the quality of its services, its relevance to the needs of the local people and its ability to devise new and innovative ways to attract the users. For example, Shah Agricultural Library has emerged as a major source of up-to-date agricultural information for the farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs of the locality and also as a platform where people can meet together and share information and ideas. This library is also receiving information and logistics support from various government agencies, thereby acting as an access point for farmers and agricultural enthusiasts to receive government services and information. The researcher is of the opinion that, the recent surge of interest in 'alternative' information dissemination mechanisms like telecentres and community technology centres sometimes overshadows the significance of traditional rural library services. Examples of successful 'traditional' rural libraries furnished in Chapter 3 clearly shows that these libraries still play a significant role in the lives of rural people. Their success lies in the fact that, they have tailored their services to suit not only the distinctive information needs of the rural people, but also their habits and attitudes regarding the use of information.

An overwhelming majority of people who attended to the survey supported the establishment of a library in every village of Bangladesh. A significant number of these people are regular library goers and the fact that their local libraries do not have enough collection to meet their demands is deplored by them. Therefore, it is up to the planners, social workers, educationalists and GO-NGO activists to come up with effective plans and programmes for meeting the information needs of rural people. As the survey findings shows, the quality of information services rendered by people like agricultural extension workers, health workers, social workers, religious leaders, etc. are not satisfactory to the rural people. Although some NGOs and research organisations have been operating rural information centres in various regions of the country and many of them have been proved to be very successful, they are more or less

experimental in nature and they have not been founded under a coordinated, nation-wide programme. Therefore, in order to fulfil the multifarious information needs of rural people of Bangladesh, a comprehensive and coordinated approach needs to be taken under people living in even the remotest and most marginal areas of the country, too, will be able to get hold of their required information in an easy and cost-effective way. The researcher is of the view that, the 4501 Union Information and Service Centres (UISCs), founded by the Government in November 2010, could be an excellent medium to make that happen. In spite of the fact that the UISCs have been grappling with various problems and limitations since their inception, they have tremendous potentials as an effective medium for disseminating information to the rural people of Bangladesh.

The evolving role of UISCs in rural areas

Although the true extent of the impact of Union Information and Service Centres (UISCs) on the lives of rural people is debatable, it is quite clear that they have great potential to positively affect the lives of rural people. The UISCs started their journey with high hopes and aspirations. The fact that the government itself was behind such a big initiative was a strong as well as a weak point for the UISCs. The backing of the government was its biggest strength, because without the government's support, it was not easy to involve the Union Parishads with the activities of the UISCs. However, since governmental activities tend to be sluggish and full of bureaucratic complexities, there were reasons to be sceptical about the future of the initiative.

Almost one year has elapsed since the inauguration of the UISCs. Although it is too early to make a reliable assessment of the performance of the UISCs, it can be said that, while the UISCs have not been fully able to live up to expectations, they have indeed started to make an impact on the lives of rural people. The detractors of UISC initiative argue that, the setting-up of 4501 UISCs simultaneously all over country was a premature and unplanned step. More research needed to have been undertaken for such a big initiative. This statement is largely true, because, according to newspaper report, almost

half the UISCs were found to be inactive, and in many cases non-existent, in the middle of 2011. Even if we consider this report to be exaggerated, it cannot be denied that, many UISCs remained non-functional even after six to eight months of their official inauguration. There are many reasons behind this. While conducting this research, the researcher visited more than 30 UISCs in various parts of the country and found at least one fifth of the UISCs closed. The officials of the Union Parishad put the blame on the UISC entrepreneurs. However, the entrepreneurs maintained that, they keep the UISC closed because there are little demands for their services and the UP officials, the UP Chairmen in particular, do not cooperate with them. Lack of cooperation and coordination between UIC entrepreneurs and UP officials seems to be the biggest roadblock to the success of UISCs. According to many UISC entrepreneurs, the UP officials do not cooperate with the UISCs owing to the fact that, they cannot commit corruption and malpractices because of the presence of UISC entrepreneurs on the UP premises. However, the UP officials always vehemently denied this accusation. Financial sustainability of the UISC also remains a major concern. In spite of much enthusiasm on the part of the UISC entrepreneurs, many of them became disillusioned right after the inauguration of the UISCs because of low turnout of people at the UISCs. This was mainly because of lack of publicity as well as limited facilities at the UISCs. At the outset, the government failed to supply adequate number of equipment (computer, photocopy machine, fax machine, scanner) to many UISCs, which resulted in dissatisfaction and annoyance of common people. However, in spite of a less-than satisfactory start, many UISCs have started to achieve varying degrees of success. This has happened as a result of redesigning the services of the UISCs in accordance with the needs of local people. For example, guided by the local Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), Kashipur UISC in Narayanganj district took photographs of hundreds of students who were sitting for primary school certificate examination and succeeded in solving its financial problems. Similarly, Ataikula UISC in Pabna district earned a substantial amount of money by preparing birth registration cards and citizenship certificates in English, which were needed by expatriate Bangladeshis for working abroad legally. It shows that, if the UISC

entrepreneurs can plan their services properly, taking into consideration the specific needs of rural people, they can make the UISCs financially sustainable. However, one point needs to be mentioned here. Although the UISCs are supposed to be 'Union Information and Service Centre', it seems that their 'information providing role' is greatly undermined. They do not contain any information collection from which they can provide information and reference services to the users. All they are presently doing is sending and receiving email, doing scanning, making photocopies, taking photographs, helping people to fill-up electronic forms, etc. But as the success of traditional library services depicted in the Chapter 3 Indicates, mainstream library and information services based on printed collections (books, magazines, etc.) are still greatly favoured by rural people. Therefore, if the UISCs develop a selective collection of books and other printed materials including maps, reports, newspapers, etc., it can increase the acceptability and use of the UISCs. Another drawback of the UISCs is that, every UISC is operating on its own and there is lack of coordination among them. They also lack a centrally coordinated system under which they can get updated information on a regular basis and share their own information with others. Although the Access to Information Programme (A2I) at the Prime Minister's Office organises various training programmes for the UISC entrepreneurs, these are not enough and these programmes do not make up for the lack of a central coordination system among the UISCs. Therefore, if the UISCs could work under a well-planned national information system, their effectiveness and acceptability both would be substantially increased. The model plan given in the next chapter would furnish such a system based on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 9

MODEL PLAN FOR RURAL INFORMATION DISSEMINATION SYSTEM

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MODEL PLAN FOR RURAL INFORMATION DISSEMINATION SYSTEM

Introduction and background

As the findings of this study show, information needs of the rural people of Bangladesh could be best met by developing a nation-wide information infrastructure with particular focus on addressing the specific, localized information needs of the grassroots people. As the foregoing discussions have indicated, this information infrastructure must take into account the socio-economic background of rural people, local culture, language, demographic peculiarities, etc. Rural people of Bangladesh are ready and willing to use information for improving their livelihood, but they face many challenges like lack of education, lack of awareness and motivation, weak communications infrastructure, power shortage, uncertain law and order situation, bureaucratic complexities, etc. Any rural information dissemination system must be aware of these challenges and make enough provisions for removing these obstacles, or, at least, alleviate their severity.

Experience from around the world shows that, there could not be any “fit-for-all” solution to the problem of rural information dissemination. Every country in the world is trying to develop its information dissemination systems in its own way, based on the particular needs of its people and the socio-politico-economic realities of the country. However, when the question of rural information system comes, some common elements or points need to be taken into account, and it is applicable for every country in the world. Kempson (1986) observed that community information services of any type should be rooted in the community and for the most part, facilitated by the

members of that community. She also opined that, the services (of the rural information centre) should be a channel for transferring information both to and from the local community. Mostert (1998) describes the community library as one that has 'moved away from the western public library model towards service-oriented systems, based on the needs of the community as a whole.' He identified some common characteristics of an ideal rural community library, which are as follows:

Establishment	- Established at the request of the community - Needs full co-operation from community
Governance	- Participative management in the form of a community committee - Participation ensures relevant services
Finance	Funds provided by community/sponsors
Aims	- Proactive service - Empowerment of all community members, especially the disadvantaged - Making all community resources available to all community members
Users	Can determine membership – either open to whole community or restrictions can be imposed
Information	- Directly linked to the everyday lives of community members - Two kinds of information: Survival information, for example, on health and childcare; Citizens' action information, for example, information concerning social, political and legal rights - Mainly alternative materials such as pamphlets, brochures, newspaper clippings and oral material - Proactively provides information to the disadvantaged in the community to help them cope with problems in their lives
Services	- Active interaction between librarians and users - Proactive approach necessitates different forms of service, for example: Information and referral – Linking the correct service with the correct user. Direct service – Face to face contact between the librarian and user to solve user's problem. Back-up service – based on active involvement of library staff in community activities and services that can make the community aware of sources that can solve their problems. - Self help – teaching the users to become self-reliant - Each community determines the type of service rendered
Staff	Different qualities than those of traditional librarians are required from staff members, for example: Staff are known to and trusted by the community. Good communication and motivational skills are essential. Staff are able to repackage information
Co-operation	Active co-operation exists between library and community organisations

Table 77: Common characteristics of an ideal rural community library proposed by Mostert

Mostert's observations are very important because it takes into account all the necessary issues that directly or indirectly influence the success of rural information systems. Among others, it highlights the role of community involvement in every sphere of rural information centre's activities and also the fact that the resources, services and programmes of the rural information centre must reflect the specific needs of the local people. Although Mostert has proposed these indicators on the basis of his research done in the context of Africa, these are quite relevant in the context of other areas, including Bangladesh. Almost all these points have been identified or highlighted in the findings of this Ph.D. research as well, namely, need-based rural information services, importance of traditional library services and print materials along with electronic documents, close liaison between the information centre and the local community, etc. These components, therefore, would have a direct bearing upon the Model Plan proposed under this study.

Objective of the model plan

Main objective of the Model Plan is to propose a workable system of grassroots level information dissemination in Bangladesh. It presents a comprehensive structure, starting from the central level to the Union level, for the flow of information in both upward and downward directions, and dissemination of information to the larger cross sections of rural people.

Functions

Major functions of the Model Plan are as follows:

1. To present a comprehensive mechanism for information dissemination in the rural areas of Bangladesh.
2. To identify the major components and sub-components of a nation-wide rural information dissemination system.
3. To delineate the roles of all parties who would be involved in the act of rural information dissemination.

4. To indicate ways for information flow to and from the grassroots level.
5. To propose how proper monitoring and evaluation of the whole system could be done.
6. To indicate how rural people from all social, economic or religious backgrounds including the people living in far-flung and inaccessible areas could be benefited from the rural information system.
7. To propose how the role of the rural information centre in the society could be strengthened by bringing more dynamism and variation in its activities with the introduction of social awareness raising campaigns, advocacy and literacy initiatives, etc.
8. To indicate how the rural information system could be expanded and scaled up for meeting the changing information needs of an increasing number of clients in a sustainable way.

Scope

The model plan includes all the major components necessary for the generation, processing, sharing and preservation of information with an aim to ensure free flow of information among all concerned parties. i.e. GO-NGO officials at district, Upazila, Union and rural levels, local elites, public representatives, teachers, students, social activists, cultural activists, development enthusiasts, and, most of all, the rural people. Therefore, it makes provisions not only for ensuring flow of information from the central to the grassroots level, but also from the grassroots to the central level and beyond. Considering the importance of both print and electronic information, the model plan makes provisions for developing two separate collections of print and electronic documents. For increasing the acceptability of rural information centres (UISCs) and bringing dynamism to their activities, the model plan also proposes various relevant and related activities like literacy campaign, awareness raising, advocacy, etc.

Description of the model plan

The model plan envisages a nation-wide information infrastructure focusing particularly on the Union Information and Service Centres (UISCs) already established by the Government of Bangladesh. It is an information dissemination mechanism aimed not only at distributing up-to-date information on various subjects to the grassroots communities, but also to collect and share information generated by the rural people themselves. Although it has a hierarchical structure, flow of information in both upward and downward directions is ensured, and, to promote transparency and accountability, active involvement of wider cross sections of people is also encouraged.

The UISCs, as it has been already made clear, were established as a part of the present government's 'Digital Bangladesh' campaign. Although they were originally envisaged as one-stop information service centres, many new service components and activities were added subsequently to the core services of the UISC. To facilitate service provision through the UISCs, several committees at different levels were also proposed. As it has been already mentioned, every UISC has two committees: a General Committee and an Executive Committee. However, in reality, most of the committees have not been established, or where established, are not functioning at all. This is creating a huge vacuum in terms of supply of adequate information and proper monitoring and evaluation of the UISCs' activities. The researcher held formal and informal discussions with A2I officials at different times and was informed that steps were being taken to activate these committees. However, it is clear that, until well planned, decisive actions are taken at the central level, these committees would not be functioning properly. And until and unless these committees are functional, we cannot expect the UISCs to be fully functional and contributing towards the achievement of the broader and greater goal of national development. Keeping this in mind, a new structure, starting at the very top with Central Coordination Committee and ending at the UISC, with the Union Information and Service Centre Committee has been proposed in the model plan.

Major components of the plan, along with their tasks and responsibilities, are mentioned below:

1. Central Coordination Council (CCC): This council forms the top-most tier of the proposed rural information infrastructure. It will consist of representatives from various ministries and from the Access to Information (A2I) Programme. Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives (LGRD&C) would act as the Chairman of this Council. The CCC would finalize which information would be disseminated to the grassroots people through the UISCs. It would assess information, especially information related to the livelihood development of rural and grassroots people, on a continuous basis and would arrange to send the information to the lower level – the Upazila-level Coordination Committees (ULCCs). It would also evaluate the reports sent from the lower levels and formulate plans and policies relating to rural information services and will monitor the whole system. Although almost all the government ministries can participate and contribute in this venture, the following ministries are likely to play a more direct and active role:

- Ministry of Agriculture
- Ministry of Communications
- Ministry of Cultural Affairs
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Environment and Forests
- Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare & Overseas Employment
- Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock
- Ministry of Food and Disaster Management
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- Ministry of Home Affairs
- Ministry of Information
- Ministry of Labour and Employment
- Ministry of Land

- Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
- Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
- Ministry of Religious Affairs
- Ministry of Science and ICT
- Ministry of Social Welfare
- Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
- Ministry of Youth & Sports

2. District Commissioner's Office (DCO): The role of the DCO in this venture is rather limited. It would not play a direct role in the flow of information from the central level to the grassroots level and vice versa. It would only act as a link between the ULCC and the CCC at the time of reporting. Any reporting made by the ULCC to the upper level would go through the DCO and DCO would pass the report on to the upper level after keeping necessary information and statistics.

3. Upazila-level Coordination Committee (ULCC): Headed by the Upazila Chairman, this committee would have upazila level officers from various ministries and selective NGO representatives as members, while the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) would act as the Member Secretary. This committee would receive information from different organisations (GOs and NGOs) and would send the information to various UISCs under that Upazila. It would also monitor the activities of the UISCs by keeping close contacts with the UISCs and through field visits. It would also send various information received from the UISCs (for example, livelihood related indigenous information, best practices, etc.) to the upper level.

4. UISC General and Executive Committees: Every UISC will have two committees: one General Committee comprising rural people from different cross sections of life, and a nine-member Executive Committee, consisting of members elected by the General Committee members. Seven members of the Executive Committee will be elected by

the general committee members for a two-year term while the UP Chairman will be its ex-officio chairperson and the UISC entrepreneurs/coordinator will serve as the member secretary. This committee will be responsible for the overall operation of the UISC, plan the activities of the UISC and make sure that the plans are being implemented properly. It will sit regularly to monitor the activities of the UISCs and report to the upper levels.

5. Union Information and Service Centre (UISC): As the model plan suggests, the UISCs' activities would be quite different from and more wide-ranging than its present activities. At present, most of the UISCs are providing Internet, photocopying and photography services. If the model plan is implemented, the sphere of UISC's activities would be expanded considerably. As Figure-13 shows, the UISCs would become a common access point for various services and facilities. Besides acting as an information and communication centre, the UISC will help rural people, especially the disadvantaged and marginal communities, by creating linkages between them and various GO-NGO service providers. It will also carry out literacy programmes, arrange various events like day observation, rally, study circle, debate, etc., contribute in capacity building through training and would bring out publications (books, magazines, newsletters, posters, brochures, pamphlets, etc.) on wide ranging development issues. It will also provide mobile information support services for people living in far-flung and inaccessible areas. Although the UISC would be run on a commercial basis (by charging fee for various services), it would engage all-out efforts for developing voluntarism especially among the youth communities for benefiting the disadvantaged people in different ways.

While making the best use of the information channeled to the UISC from the upper level, every UISC would develop a database of local information collected from the grassroots level. These information should be extensively shared with the larger cross sections of people with the help of the UISC's own web site and the "*Jatiya e-Tathyakosh*" or National e-information repository maintained by the Access to Information (A2I) Programme. Besides, every UISC would develop a print collection of

selective books, journals and magazines. The subject matter of the books must be relevant to the specific needs of local people and the language and content of the books should be easily comprehensible to the UISC users. The UISC entrepreneurs must take a proactive role for letting people know about the activities of the UISC. For this purpose, extensive publicity campaign and marketing of information need to be carried out with an attempt to make everybody aware of the services of the UISC and the many benefits they could get by visiting the UISC. The UISC would provide its service in two ways: firstly, by providing services to the people who visit the UISCs and secondly, by taking the services of the UISC to the doorstep of people, especially people living in remote and far-flung areas. This can be done through mobile library, information and communication services. The UISC can use youth volunteers for this purpose.

The model plan suggests turning the UISCs into multipurpose community information centres with library and information services at its core. The present role of the UISCs is quite limited and most of them have no 'information providing' role. Although the Government has been relentless in its efforts to add new and innovative services to the core services of the UISCs, most of the UISCs have not yet started providing these services and the prospect of doing so in near future also is not very bright. The researcher paid visits to more than 20 UISCs in the districts of Noakhali, Lalmonirhat, Rangpur and Gaibandha and found that the role of most UISCs was limited to that of a cyber café, digital studio and/or photocopying outlet. Therefore, the researcher is of the opinion that, if the UISCs are to have far-reaching impacts on the lives of rural people, they must realign their position in the rural society by providing need based services to the rural people in order to meet their diverse livelihood requirements. Therefore, major focus of the UISCs services should be:

- Information providing
- Service delivery
- Awareness raising
- Empowerment through capacity building

- Networking and linkage creation
- Documentation, publication and experience sharing
- Policy lobbying and advocacy
- Rural database development
- Literacy campaign

The UISC committee would decide what information collections best suit the needs of local people. The need of students, farmers, traders, small businessmen, female entrepreneurs and other groups should be taken into consideration while developing the UISC print and electronic collection. Many students coming from poor families cannot afford to buy textbooks and other reading materials. Every UISC should build a special collection of educational materials to cater to the needs of these students.

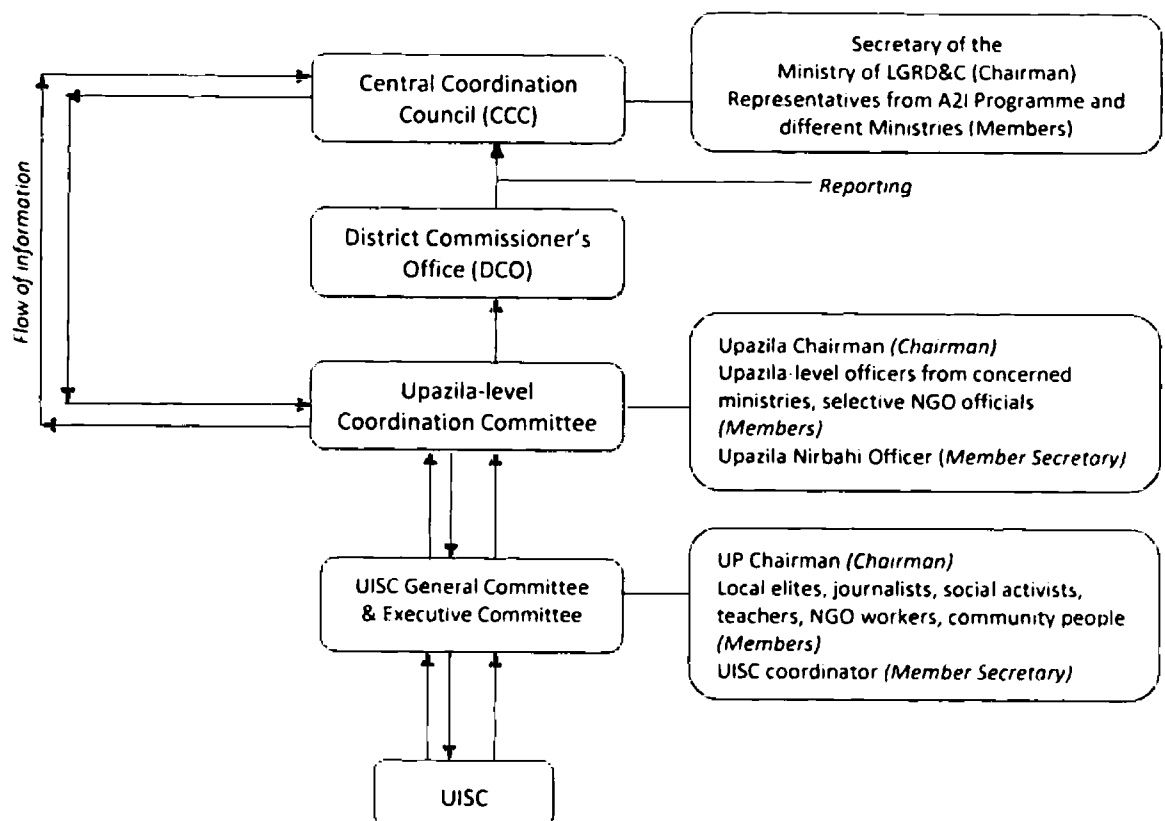


Figure 11: The Rural information dissemination infrastructure

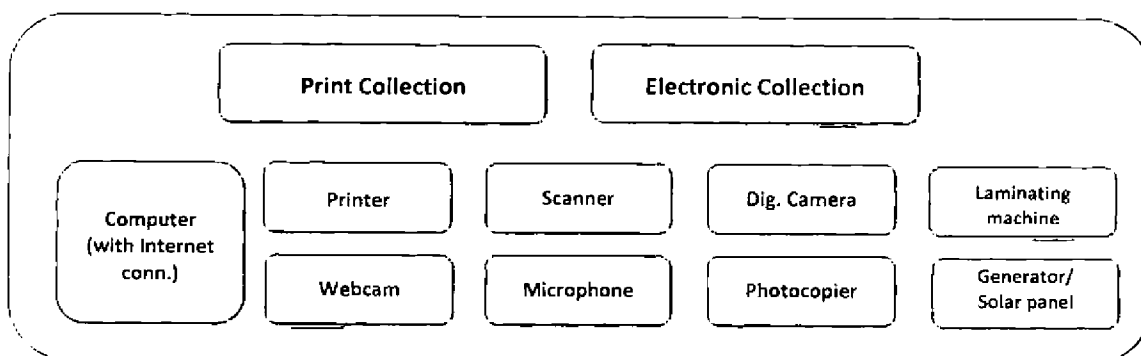


Figure 12: Resources and equipment of UISC

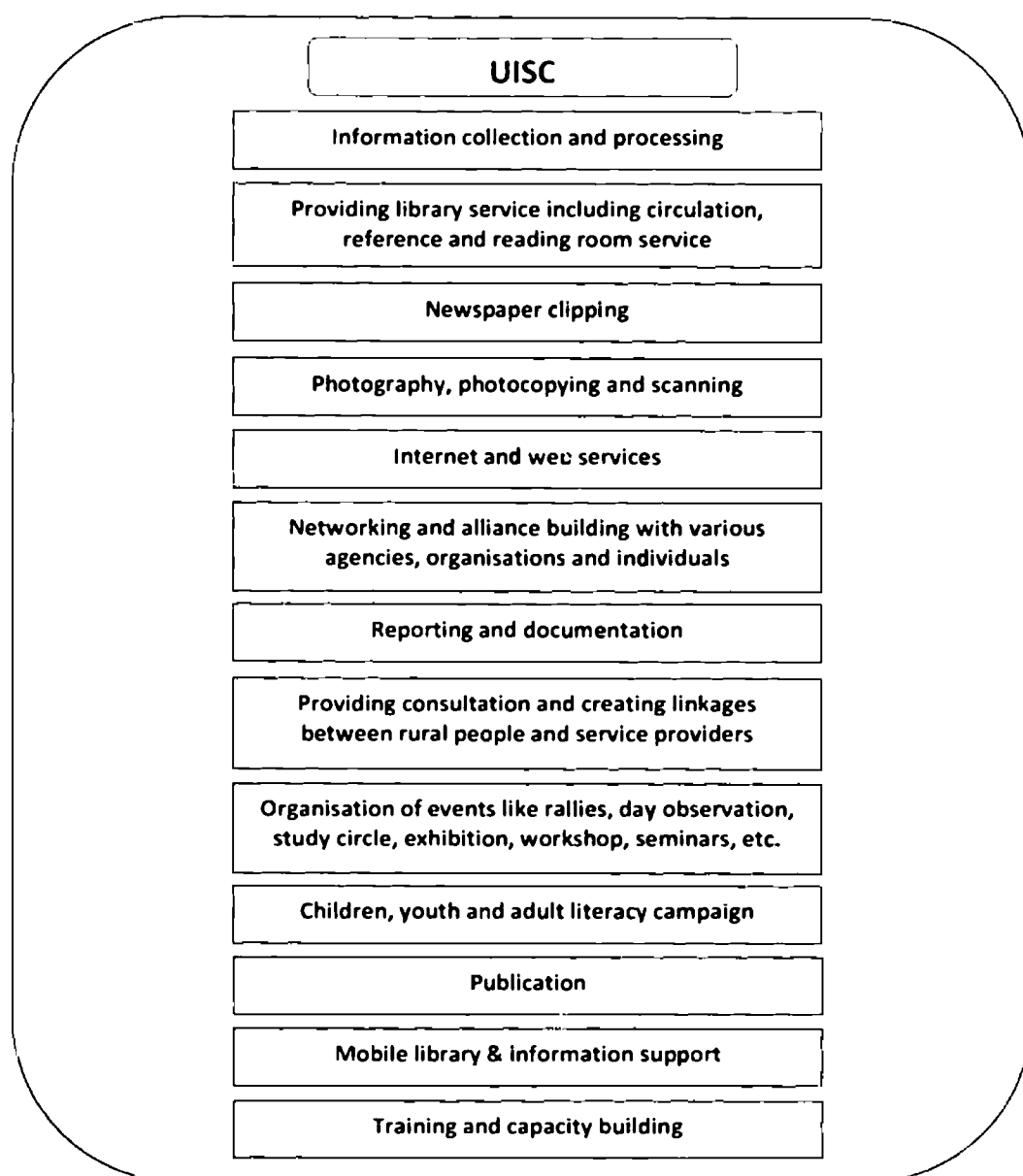


Figure 13: Proposed services and activities of the UISC

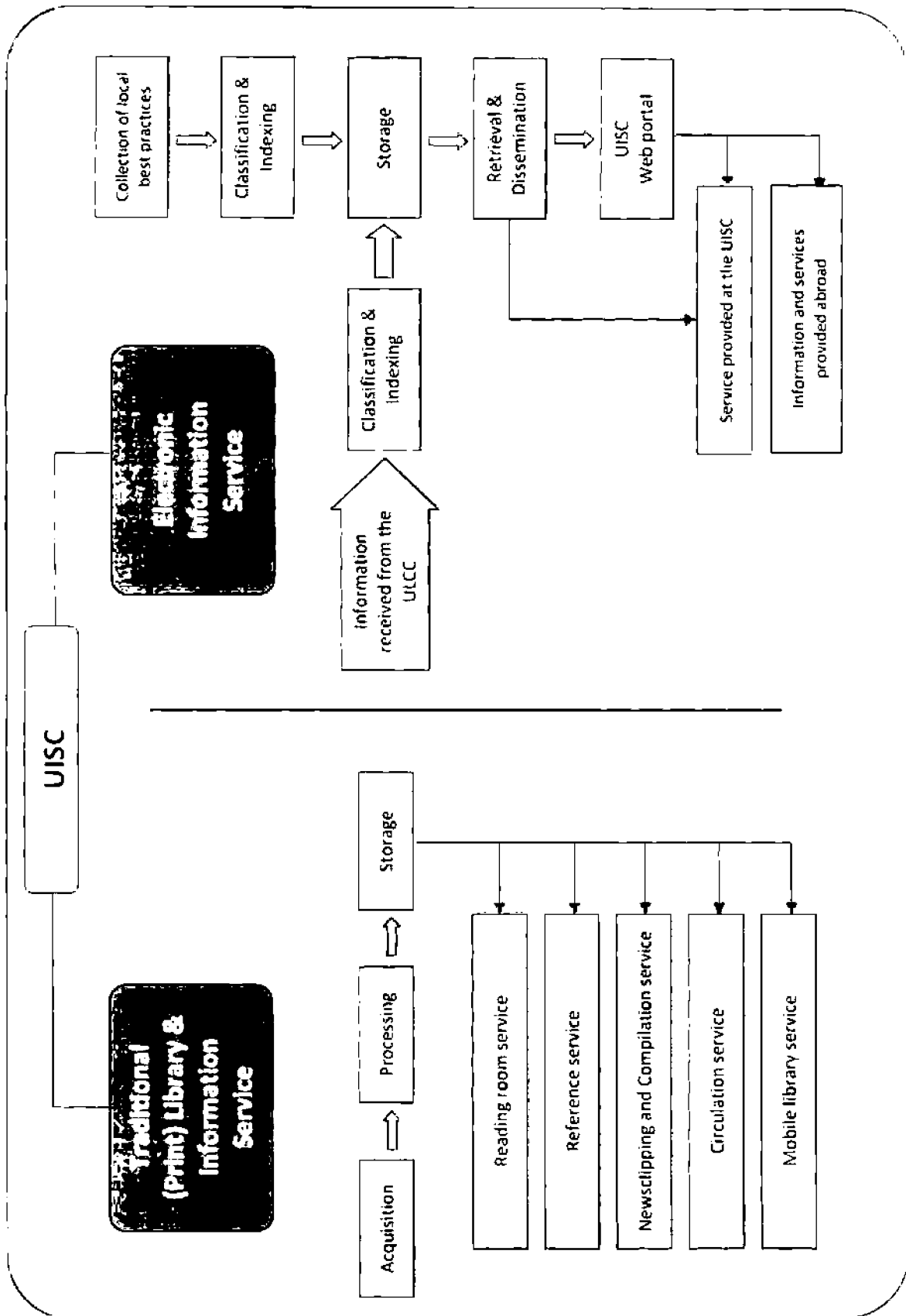


Figure 5.4: Print and Electronic information services mechanism of the UIISC

As mentioned above, the UISC will provide both print and electronic information services. The print-based services will be based on books, magazines, periodicals, newspapers, etc. The UISC will collect books and other print materials through purchase, donation, exchange and other ways. These materials will be processed and preserved by UISC staff following standard library management procedures. Major services based on the print collection will be: reading room service, reference service, circulation service (for registered members), newspaper clipping and compilation service (clippings on selective issues will be collected regularly; besides, issue based compilations will be prepared for reference and research purposes) and mobile library service. Boats, rickshaw vans, rickshaws or any other suitable vehicle could be used for running the mobile library service.

The Electronic information service will be based primarily on the information provided from the upper level, i.e. ULCC. These information will be scanned, analyzed, indexed and stored in the UISC's own database. Besides, the UISC will collect indigenous information from respective Unions and adjacent areas which would include case studies, local news, local experiences and best practices in the fields of health, agriculture, social welfare, cooperatives, disaster management, product marketing, employment, self-help initiatives, etc. Every UISC will maintain a web portal which would act as the access point for all UISC information and services. Anybody, from anywhere in the world, will be able to tap into the information repository of the UISC by visiting its web site.

To successfully carry out its activities, the capacity of the UISC staff members must be strengthened. This could be done through training programmes arranged regularly at local, regional and national levels. Extensive exposure of UISC entrepreneurs to national and international level should be ensured so that they can gain experience and expertise by witnessing best practices from home and abroad. The information providing, service delivery, training and publication activities would contribute directly in the financial

sustainability of the UISCs. If the model plan could be implemented properly, all the UISCs of the country would build a nation-wide information infrastructure which would provide necessary data, information and intellectual inputs not only for rural development, but also for sustainable socio-economic development of the country. The UISC network could be connected to other local and international networks of development organisations, research organisations, universities, GO-NGO bodies, UN agencies, etc. which would lead to a global exchange of information, experience and expertise sharing for the benefit of the underprivileged communities on a world scale.

Infrastructure

One of the most positive factors for building a sustainable rural information dissemination system in Bangladesh is that, the country already has more than 4500 information dissemination points in the rural areas of Bangladesh, i.e. the UISCs founded by the Government. Therefore, it is only logical to utilize these centres for the purpose of rural information dissemination rather than establishing something completely new. The UISCs, therefore, constitute the main element of the proposed rural information infrastructure, which would, naturally, be aided by other bodies, agencies, networks and organisations. Almost all UISCs now have laptop and desktop computers, digital cameras, modem, scanner and microphone. Some have photocopy machines and multimedia projectors. In the proposed model plan, all UISCs will have a print information collection comprising books, magazines, newspapers, reports, etc. based on the specific information needs of the rural people. Necessary furniture, i.e. book shelves, newspaper stands, chairs and reading tables also will have to be bought. To guard against power disruptions, it is advisable for the UISCs to acquire solar panel. Considering the high price of solar panels, the UISCs could purchase the panels in conjunction with the Union Parishad.

Manpower and others

Presently, the UISCs are run by a 'UISC entrepreneur'. In most cases, he/she is a local youth to whom the UISC is a medium for self-employment. Most of the UISC entrepreneurs possess graduate degrees and they have adequate skills for running the UISCs. However, if the proposed model plan is to be fully implemented, a UISC would need to employ more personnel to assist the UISC entrepreneur. Based on the area and population covered by the UISC and the scope of its activities, the number of UISC personnel could vary widely. Keeping in view the many different activities of the UISC proposed under this study, every UISC would require at least three staff members. The UISC would be run under the leadership of the UISC entrepreneurs, whose designation could be 'UISC Coordinator' or 'UISC Manager'. He/she will be assisted by two staff members whose designation could be 'UISC Assistant Coordinator' or, simply, 'Facilitator'. At least one of the staff members should be female (The UISCs currently has this provision, but most of the UISCs have been unable to find suitable female staff). The staff members of the UISC should be recruited from the local community, with direct and extensive knowledge about the local community, local geography, economy, politics and other factors. The entrepreneurs must have good understanding and skills in classification and cataloging, preservation and dissemination of information. If the UISC can successfully carry out its commercial and non-commercial ventures, it is expected to generate enough income for paying the salaries of the staff members and bearing all necessary expenditure for running the UISC.

Limitations

One of the biggest challenges of implementing the model plan is recruiting the staff members with correct skill-sets and motivation for successfully running the UISCs. Besides, this model plan calls for considerable extension of the present role of the UISCs by incorporating a range of different services. There is a possibility that all UISCs will not be able to introduce the services at once. In that case, these services could be introduced gradually or phase-wise. When the UISCs would feel that they have acquired necessary skills and capacity for carrying out the services effectively. Ensuring proper

monitoring and evaluation of UISC activities is another challenge. Without regular monitoring and evaluation, it will be difficult to assess the performance and impact of the UISCs. In order to successfully implement the model plan, effective collaboration and cooperation among various government ministries, divisions and departments and other bodies is essential. Ensuring this collaboration and cooperation is another big challenge. However, all these challenges and limitations could be overcome if there is strong determination on the part of the government and others concerned. Information is the lifeblood of modern society and it could bring lasting changes in the lives of millions of disadvantaged rural people. People are now aware of this fact and this awareness would act as the biggest enabler for implementing this model plan.

Budget (Cost benefit analysis)

Since a nation-wide UISC network is already in place in the newly created and pre-existing Union Parishad complex building, and most of the UISCs are equipped with basic hardware equipment, implementation of the model plan would not incur much additional expenses. Major heads of additional expenditure would include building a print collection in each UISC, purchasing furniture and fixtures, carrying out mobile library services, developing a web portal for each UISC, etc. For strengthening the UISCs and ensuring their smooth operation and long-term sustainability, the need for detailed cost-benefit and user studies has been stressed in the recommendation chapter of the study. However, developing a small but selective collection of books and magazines could be done from the UISC's own income. The collection could then be expanded gradually with the help of local community, GOs and NGOs. Necessary financing for other proposed activities could be done either by the government or the UISCs themselves. If the commercial services of the UISCs could be started in full swing, the financial worries would lessen considerably. This would pave the way not only for introducing new and innovative services, but also for attaining long term financial sustainability of the UISCs.

CHAPTER 10

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MODEL PLAN

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Plans and policies are nothing new in Bangladesh and since the country's independence, innumerable plans, programmes and policies have been devised, not only by the government, but also by non-governmental bodies and international development partners. More than four decades have passed in the meantime and the end result of most of these high-flying and high-sounding plans has been close to nothing. This shows that, devising plans and policies is not enough; effectively implementing these plans for meeting the intended objectives is more important. Therefore, coming up with a model or ideal plan for comprehensive rural information dissemination is the easier part. More challenging or harder task is to implement that plan for ensuring sustainable socio-economic development of rural people.

As it is evident from the literature review as well as the findings of this study, unless the rural information system reflects the real needs of the rural people and addresses all the issues that have direct and indirect bearing upon the lives of rural people, any plan, however impeccable-looking, is destined to fall through. Bangladesh is now going through an important period in its journey towards development and self-sufficiency. In spite of grappling with myriad problems like population explosion, unemployment, corruption, political instability and as such, the country has set itself a target of emerging as a middle-income country by 2021. The government has identified information and communication technologies (ICTs) as one the main tools for achieving

this target. Union Information Resource Centres (UISCs) are one of the media through which the government is trying to materialize the dream of digital Bangladesh.

The philosophy behind the establishment of 4501 UISC all over the country was indeed noble. It goes without saying that these unique rural centres could play a phenomenal role in helping rural and marginalized people of Bangladesh benefit from the evolving information society and contribute towards socio-economic advancement of the country. That is why the Model Plan has put forward a comprehensive information dissemination system for rural Bangladesh with the UISC at its centre. The researcher has been following the activities of the UISC since their inception and has had a series of discussions with UISC entrepreneurs, Union Parishad chairmen and members and other concerned people, especially officials at the Access to Information (A2I) Programme at the Prime Minister's Office. From these discussions and the experience of visiting a number of centres over the last one year, the researcher firmly believes that, UISCs indeed hold great promise and potential. The A2I planners, policy makers and officials, also, are quite sincere and sometimes passionate about the whole venture. That is why they have been relentless in their efforts to make the UISCs a unique platform for fulfilling various livelihood needs of the rural people. Admittedly, it is not enough to confine the UISCs strictly within their information providing role. If the UISCs only act as rural library or information centre, they will not be able to achieve financial sustainability and would have to be dependent of government's financial assistance all the time. Therefore, they must have some ways for earning a substantial amount of money so that they can not only bear their operational costs, but contributes towards community development by carrying out new and innovative programme activities on their own. But what the UISCs are doing at present, is not consistent with their main agenda, i.e. providing vital livelihood information to the rural people. It was never the intention of the planners of the UISCs that they would confine themselves only within income generating programmes ignoring their information providing, network building, policy lobbying and awareness raising roles. The proposed model has tried to address

this vital issue by taking a more holistic approach, where all the major dimensions of the activities a true rural information centre have been taken into account. In a developing country like Bangladesh, a unique rural centre like the UISC cannot restrict itself only to some IT based financial and communication services, it must broaden the horizon of its sphere by becoming a hub of various social, economic, cultural, educational, communicational and other activities. The Model Plan envisions such a broader and comprehensive role for the UISC, with other necessary components contributing towards creating a broad-based national network of information sharing and dissemination.

Based on the review of existing literature, discussion with UISC entrepreneurs, public representatives, social activists and intelligentsia, direct observation through field visit and analysis of the survey data, the researcher would like to put forward the following recommendations for ensuring successful implementation of the Model Plan and thus creating an effective information dissemination system for rural Bangladesh:

1. The Government of Bangladesh should take proper actions to incorporate the issue of rural information dissemination system in its national development programmes and relevant policy documents. Since successful implementation of the Model Plan requires active participation and leadership of various government agencies, this plan will never be implemented unless there are strong policy directions from the government. It is a common scenario, especially in the developing countries, that, when various government ministries or agencies are involved in a common activity, they often tend to squabble over small and insignificant matters, in an attempt to assert the ascendancy of one ministry or agency over another. To prevent this, there should be strong policy directions from the Government and proper monitoring.
2. Monitoring and evaluation at every stage or level is the key for successful implementation of the Model Plan. The government must devise an extensive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plan which will ensure timely and effective

completion of each activity. For this purpose, an M&E Committee comprising some members of the CCC might be formed, which will periodically monitor the activity of the whole system and evaluate its performance based on the reports sent from the lower levels.

3. Although more than 4500 UISCs have already been established, it is evident from the forgoing discussions that many of these UISCs are not functioning properly. Although various efforts are being taken from the Access to Information (A2I) Programme to strengthen the weak and non-functioning UISCs, it seems that these efforts are not well-planned and well-coordinated. Therefore, the strengthening of these UISCs should be done in a coordinated manner, with specific time limits. Until all the UISCs are brought to the same level in terms of resources, capacities and motivation, the proposed rural information system will not be able to fulfill its intended objectives fully.
4. Still, there are many UISCs which are very ill-equipped. Many of them have only one computer and nothing else. This is hampering their activities seriously. Therefore, immediate steps need to be taken so that these UISCs could offer their services to their clientele with all necessary tools and equipment.
5. Successful implementation of the Model Plan calls for considerable financial assistance from the government. Equipping every UISC with all necessary facilities requires financial assistance from the government on a continuous basis. Weak UISCs would need subsidies from the government for specific period of time so that they can overcome their weakness and achieve financial sustainability.
6. Recruitment of adequate number of field staff with necessary skill set and motivation is another key to the success of the whole venture. There are innumerable educated but unemployed youth in the rural areas of Bangladesh. They have a strong passion and urge to serve their country, but have limited opportunity to do so. Many of these youths fall prey to unscrupulous people like dishonest manpower exporters, black marketers, smugglers, etc. Often losing

valuable assets as well as their morale, many of the frustrated youths turn to violence, crime and other anti-social activities. If they could be engaged with the activities of the UISC, these youths will not only be able to serve the society, they will also be able to achieve financial solvency. This, in turn, would contribute towards national development through employment, social welfare and a decline in crimes and anti-social activities.

7. For a socially beneficial venture like rural information services to be successful, the spirit of voluntarism is vital. The activities of the UISC, by their very nature, are different from other commercially-run ventures. Therefore, if the people who are responsible for running the UISCs are not infused with the spirit of voluntarism and take this venture only as a means for income generation, the UISCs will never be able to play their intended roles in the society. All cross-sections of rural people must feel empathy towards the UISC and have a sense of ownership in the programme activities of the UISC. If they feel that the UISC is only run as a commercial venture without any commitment towards the societal needs of rural people, this empathy will not grow among them. Therefore, it is important for the UISCs to actively practice, pursue and promote voluntarism to achieve their social sustainability.
8. In order for the Model Plan to be successfully implemented, extensive alliance-building and networking among concerned bodies, organisations, institutions and individuals should be done. If free flow of information and sharing of ideas, experiences and expertise among all the participating agencies and network partners at home and abroad could be ensured, this would strengthen the rural information network and contribute towards effective implementation of the Model Plan.
9. A nation-wide awareness raising campaign need to be carried out in order to ensure overall success of the proposed rural information system. This campaign will cover not only the rural areas but also the urban areas, because if the urban people are not properly sensitized, they will tend to underestimate the

importance of the system and without whole-hearted support of all the people of the country, long term success of the rural information system could not be ensured. This awareness raising campaign should be carried out through publications, television and radio programmes, posters, leaflets, stickers, banners, rallies, exhibition and folk media like jatra-pala, drama, songs, etc.

10. Bangladesh's telecommunications infrastructure is quite poor. As of 2010, only 0.6% of the population of Bangladesh can use Internet, which makes our Internet penetration one of the lowest in this region (Internet World Stats, 2010). If a comprehensive rural information system, extending to the length and breadth of the country, is to be developed, the telecommunications infrastructure of the country must be strengthened on a continuous basis. Out of the reach of the broadband Internet network, the UISCs are presently using wireless modems for providing Internet services. All six mobile operators of the country are providing wireless Internet services, while two companies: BanglaLion and Augere (brand name Qubee) have been providing WiMax Internet services. However, in most cases, the performance of wireless Internet services is much slower in rural areas as compared to urban areas. These services, along with broadband Internet services in the rural areas, must be strengthened for ensuring success of the proposed rural information system.
11. It will not be possible to implement the plan without building the capacity of the information service providers and other concerned. At present, some capacity building training and workshops are organised by A2I programme and Bangladesh Computer Council. These programmes need to be regularized and spread to the grassroots levels. Besides, extensive Training of Trainers (ToT) programmes also should be undertaken with an aim to create a pool of skilled manpower who will be able to provide technical and technological assistance to the rural information service providers.
12. Presently, library and information professionals are not involved in any way in the planning or implementation of the UISCs or other similar initiatives. This is

undermining the efficiency of the existing information services, because, without proper guidance and suggestions of information professionals and specialists, no viable information system can be operated. Therefore, for ensuring effective implementation of the proposed rural information system, library and information professionals, academicians and specialists should be involved with this intervention.

13. In order for the Model Plan to be applied successfully, the information, experiences and ideas generated by this initiative should be shared. This can be done through various print and electronic media. The World Wide Web could be an excellent means for sharing the story of this initiative to the wider cross sections of people at home and abroad. It is also important that the model be promoted locally, by word of mouth, to as many people as possible.
14. If the rural people are to make most gainful use of the information conveyed to them through the rural information system, the information must be in a form which is easily understandable to them. For this purpose, locally relevant contents prepared in easily comprehensible language should be made available to them. The format in which the information is conveyed is also important. It has been observed that, semi literate and even literate rural people prefer booklets and leaflets written in large fonts, accompanied by relevant pictures. Most of them don't have much time to spare for reading books. Therefore, booklets, leaflets, brochures, stickers, posters, etc. should be given priority while preparing the information, education and communication (IEC) materials. With regard to electronic information system, the UISC entrepreneurs should act as intermediary and interpreter for helping rural people make the best use of the information they receive.
15. As it is revealed in the data analysis chapter, education, health, agriculture, marketing of products, law and human rights, entertainment and disaster management are some of the issues in which rural people mostly need information. Therefore, these issues should be given priority while designing the

rural information system. It must be made sure that rural people constantly receive up-to-date information in these and other relevant issues in a convenient form, so that they can utilize these information for improving their livelihood condition.

16. The UISC staff members must play a proactive role for guiding and instructing the users for using the information services and materials. Most of the rural people are not accustomed with using a library, and when it comes to computer-based information system, their discomfort and reluctance increase even more. Therefore, the UISC staff members should be very patient and understanding while providing information services. They should never express irritation or annoyance at the apparent lack of knowledge of the users or their clumsiness. They should help rural people interpret the information and, if necessary, refer them to other sources of information so that their information need is fully satisfied. This would enable rural people to achieve information literacy and meet their information needs on their own.
17. Passing of the 'Right to Information (RTI) Act-2009' in the National Parliament of Bangladesh in March 2009 was a landmark event. Consequently, a National Information Commission has been formed and it has started working to ensure people's right to information. However, as the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) as well as the researcher's personal interviews with rural librarians and rural people revealed, most of them are not aware of the passing of this Act and its significance. For creating an information-conscious society, people from all spheres of life must be aware of the importance of right to information and the success of the proposed rural information system is also linked with proper implementation of the RTI Act. Because if the rural people are not aware of their right to receive and use information, they will not feel little motivation to seek for information. The UISCs should make people aware of their right to information and practice this right in all spheres of life.

18. Public representatives, religious leaders, local elders and opinion leaders play an important role in shaping the collective mindset of rural people. Therefore, for successful implementation of the Model Plan, these people should be effectively sensitized through sensitization meetings, discussion programmes and other means. These people have considerable influence on the lives of rural people and their non-cooperation and negative influence might hamper the implementation of the proposed rural information system. It will be much easier to reap expected benefits from the rural information system if these people could be motivated to play a positive role in this venture.
19. Planners and policy makers often tend to forget that the flow of information in the rural areas is not necessarily a one-way affair; rural people, too, have information to give and share. This information is embedded in their age-old traditions, experience and experimentations. That is why a meaningful rural information system must also make provisions for the collection, processing and sharing of rural people's knowledge. The system proposed in the Model Plan has taken this matter into consideration and made provisions for capturing, indexing, classifying and sharing these information with development activists and enthusiasts at home and abroad. An all-out effort needs to be taken to ensure that this vital component of the proposed system is never underestimated or ignored and rural people's experiences, best practices, traditional knowledge and experiments are given due importance.
20. Computer and telecommunications sector have been experiencing phenomenal advances in a very short period of time. As a result of ongoing research and developments, many new innovations are happening in hardware, software and related technologies. Most of these innovations are taking place in the developed countries and developing countries like Bangladesh have to depend on the developed nations to fulfill their technological needs. If Bangladesh is to establish an information system which would assist the country in achieving sustainable development, it must develop a robust technology industry which

will provide all necessary hardware and software for the country. Bangladesh Government has recently announced that it will build low-cost laptop computers (brand name: Doel) for larger cross sections of people which will be able available in the market in early 2012. This is indeed a commendable initiative and many more initiatives like this are needed to help Bangladesh make its mark as a leader of the ongoing technology revolution.

21. The Model Plan envisages a new role for the UISC where it will create linkages between rural people and various service providing agencies. For playing this role successfully, the UISCs should strengthen their capacity on a continuous basis. The UISC staff members also should be properly motivated so that they can carry out this activity effectively, to the satisfaction of service receivers and service providers. The UISCs should develop working relationship with various industries and employment agencies so that they can help unemployed people find employment. For this purpose, every UISC should create a rich pool of information on employment related matters.
22. The findings of the study indicate that rural people feel very comfortable to receive information from television. Therefore, television (and radios, too) should be used by the UISCs for information dissemination. This can be done by attaching a TV Card to the computer. The UISC staff members should make sure that the television is used mainly for assisting people who have no access to television to watch news, discussion programmes, educational programmes, etc. Besides, since many of the rural people now have mobile phones, it, also, should be used for information dissemination and collecting information from the rural areas. However, how these tools will be used should be determined by respective UISCs.
23. Although 'Information for Development' has been drawing a lot of attention from different corners, it is still a comparatively new phenomenon. Library and information professionals, development enthusiasts, ICT specialists and many other groups of people have taken an active interest in the field of information

for development and new dimensions are constantly being added to this field. Therefore, for realizing the true potential and far-reaching impacts of information-focused development initiatives, more research and development initiatives need to be undertaken. These research initiatives would bring forth new and innovative ways in which information and information-focused activities could be used for ensuring sustainable development of the rural people.

24. Effective implementation of the Model Plan would need detailed analysis of costs and benefits which would assist in getting a comprehensive picture of the possible investments in short, medium and long terms and their returns over the years. The cost-benefit analysis should include all existing and projected fields of expenditure keeping in mind the changing nature of technological innovations and the increasing demand of the users. Involvement of library and information professionals, ICT specialists and marketing and finance experts.
25. Without proper assessment of user needs and an objective evaluation of their information seeking behaviour, it will be difficult to meet the changing information needs of the users. For this purpose, user studies will have to be undertaken on a regular basis which will provide necessary inputs and directions for designing information systems for the rural people. The user studies will give valuable information about the perceptions of the rural people about their livelihood problems and the changing socio-economic situations of the rural areas.

Concluding remarks

The present time is crucial for Bangladesh in many regards. The country has celebrated its 40th anniversary of independence in this year. In spite of continuous political turmoil and a looming threat of more political upheavals and violence in the coming days, Bangladesh has made significant advances in the fields of women and children health, education and economy. Keeping this momentum in place and leveraging it for ensuring

sustainable development of its huge population, Bangladesh would need to make more progresses in every sector, foremost of which are health, environment, economy, governance and human rights. As it has been made clear in the foregoing discussions and analyses, information could play a pivotal role in achieving these progresses. Implementation of the proposed Model Plan by following the above mentioned recommendations would ensure effective utilisation of information in the sustainable socio-economic development of the country. This will require collective efforts from all stakeholders including GOs and NGOs, political parties, civil society, social and development activists, researchers, cultural activists, policy makers and planners and people from all cross-sections of life. With more than 70% of the population of Bangladesh living in the rural areas, the importance of rural development could hardly be overemphasized. An information-focused development campaign, by ensuring the timely dissemination of critical information to the grassroots people and others concerned, could usher in a new era of progress and development for Bangladesh. It could also contribute greatly in the realization of 'Digital Bangladesh' by 2021 - the 50th anniversary of the independence of the country.

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APPENDIX 1
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE INFORMATION USERS

APPENDIX 2
**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE INFORMATION
PROVIDERS**

Appendix-1

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE INFORMATION USERS

Section A: Demographic Data

Division:

District:

Upazilla:

Union:

Village:

Name of the respondent:

1. Age of the respondent

a. 15 - 25 years ☐

b. 26 - 35 years ☐

c. 36 - 45 years ☐

d. 46 - 55 years ☐

e. Above 55 years ☐

2. Gender

a. Male ☐

b. Female ☐

3. Marital status

a. Single ☐

b. Married ☐

4. Level of education

- a. Illiterate ☐
- b. Primary ☐
- c. Secondary ☐
- d. Higher secondary ☐
- e. Graduate ☐
- f. Masters ☐

g. Others (please specify)

5. Profession

- a. Farming ☐
- b. Business ☐
- c. Service ☐
- d. Self-employment ☐
- e. Student ☐

f. Other (please specify)

6. Number of family members

- a. 1-5 ☐
- b. 6-10 ☐
- c. 10-15 ☐

d. More (please specify)

7. Number of illiterate family members above 15 years

- a. 1-5 ☐
- b. 6-10 ☐
- c. 10-15 ☐

d. More (specify)

Section B: Economic condition of the respondent

8. The number of income generators in the respondent's family

- a. 1-3 ☐
- b. 4-6 ☐
- c. More (please specify)

9. Average monthly income of the family

- a. Less than 1,000 Taka ☐
- b. 1,000-5,000 Taka ☐
- c. 5,000-10,000 Taka ☐
- d. 10,000 – 15,000 Taka ☐
- e. More (please specify) Taka

10. Main source of income in the respondent's household

- a. Farming ☐
- b. Business ☐
- c. Service ☐
- d. Self-employment ☐
- e. Money sent by expatriate family member(s) ☐
- f. Others (please specify)

11. Main financial/income generating problems faced by the respondent

(You can tick more than one option)

- a. No earning member in the family at all ☐
- b. Not enough earning members in the family ☐
- c. Low salary of the person(s) who earn ☐
- d. Unavailability of job/employment because of lack of education ☐
- e. Others (please specify)
-

Section C: The respondent's perception of information

12. How would you rank the importance of information in your life?

- a. Very important ☐
- b. Important ☐
- c. Moderately important ☐
- d. Not important ☐
- e. I don't know ☐

13. How would rate your ability to find/use information? *(You can tick more than one option)*

- a. I know when I need information ☐
- b. I know the sources of my desired information ☐
- c. I know how to retrieve information from those sources ☐
- d. I know whether the information I get are the ones I need ☐
- e. I know how to use information to solve my problems ☐

14. Whose opinions or interpretations of information seem to be most acceptable or reliable to you?

- a. Religious leader ☐
- b. Community leader ☐
- c. NGO activist ☐
- d. A learned person in the locality ☐
- e. Your family members ☐
- f. Elderly/experienced persons in the neighbourhood ☐
- g. Friends ☐
- h. Librarian ☐
- i. Others (please specify)

15. When you interpret information, which viewpoint seems to be the most important?

- a. Religious viewpoint ☐
- b. Logical and scientific viewpoint ☐
- c. Your own experience and understanding ☐
- d. Other people's opinion/suggestion ☐
- e. Others (please specify) ☐

16. Do you recognize that receiving information is your right?

- a. Yes ☐
- b. No ☐

Section D: Respondent's information needs

17. Which information do you need for your day-to-day life? (You can tick more than one option)

- a. Information about farming ☐
- b. Information about weather ☐
- c. Information about education ☐
- d. Information about market of products ☐
- e. Information about health ☐
- f. Information about income generating ☐
- g. Information about family planning ☐
- h. Information about employment ☐
- i. Information about natural disaster ☐
- j. Information about politics ☐
- k. Information about entertainment ☐
- l. Information about law and order situation ☐
- m. Others (please specify)

18. What are your usual sources to meet your information needs?

(You can tick more than one option)

- a. Friend, relative, neighbours, acquaintances ☐
- b. Local school/college teachers ☐
- c. Library/information centre ☐

- d. Local religious leader ☐
- e. Local political leader/public representative ☐
- f. Local social worker ☐
- g. Radio ☐
- h. Television ☐
- i. Newspaper/newsmagazine ☐
- j. Local haat/bazaars/tea stalls ☐
- k. Others (please specify)

19. Did you get any information from any of the following categories of people? (1=I can't remember, 2=Never, 3=Very rarely, 4=At least once in a year, 5=More than once in a year, 6=More than once in a month, 7=More than once in a week)

Sl. No.	Category of people	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
a	Agricultural extension worker							
b	Family planning worker							
c	Health care worker							
d	Public representative							
e	NGO worker							
f	Library/information worker							
g	Representatives of corporate bodies							
h	Social welfare worker							
i	Community leaders							
j	Religious leaders							
k	Others (please specify)							

Section E: Respondent's Use of information channel

20. How do you prefer to receive information? *(You can tick more than one option)*

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Orally | ☐ | e. From TV | ☐ |
| b. By using telephone/mobile phone | ☐ | f. From Radio | ☐ |
| c. From books | ☐ | g. From the Internet | ☐ |
| d. From newspaper/news magazines | ☐ | | |
| h. Others (please specify) | | | |

21. What is the frequency of your newspaper reading?

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| a. More than once daily | ☐ |
| b. Once daily | ☐ |
| c. Several times in a week, but not once in a day | ☐ |
| d. At least once in a week | ☐ |
| e. Less than that | ☐ |

22. What news in the newspaper attracts you most? *(You can tick more than one option)*

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Politics | ☐ | f. Accidents, violence | ☐ |
| b. Current affairs | ☐ | g. Corruption | ☐ |
| c. Agriculture | ☐ | h. Show biz | ☐ |
| d. Health | ☐ | i. Career, income generating | ☐ |
| e. Environment | ☐ | j. Economy, business, finance | ☐ |
| k. Others please (specify) | | | |

23. Do you read books/magazines?

- | | |
|--------|--------------------------|
| a. Yes | ☐ |
| b. No | ☐ |

24. If yes, what kind of books/magazines you like most? (You can tick more than one option)

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| a. Educative | ☐ | d. Religious | ☐ |
| b. Entertaining | ☐ | e. Political | ☐ |
| c. Text books | ☐ | | |
| f. Others (please specify) | | | |

25. What is the frequency of your book reading?

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. At least once in a day | ☐ |
| b. More than once in a week | ☐ |
| c. At least once in a week | ☐ |
| d. At least once in a month | ☐ |
| e. Less than that | ☐ |

26. Do you have a Radio in the household?

- | | |
|--------|--------------------------|
| a. Yes | ☐ |
| b. No | ☐ |

27. What is the frequency of your Radio listening?

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. More than once in a day | ☐ | e. Several times a month | ☐ |
| b. At least once in a day | ☐ | f. At least once in a month | ☐ |
| c. Several times a week | ☐ | g. Less than that | ☐ |
| d. At least once in a week | ☐ | | |

28. What do you usually listen to Radio for? (You can tick more than one option)

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| a. News | ☐ |
| b. Entertainment | ☐ |
| c. Weather report | ☐ |
| d. Subject based discussion program (health, agriculture, etc.) | ☐ |

- e. Subject based educative programs ☐
- f. Others (please specify)

29. Do you have a TV in the household?

- a. Yes ☐
- b. No ☐

30. What is the frequency of your TV watching?

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. More than once in a day | ☐ | e. Several times a month | ☐ |
| b. At least once in a day | ☐ | f. At least once in a month | ☐ |
| c. Several times a week | ☐ | g. Less than that | ☐ |
| d. At least once in a week | ☐ | | |

31. What do you usually watch TV for? (You can tick more than one option)

- a. News ☐
- b. Entertainment ☐
- c. Weather report ☐
- d. Subject based discussion program (health, agriculture, etc.) ☐
- e. Subject based educative programs ☐
- f. Others (please specify)

32. What is your usual source of entertainment?

- | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| a. TV | ☐ | c. Cinema | ☐ |
| b. Radio | ☐ | d. Jatra-pala | ☐ |
| e. Others (specify) | | | |

33. How many mobile phones are there in your household?

- a. 1-5 ☐
- b. 6-10 ☐
- c. More (specify)

34. How many mobile phones you personally own?

- a. 1-3 ☐ b. 4-6 ☐
 c. More (specify)

35. Why do you use mobile phone? (You can tick more than one option)

- a. To talk to friends and relatives ☐
 b. To stay up-to-date ☐
 c. To listen to music ☐
 d. To take pictures ☐
 e. To collect information related to profession, occupation ☐
 f. To use commercially ☐
 g. Because owning a mobile phone is a prestige issue ☐
 h. Others (please specify)

36. What is your average monthly mobile phone bill?

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Less than 100 Taka | ☐ | d. 300 – 400 Taka | ☐ |
| b. 100 - 200 Taka | ☐ | e. 400 – 500 Taka | ☐ |
| c. 200 – 300 Taka | ☐ | f. More than that | ☐ |

37. How much are you ready to pay monthly for receiving useful information on health, education, business, entertainment, natural disaster, etc. on your mobile phone?

- | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Not interested | ☐ | d. 100 – 200 Taka | ☐ |
| b. Less than 50 Taka | ☐ | e. 200 – 300 Taka | ☐ |
| c. 50 – 100 Taka | ☐ | f. More than that | ☐ |

38. Have you ever browsed the World Wide Web/Internet?

- a. Yes ☐ b. No ☐

39. Have you ever used email?

a. Yes ☐ b. No ☐

40. Do you want to receive latest information by using Internet on your mobile phone?

a. Yes ☐ b. No ☐

41. Are you ready to pay a nominal fee (less than 50 Taka a month) for using Internet on your mobile phone?

a. Yes ☐ b. No ☐

42. Do you think computer is a luxury item and it has no utility for common people?

a. Yes ☐ b. No ☐ c. I don't know ☐

43. Have you any plan to buy a computer for your home?

a. Yes ☐ b. No ☐

44. If yes, when?

a. Within a year ☐ c. After more than two years ☐
b. Within two years ☐ d. After more than five years ☐

45. Is there a library in your locality?

a. Yes ☐ b. No ☐

46. What is the type of the library?

a. Public ☐ c. Academic ☐
b. Special ☐ d. I don't know ☐

e. Others (please specify)

47. If there is a library in your locality, how often do you go there?

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Daily | ☐ | d. Once in a month | ☐ |
| b. Once in a week | ☐ | e. Never | ☐ |
| c. Once in a fortnight | ☐ | | |
| f. Others (please specify) | | | |

48. Does the library have the materials to meet your demand?

- | | | | | | |
|--------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| a. Yes | ☐ | b. To some extent | ☐ | c. No | ☐ |
|--------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|

49. Do you think there should be library in every village?

- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| a. Yes | ☐ | b. No | ☐ |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|

50. Would you like to receive library service at your home through book mobile and library extension?

- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| a. Yes | ☐ | b. No | ☐ |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|

51. Are you ready to pay a nominal fee for using library?

- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| a. Yes | ☐ | b. No | ☐ |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|

52. If yes, how much you would like to pay for the library service?

- | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Less than 50 Taka | ☐ | d. 200 – 300 Taka | ☐ |
| b. 50 – 100 Taka | ☐ | e. More than that | ☐ |
| c. 100 – 200 Taka | ☐ | | |

Appendix-2

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE INFORMATION PROVIDERS

Section A: Personal information

1. Name:

2. Designation:

3. Organization:

4. Type of organization:

5. Address (office):

6. Age of the respondent

a. 18 - 25 years ☐

d. 46 - 55 years ☐

b. 26 - 35 years ☐

e. Above 55 years ☐

c. 36 - 45 years ☐

7. Salary (you can choose not to disclose your salary)

8. Year of experience in the present job:

a. Less than 1 year ☐

b. 1 – 3 years ☐

c. 3 – 5 years ☐

d. 5 - 10 years ☐

e. 10 – 15 years ☐

f. Above 15 years ☐

9. Gender

a. Male ☐

b. Female ☐

10. Marital status

a. Married ☐

b. Single ☐

11. Level of education

a. Primary ☐

b. Secondary ☐

c. Higher secondary ☐

d. Graduate ☐

e. Masters ☐

f. Others (specify)

12. Reason for choosing this job (You can tick more than one option)

a. I find the job exciting ☐

b. I want to serve grassroots people through this job ☐

c. I like the salary package of this job ☐

d. I like the organization I work for ☐

e. Because this is the only job I got ☐

f. This job will help me learn new things ☐

g. Others (specify)

13. Your Bangla language skills

a. Excellent ☐

d. Moderate ☐

b. Very good ☐

e. Poor ☐

c. Good ☐

14. Your English language skills

- a. Excellent ☐
- b. Very good ☐
- c. Good ☐
- d. Moderate ☐
- e. Poor ☐

15. Your computer literacy (You can tick more than one option)

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Bengali typing | ☐ | d. Email | ☐ |
| b. English typing | ☐ | e. Internet searching | ☐ |
| c. Basic hardware/software troubleshooting | ☐ | f. Web browsing | ☐ |
| g. Others (specify) | | | |

16. How would you rate your job satisfaction?

- a. Very high ☐
- b. High ☐
- c. Just enough ☐
- d. Less than enough ☐
- e. Not at all ☐

Section B: The respondent's information providing activities

17. What information services your organization usually provide?**(You can tick more than one option)**

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| a. Traditional library service | ☐ | e. Photocopy service | ☐ |
| b. Web browsing | ☐ | f. Information services through mobile phone | ☐ |
| c. Email | ☐ | g. Reference service | ☐ |
| d. Translation service | ☐ | h. Fax | ☐ |
| i. Others (please specify): | | | |

15. What daily tasks do you usually perform? (You can tick more than one option)

- a. Disseminate information to users from print materials ☐
- b. Disseminate information to users from electronic sources ☐
- c. Give information to users through mobile phone ☐
- d. Assist users in the use of traditional library ☐
- e. Assist users in the use of electronic information sources ☐
- f. Give information to users directly by visiting their home ☐
- g. Act as liaison between users and information providing agencies ☐
- h. Others (specify)

18. How do you assess the information needs of the users? (You can tick more than one option)

- a. By interviewing them formally ☐
- b. By having informal discussions with them ☐
- c. By giving them a questionnaire ☐
- d. I do not assess their information needs ☐
- e. I guess their information needs without asking questions ☐
- f. Others (specify)

19. What sources you usually consult for providing information services?

(You can tick more than one option)

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| a. Book | ☐ | f. Radio | ☐ |
| b. Magazine | ☐ | g. Email | ☐ |
| c. Newspaper | ☐ | h. Individuals who have information | ☐ |
| d. Web site | ☐ | i. Concerned organizations | ☐ |
| e. TV | ☐ | j. Other libraries/information centres | ☐ |
| k. Others (Please specify) | | | |

20. According to your own observations, which information are mostly required by users?

(You can tick more than one option)

- a. Information about farming ☐ g. Information about family planning ☐
 b. Information about weather ☐ h. Information about employment ☐
 c. Information about education ☐ i. Information about natural disaster ☐
 d. Information about market of products ☐ j. Information about politics ☐
 e. Information about health ☐ k. Information about entertainment ☐
 f. Information about income generating ☐
 l. Others (please specify):

21. Which information sources you find comfortable to work with?

- a. Print ☐ c. Oral ☐
 b. Electronic ☐
 d. Others (specify)

22. Based on your own experience, rate the effectiveness of the following information sources (Highly effective = 3, Effective = 2, Somewhat effective = 1, Not effective = 0)

Sl. No.	Information source	3	2	1	0
a	Book				
b	Magazine				
c	Newspaper				
d	Web site				
e	TV				
f	Radio				
g	Email				
h	Individuals who have information				
i	Concerned organizations				

Sl. No.	Information source	3	2	1	0
j	Other libraries/information centres				
k	Others (please specify)				

21. What drawbacks you usually face in performing your duties?

(You can tick more than one option)

- a. People are not interested to receive information ☐
- b. People are interested to receive information, but feel embarrassed because of social restrictions ☐
- c. Lack of general awareness about the importance of information ☐
- d. Unfavourable religious environment ☐
- e. Lack of education of the people ☐
- f. Non cooperation of government officials ☐
- g. Non cooperation of local political leaders ☐
- h. Non cooperation of local community leaders ☐
- i. Weak telecommunication infrastructure of the country ☐
- j. Lack of fund ☐
- k. Lack of commitment of the information providers ☐
- l. Others (specify)

23. What, in your view, should be done to remove these obstacles?

(You can pick up maximum five options which you deem most important/urgent)

- a. Enough funds should be allocated by the government ☐
- b. Government should formulate more convenient policies for dissemination of information ☐
- c. More non-government initiatives for rural information dissemination should be taken ☐
- d. The country's telecommunication infrastructure must be strengthened ☐

- e. Mobile library services should be strengthened ☐
- f. Massive awareness raising program should be undertaken ☐
- g. More traditional libraries should be set up ☐
- h. More technology based information service initiatives should be set up ☐
- i. Besides normal activities, traditional libraries should arrange discussion meetings, study circles, etc. ☐
- j. Massive literacy campaign should be undertaken ☐
- k. Economic development of the underprivileged people should be ensured ☐
- l. Others (specify)

24. Based on your experience as an information service provider, what do you think is the possibility that Bangladesh will turn into a knowledge-based society in the next 20 years?

- a. Very high ☐
- b. High ☐
- c. Moderate ☐
- d. Low ☐
- e. Not at all ☐
- f. I don't know ☐