

A SPECIAL LIBRARY FOR DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH - THE ROLE OF THE ISS LIBRARY IN MANAGING INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS FOR RESEARCH

By Sharmila Ghosh & G Y Wesley

Scope of the paper

- Today more and more organisations are involved in research, action-research and advocacy on various development issues, particularly in the Social services and Human Development sector.
- Most of these issues and themes are inter-disciplinary in nature and are characterised by overlapping subject boundaries. Research on such areas therefore generates information which are consequently inter-disciplinary in nature.
- In order to manage such information and also to make more information available, special libraries and thematic, issue-based information centres have come up. Such libraries are peculiar as far as their collection, users, services, queries and information processing are concerned.
- The Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi has a special library which tries to establish a synergy between the research focus of the Institute and the information cropping up from research.
- The library and resource centre has a computerised information management system, which promotes a collaborative and symbiotic relationship between research and information (i.e. between research staff and library professionals).

In the context of the growth and development of the Information society, and increasing awareness among the people about *development issues* and related information, we notice a remarkable increase in the number of organisations focussing on research and action-research in social, economic, socio-economic and human development issues with special emphasis on the improvement in the quality of life and with the primary objective of making a serious impact on public policy. This **inter-disciplinary and issue-based research** has contributed to the growth and development of special libraries and information-resource centres which are very different from conventional libraries in their organisation, composition, functioning and services.

In the event of a gradual transition, from the library as a storehouse of books to the information centre as the information *processor-cum-provider*, has emerged a new breed of information specialists, aiming at fulfilling the information needs of the users in a **multi-disciplinary information environment**. Their mission is to produce a constant flow of value-added, *customised* information services. They go by the motto 'just in time' and 'just for you'. In today's electronic information environment, the role of the special librarian has evolved to meet the demands of both the *technology revolution* and the *information revolution*.

New technology is being increasingly utilised not only for automation of library functions but also for enhancement of information access and delivery of items **not** physically contained within the library boundaries. Most libraries now offer an online public access catalogue (OPAC), public PCs equipped with CD-ROM drives, scanners or public terminals connected to the Internet. More and more libraries are building homepages on the Worldwide Web from where users have access to a variety of services without physically entering a library.

Information and knowledge management is at the center of business and society in the 21st century. The use of knowledge within an organisation rests primarily on the attainment of two objectives;

- **effective management of information resources**, and
- **the establishment of a learning environment**.

An integral component to achieving both of these is an intimate understanding of the information flows within an organisation. As keepers and disseminators of information within organisations, information specialists make substantial contributions to the successful implementation of knowledge management projects. Special librarians function as change agents and leaders providing the information needed to help their organisations achieve their goals. In addition to identifying and acquiring external sources of information, they help to organise internal sources of information. They provide vital information services by preparing abstracts and indexes of current periodicals, organising bibliographies or analysing background information and preparing reports on areas of particular interest. They are best positioned to monitor the information products and needs of different departments and deserve a central role in the development of processes and policies that harness an organisation's knowledge base.

The Institute of Social Sciences - Research and Information

The Institute of Social Sciences studies contemporary social, political and economic issues in an inter-disciplinary perspective and makes available its

findings and recommendations to policy makers, social scientists, people's organisations and activists' groups. The evolution of an informed and action-oriented public opinion is the primary objective of the institute.

The **library, documentation and resource centre** of the Institute is closely related to the Institute's research and training programmes, and grassroots activities in the development sector. The resource base covers all major areas and issues relating to the Institute's ongoing and planned programmes and activities, and specifically decentralised governance, urban studies, economic affairs, social studies, gender studies, human rights and related topics. Since the Institute's work in the area of local self-government (*Panchayati Raj*) has attracted wide acclaim nationally and internationally, the library & information centre has developed a specialised collection of resources on this topic, including its sub-systems - *rural and urban local governance, decentralisation, federalism, women's empowerment* and related issues. The information resource centre has a networking arrangement with institutions (like Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, National Institute of Rural Development, Society for Participatory Research in Asia, to name a few) engaged in similar and allied areas of study, and acts as nodal agency for exchange and sharing of information in the focal topic.

The library & documentation centre provides *customised* user-oriented services to assist professional and research staff to get their information quickly, accurately and comprehensively, through 'profile-matched and identified needs' in relation to their functional needs. These include

1. an electronic Catalogue of the library resources on OPAC terminals
2. a computerised circulation and loan system
3. periodicals indexing service, with an annual articles index
4. reference and information services - query answering, information retrieval and dissemination, data packaging and compilation of document lists, etc.
5. access to Internet and CD-ROM databases, and audio-visual resources
6. documentation services - Current Awareness and SDI services
7. inter-library borrowing and information interchange
8. on-demand selective acquisition of new resources
9. newspaper clipping services
10. photocopying and document delivery services

The Library & Documentation Centre (LDIC) coordinates the bibliographic and information retrieval activities with the information storage and records

management functions as well as all information transfer and dissemination activities. The library helps to promote and implement the transfer of the Institute's research accomplishments to the Social Science research community, state and local governments and to NGOs through appropriate dissemination of information. Some of the activities carried out by the library and resource centre which directly contribute to research activities of the Institute are -

- Acquiring new resources and information as per requirements / recommendations from faculty,
- Preparing research reports and state-of-art reports in response to queries and project support,
- Verifying and checking out on data, facts, statistics for external and internal reports and publications
- Identifying research needs of staff members and providing *guided* reference services through documents and files,
- Creating databases for accessing stored information
- Evaluating and comparing software and sources of data prior to purchase,
- training other staff to efficiently and cost-effectively use on-line databases and internet resources
- Generating information products (like reading lists, articles index) for researchers and external members
- Promotion and sale of Institute's publications, and
- Customisation of the information system with occasional suggestions from research faculty.

As a result of all this, the Institute is benefitted in the way of taking major decisions and deciding the course of action. The library saves both time and money for the organisation. Research staff need not waste their time in visiting other libraries to acquire needed information. Expenses involved in such activity can be avoided. Research staff writing articles, papers, reports are provided with information which saves upon their research time. This information is provided by way of bibliographical references, statistical data, information sources and metadata, and referral services.

What is 'special' about the ISS Library?

There are five unique features of the ISS Library & Documentation Centre which make it very different from any conventional library. These are :

1. Nature and type of RESOURCES and the coverage of interdisciplinary topics and themes

2. Nature of library USERS - their academic/professional background, their information requirements
3. Nature of information processing and INFORMATION MANAGEMENT activities - in the 'combination' environment (i.e. partially computerised and partially manual operations)
4. Nature of QUERIES - reflection of research requirements of special users
5. Nature and types of SERVICES provided - particularly in the electronic environment with the fast progress of IT

1. Nature of collections

The library collection is multi-faceted and reflects the Institute's research interests in the following subjects/themes :

- Democratic decentralisation
 - urban local governance
 - rural local governance (*panchayati raj*)
- Governance issues, civil society and federalism
- Welfare economics - development issues
- Sociology and social research
- Gender studies - women's political empowerment
- Human rights, police reforms
- Rural development
- Urban development
- International studies
- Culture, political philosophy, nationalism

1.1 Newspapers - Important national newspapers and some regional papers are meant for thematic marking by research staff. Newsitems are classified on the basis of research issues of the Institute. and is therefore customised. The Institute's monthly publication "*Panchayati Raj Update*"* is compiled from information available in the papers.

1.2 Journals & magazines - The library subscribes to thirty-five journals & magazines. Current issues are processed for SDI services and back issues are bound. Some of the scholastic journals are indexed for specific themes/topics of relevance to the Institute's research focus. Some significant articles are circulated to research staff as part of Current Awareness Services. At the end of a calendar

* The Panchayati Raj Update is a monthly report of happenings and news about *panchayats* (the elected representatives for rural decentralised governance) all over the country, individual state situations and special features written by practitioners.

year, a bibliography is compiled with 'Author' and 'Keywords' index for selective searching of articles.

1.3 Books & reports - Books are acquired mostly on the basis of recommendations and approvals from senior faculty of the Institute. Some reference tools are acquired by library - like Census reports, Economic survey data reports, Budget and Plan documents, documents pertaining to important legislations, Development reports, Institutional reports from other organisations, latest titles from the publishers' catalogue on issues related to the Institute's research. Book reviews appearing in newspapers and journals help in acquisitions. Duplication of resources are generally avoided. List of new acquisitions are compiled every month as part of Current Awareness services.

1.4 Unpublished monographs, research reports, project reports of varied nature are obtained on complimentary basis, through exchange programmes and from staff members attending seminars/workshops or conferences. Government publications are sometimes purchased or received through public relations promotion.

1.5 Electronic documents available on the Net, full-text articles, graphical data etc. are downloaded, printed and packaged to look like complete documents. They are treated at par with books and reports.

2. Nature of users - six categories:

- staff members (inhouse and local), researchers from branch offices
- visitors (both casual and specific)
- temporary / long-term affiliates of the Institute
- external members (individual and institutional) on subscription
- representatives from funding agencies, NGOs and government
- students (particularly those at doctoral level, whose research topic is related with those of the institute)

The nature of library reference and use depends on their assignment and the time available at their disposal. Their queries are sometimes defined but mostly needs to be refined. A detailed interaction with the library staff is therefore required at times to make the query pinpointed for quick retrieval of information. Researchers working on inter-disciplinary areas (for example, 'gender issues and panchayati raj', 'fiscal devolution', 'urban sociology', 'decentralisation issues', etc) will not benefit if they go to a public library. Then there are students pursuing their doctoral studies, who often end up delimiting their research topic while browsing through the library collection. Freelance journalists require information to

supplement their article. Research scholars use the library to prepare a project proposal. It has been observed that most users are focussed on a particular topic or an issue instead of a broad generic subject.

3. Nature of information processing and information management activities

3.1 Classification and coding - Books and reports acquired through defined procedures (see section 1.3) are technically processed in the database. Both the subject classification and the physical arrangement system are theme-based / issue-based and sometimes even project-defined, and customised as per research issues of the Institute. (Example: 'rural development', 'governance', 'human rights', 'panchayati raj', 'social studies', 'economic studies', 'Indian Sociological Society', 'Constitution Review Committee', 'Women's Empowerment Celebrations', etc)

It may be mentioned that although the Dewey Decimal System is followed, some essential modifications are carried out (for example, instead of the place numbers of Dewey Table 1, we use alpha-numeric codes for countries and 3-letter codes for Indian States and Union Territories). Also, broad numbers are assigned to documents which are inter-disciplinary in nature. The basic objective is to keep the class numbers as short as possible, particularly the digits after the decimal point.

3.2 Keywords/descriptors form a very important component of the documents processing activity and is the basis for document retrieval. In fact, keywords searches are carried out while preparing documentation lists. The well-known database software "*Alice for Windows*" (AFW) is used for information recording, storage and retrieval. This programme helps not only in OPAC searches, but also in compilation of 'on-demand' reading lists, meant to aid in research and proposal writing. Most information searches/queries are dependent on appropriate keywords, and therefore technical processing is not complete without assigning relevant keywords. It may be mentioned here that the keywords chosen/defined are unique to the research queries followed in the Institute and therefore do not follow any standardised list of subject terms or thesaurus. A notable feature is to assign a descriptor/keyword from the name of a Committee (for e.g. The Committee on Decentralisation was constituted and one "Sen" had headed the committee. The report of this committee is referred to as the 'Sen Committee Report') The most common query is "Can I have a look at the Sen Committee Report?" Another unique aspect of keywords is by the name of a tribe, or a movement or a conference or simply the acronym for a programme or scheme (e.g. 'Narmada Bachao Andolan', 'Bhils', 'Beijing Conference', 'TLC' for Total Literacy Campaign, etc.). So **assigning appropriate keywords or descriptors** is a very crucial part of the processing activity.

3.3 **Shelf location** - The records database has another component: 'location', this is also important because quick retrieval is dependent on the shelf location of a book. Grey literature like handouts, pamphlets, booklets, training material, etc are organised in vertical boxes with thematic labels.

Journal articles related to Institute's research programmes are indexed in a database and supported by appropriate keywords. Newspaper markings are filed in topic files. On-demand documentation lists are prepared to meet staff requirements on particular topics. Information available from the Net are processed in the same way as books and reports. (Section 1.5)

3.4 **Indexing** of journal articles and newsclips - articles are selected from scholarly journals which relate to the Institute's research areas and processed in a database with appropriate keywords. An annual bibliography is compiled at the end of a year which helps the researcher to find articles on pinpointed topics. With regard to newsclips a list is generated each month topicwise and circulated. On-demand newsitems are photocopied and distributed.

3.5 **Project documentation** - all of the above, combined with research assistance for projects.

4. Nature of queries and requests for information

Since the Institute covers inter-disciplinary topics and development issues for its research, and the nature of library resources being a resultant follow-up of the research focus, it is but natural that reference queries will be very unique and specific and not the kind that we come across in a public library. Queries and information requirements are of the following nature:

- statistical data on states [e.g. State Finance Commission reports, data published in the Institute's monthly publication "panchayati raj update", election related information, 'fact file' extracted from a premier national newspaper, economic data from CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy) reports, etc]
- demographic data, census tables, population totals
- committee / commission reports (Sen Committee report, Sarkaria Commission report, Balwant Rai Mehta Committee report)
- availability of particular titles (author query, title-query)
- journal articles on a specific issue/topic (e.g. poverty, scheduled castes & scheduled tribes, South Asia, urban poverty, and so on)
- institute's unpublished study reports (reference by the name of the funding agency, e.g Unicef study, Danida report, etc.)

- availability of documents on a particular theme/issue/topic (this helps the user to decide whether he/she needs to consult any other library)
- pinpointed questions like - full form of acronyms, date of a particular event, which states have not conducted panchayat elections, how many farmers committed suicide? How many cases of human rights violations, etc.

Then there are some **functional queries** -

- which international journals do we get in the library?
- which paper carried out a particular article written by a faculty or anyone known to the Institute,
- what is the price of a specific publication?
- what type of library membership is available and who can become a member,
- what are the ongoing research projects of the Institute?
- which is the latest publication of the Institute?
- who in the institute should I consult for information on 'gender issues'?
- what are the library working hours, and, is photocopying facility available?

5. Nature of services provided to meet research needs of users

The library provides a variety of reference services. Direct patron assistance is available always at all times. Telephonic and mail information requests are handled whenever possible. The library acts as a referral point for subject experts or organisations more qualified to respond to a specific request.

Circulation - books and reports processed are available only to staff for issue. If there is only a single copy of an important document, then it is given on short loan (i.e. for a day or two).

Inter-library borrowing facilities are provided.

Membership services - Students pursuing their doctoral research, academic faculty from universities/colleges, NGOs and Voluntary organisations, people known to the Director or senior faculty of the Institute, are eligible for day/week/month membership. About 4-5 external members are attended to by library staff at one time. They are assisted in the use of the OPAC, locating their desired titles from shelves, and necessary photocopying.

SDI and CAS to staff members - information on specific themes or topics available in current issues of journals, newspapers or newly-acquired books, are provided to the research staff as per his/her research area/interest. Copies are made of news items, review articles, statistical data or fact sheet and are passed on to the respective staff member. List of new resources are compiled every month. Net searches are undertaken on demand-based topics and relevant information is

downloaded for the respective staff member. List of relevant articles (from journals) on specific topics are provided to both the external member and the staff. Sometimes a particular information is conveyed verbally to a staff member. Senior faculty (who have placed orders for books) are duly informed about the arrival of such books.

Sale and promotion of Institute's publications - The library functions as the sale counter for Institute's publications. The printed catalogue of publications is provided to the visitor who selects which titles to buy after reading the annotations. In some cases, the visitor may be confused and seek help from library staff.. Occasional reports about sales and revenue is provided to the Director.

Conclusion

The ISS Library & Documentation Centre provides a brilliant example of the collaborative and interactive **relation between research and information within the electronic environment** and the increasing recognition by the research community of modern trends in library documentation and information services. The need for research, that addresses the changing role of libraries, is being felt both by the academic community and the information society for three distinct reasons.

1. We offer services for those users who want to be guided to the most suitable information resources, we are **Information Access Providers**. Making use of current technologies, we organise electronic resources in a logical, easily understandable manner, integrating documents and services that relate to each other. The purpose of value-added services is not only to save the researcher time and effort, but also to provide him/her with a pre-assessed, semi-ordered list of resources which match the targeted group's information requirements.
2. We are **Research Assistants** - we provide research assistance for those who prefer to conduct searches themselves and only approach us in case they have not been successful in their attempts. No resource, be it electronic or paper, is complete and so, if we do not find a particular information on the Net, this does not mean that it does not exist. We should be able to identify which sources can be queried to make a search as complete as possible. Information that is not available in structured publications may be available in 'grey literature', and hence retrieval becomes complex. This involves both skills in locating information and technological skills. Research assistance in such context includes training users to learn new technologies. For instance, distance support by telephone/email, printed or on-line manuals and face-to-face end-user training have all become so popular.

3. We are **Technology-User Intermediary** - we closely collaborate with Information Technology (IT) departments for information retrieval. Often users report problems to us which they encounter while using a system or we recognise what needs to be redesigned while explaining a system. While IT designers and System specialists design programs and user interfaces to us, we should be able to explain language, typography, layout and design requirements so as to achieve the ultimate functionality.

The advent of the Internet and other online services has changed the library from a mere entity to an information system. In other words, libraries are no longer limited to the information they house; they have become facilities that provide electronic access to **global information resources**. James Michael suggested a blueprint for the library that consisted of

- Interconnectivity - networking, uniformity of data storage and location, etc
- Interoperability - several computers talking to each other
- Integration - internal and external resources into one single user interface
- Intermediation - reference services, guided research assistance and instructions for users
- Interdependency - resource sharing and information exchange, because one library cannot have everything that might be required by users.

References

- Mann, Thomas: "The Oxford Guide to Library Research", Oxford University Press, 1998
- Bean, Carol & Green, Rebecca (ed): "Relationships in the Organisation of Knowledge" *in Information Science and Knowledge Management*, Vol.2. Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001
- McCarthy, Richard C: "Designing Better Libraries; Selecting & Working with Budding Professionals". Highsmith Press, 2000
- Bender, David R : "What's Special About Special Libraries?" In: *INSPEL (International Journal of Special Libraries)* Vol. 32(1998)4
- Marshall, Joanne & others: "Competencies for Special Librarians" (SLA Special Committee Report)

Sharmila Ghosh & G Y Wesley
Institute of Social Sciences
8 Nelson Mandela Road,
Vasant Kunj, New Delhi 110070
Iss_ldic@email.com Gubai@altavista.com