Library Landscape Assessment of Bangladesh

Brief Report | May 2015

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

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

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

Objectives of the study

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

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

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

Scope of the study

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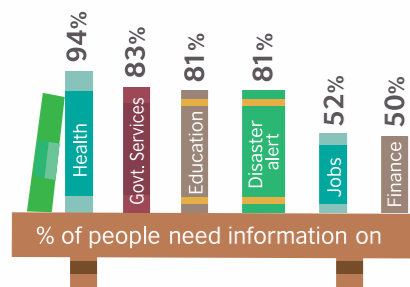
Research design

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

LIBRARY
LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT OF BANGLADESH
at a glance

Everyone needs information

% of people need information on

Category	%
Health	94%
Govt. Services	83%
Education	81%
Disaster alert	81%
Jobs	52%
Finance	50%

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

22% of libraries have photocopiers
48% of libraries have printers

Available room types
(% of surveyed libraries)

Room type	%
Hall room facility	30%
Separate study room	48%
Place for computer	63%
Meeting room	29%

There is a demand for non-traditional services

43% of library users want libraries to host workshops and trainings

1% of libraries use their space for organizing seminars or meetings

40% of library users want libraries to host art exhibitions

10% of users visit a library to participate in cultural functions, attend exhibitions

9% of govt. libraries hold movie screenings

52% of librarians said reading resources are insufficient

62% of users want some books in glass covered shelves
66% of users want other books on open shelves

Popular reading materials
(according to librarians)

Material	%
Literature	99%
Entertainment	38%
History/Politics	52%
Religious	52%
Dictionary	17%
Text Books	29%
Magazines	35%
Newspapers	57%
General Knowledge	52%

25% of libraries have backup power supplies
40% of librarians think lack of backup power is a challenge

In general, libraries do not have wi-fi
75% of users think wi-fi is very important for libraries

Librarians demand training and higher investment

25% of librarians think lack of trained staff is a challenge
92% of librarians are trained

Librarian

49% of librarians are dissatisfied with staff salaries
59% of librarians are dissatisfied over the annual budget of the libraries

Budget

Infographics by IID

Availability of toilets is an issue
44% of libraries do not have toilets
41% of libraries have unusable toilets
59% of libraries do not have toilets for females

29% of librarians think lack of space is a serious problem
21% of libraries are seriously dissatisfied with seating capacity

Library usage is increasing
84% of librarians said use of library is increasing

Libraries have positive impact
99% of library users find libraries useful for society, of which-
60% find libraries essential
39% find libraries very important

Demand for ICT services are high
25% of library users use library computers
13% of library users use library internet
93% of library users want to use computers in a library
84% of library users want to browse internet in a library
83% of library users want photocopy machines in a library

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

Children's corner needs improvement
59% of libraries have separate space for children
65% of libraries keep the height of bookshelves within children's reach
79% of librarians said they do not have volunteers for storytelling
41% of users are dissatisfied with child safety in libraries

Libraries are useful for female users
71% of female users think libraries help in decision making
74% think libraries improved their skills
69% think libraries helped them in finding better jobs

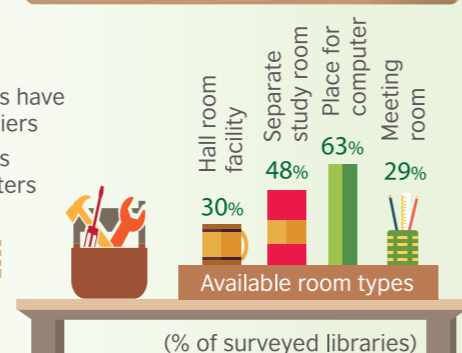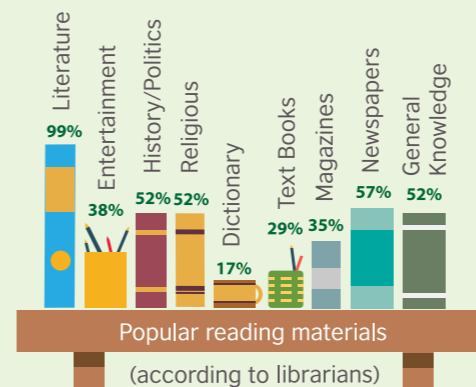## Libraries lack ICT facilities for the public
78% of libraries have computers
44% of libraries have computers for the public
51% of libraries have internet connection
44% of govt. libraries have internet for the public

Libraries are convenient
88% of library users think libraries have adequate lighting and ventilation
20% of users think libraries are noisy

Libraries are easily identifiable
70% of libraries are located beside major roads
83% of entrances are visible from the street
73% of libraries have signboards

Libraries are yet to serve everyone
6% of household respondents use libraries
72% of library users are students
65% of library users have completed at least high school education
60% of the surveyed libraries do not provide facilities for people with special needs

Modernization needs to be ICT-based
63% of library users think libraries are not technologically modern
86% of librarians want improved computer facilities
85% of librarians want to get internet connectivity
43% of librarians think insufficient ICT facilities is a serious challenge

Libraries need more public investment
0.1% of total national budget for FY2014-15 was allocated for Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MoCA), of which-
7.8% was earmarked for Dept. of Public Libraries, Directorate of Archives and Libraries, and National Book Centre all of which was allocated for revenue expenditures such as staff salaries and maintainance, with no development expenditure

Vision for libraries in Bangladesh

For the people

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

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

ICT integrated

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

Motivated librarians

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

Gender sensitive

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

Demand driven

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

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

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

Modern infrastructure

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

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

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

Mainstreamed

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

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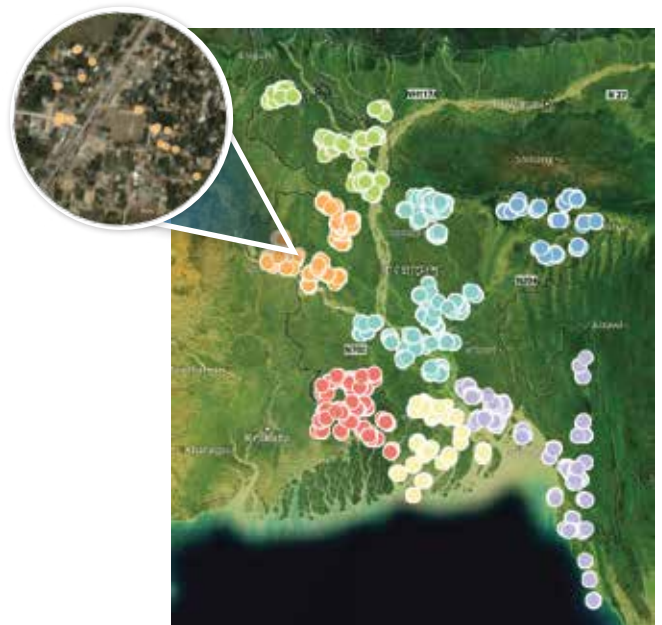
A Geospatial Survey

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

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

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

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

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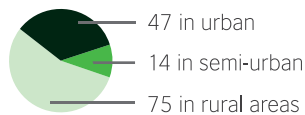

Mapped data can be zoomed to individual respondents

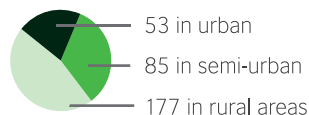## Key facts about the field survey

136 libraries

34 Govt. Public libraries
21 Non-govt. public libraries
81 NGO libraries

47 in urban
14 in semi-urban
75 in rural areas

315 e-centers

32 Cybercafés
59 Other telecenters
224 Union Information Service Centers (UISCs)

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

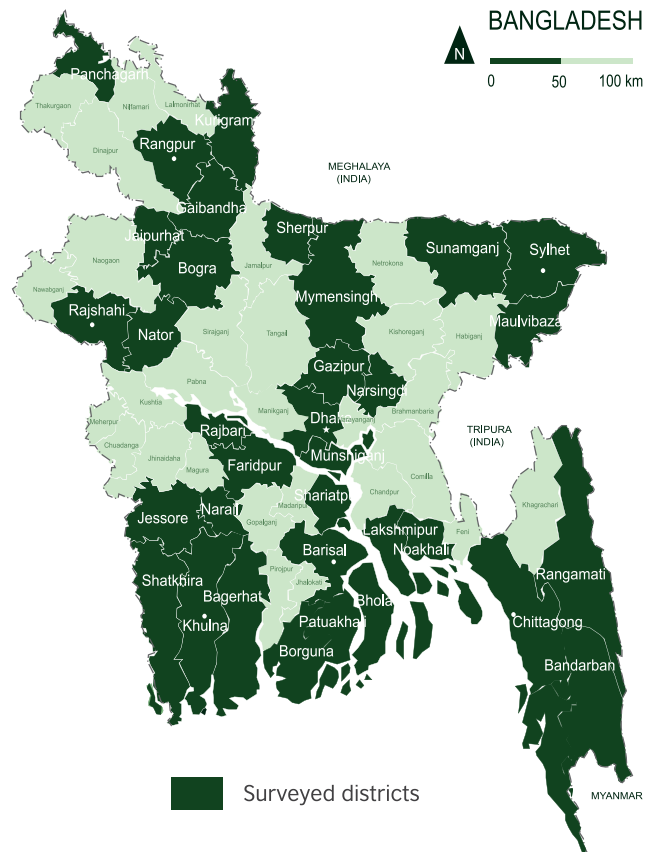**136** librarians > **54** males **82** females

315 e-center operators > **294** males **21** females

769 library users > **562** males **207** females

1,280 e-center users > **1,009** males **271** females

4,585 members of the public
(household survey respondents)

> **2,222** males; **2,362** females; **1** other

BANGLADESH

N

0   50   100 km

MEGHALAYA (INDIA)

TRIPURA (INDIA)

MYANMAR

Surveyed districts