

“Application of ICT in augmenting library services”¹

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Members of the Head Table
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Friends & Colleagues,

It is an honour to be here as an invited speaker on this august occasion and I thank Dr. P.K. Jain for cordially extending me this invitation to participate.

I have a paper published on Emotional Intelligence in the proceedings of this seminar but since the topic of the seminar is the “Application of ICT in augmenting library services” I will draw your attention to a few pertinent ideas.

My first encounter with ICT in the library environment was in 1986 – using CDS / ISIS software on a microcomputer to produce a bibliographic database. Then I had the opportunity in 1989 / 90 to witness more advanced applications in the UK and software like GEAC & Eureka, advantages of JANET and e-mail.

Since then I’ve seen many IT related developments in the library domain.

Information storage and retrieval, automated technical services, retrospective conversions of card catalogues, automated SDI and CA services, home-grown databases, commercial databases of journal articles, digital libraries, open access journals, e-books and readers, not forgetting the internet & Web 2.0 which enables social networking. In short no other phenomenon has revolutionized the library world like ICT. Advances in the ICT have intensely enriched the creation, recording, acquisition, organization, retrieval and transfer of information & knowledge. Networking through mobile phones & wireless technology is further augmented the library resources.

It does not mean that everything is rosy in the libraries, as far as ICT is concerned. We have our share of issues as well. We talk about digital divide – it is not only between north & south or developed countries & developing countries, but digital divide is evident within the countries as well as within the same type of institutions in the same country. There are disparities between libraries in the urban / rural areas, solely government funded and income generating institutions etc. We need to develop our ICT infrastructure, we need electricity or alternate power sources and a continuous power supply, and we need more and more latest machines in our libraries. We need access to internet across the country, networking cables or access to wireless technology, we need higher bandwidths, we need to build the ICT capacity of new staff, need continuing

¹ Lead Paper presented at the LIPS 2012: Leadership and Professionalism for new age libraries. 16-17 March 2012 New Delhi, India.

education & training programmes for those who are in service, more than anything else we need funding and to receive continuous support, we need the positive attitudes toward libraries, in policy makers. In order to 'augment the library services' through ICT we need to address these issues.

I would like to draw your attention to this part of the statement "Augmenting the Library services" – to whom? Each library has its own user groups – special libraries, university libraries, school libraries, research libraries or public libraries. We all try our best to augment services to this clientele, but is it sufficient to remain within one institutional boundary? Do we not have a greater responsibility towards the society?

A news item in the Daily Financial Times on 20th February 2012 caught my eye recently. At the launch of a new progress report on [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs), Asian Development Banks' Vice President has commented that, 'the South Asian nations are making the least progress in the Asia – Pacific region on meeting the 8 development goals of the United Nations.

The eight global targets; 1) to eradicate poverty & hunger 2) to achieve universal primary education 3) to promote gender equality & empower women 4) to reduce child mortality rates 5) to improve maternal health 6) to control HIV / AIDS and other diseases 7) to ensure environmental sustainability and 8) to develop global partnerships for developing. These were adopted by the United Nations in September 2000 with time-band targets to be reached in 2015, In 2004 SAARC leaders extended their Millennium Development Goals in to 22 [SAARC Development Goals](#) (SDGs) related to livelihood, health, education & environment in the region, also with targets to be met in 2015.

But as the Vice President of the ADB commented although we are on track to meet certain goals like eliminating gender inequality in primary education and halting the spread of TB; may other targets like, reducing hunger, child & maternal mortality we have a long way to go.

What have we "librarians" done to support our countries in achieving the MDGs or SDGs? Have we fulfilled our social responsibility towards the community? Have we used ICT to augment the library services to empower our people so that their poverty is reduced, their health issues are eased, maternal mortality is reduced. Is there a social inclusive in our services? Do we reach the most vulnerable groups who need substantial support for empowerment; for instance;

- What services do we offer for illiterate?
- What services do we offer to those who live below the poverty line (38.6% in South Asia)?
- What do we offer to those who are geographically isolated due to lack of roads and means of transportation?
- What do we do to empower women in our region (about 50% - 65% illiterate across the region)

This is where we need to use ICT to augment our library services.

I will mention very briefly two instances in which the Faculty of Agriculture Library of University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka has attempted to empower the farmers by taking the university research results to the most needy illiterates.

1. Once a workshop was conducted by the Senior Assistant Librarian for 100 milk farmers of which 55 were illiterate. The contents on cattle diseases & remedies and contact details for support was delivered using posters, CDs and presentations and a take-home information pack was given – to illiterate ? – but they were most enthusiastic – because they could get their children to read the leaflets for them & the feedback was 100% positive.
2. Second instance was a workshop on use of pesticides for farmers again using the same methods and educating them on connecting to the audio visual site maintained by the Department of Agriculture for more information. Again the feedback was 100% positive.

I am sure that there are many more examples from other countries too.

But we need to offer more services of this nature to empower the citizens to enhance there living conditions. But it is not easy. We cannot do it alone.

We need to,

- think beyond the boundaries of our school, academia, research or university library compartments
- take leadership in initiating such rprogrammes.
- Especially the public libraries as the common citizens' university – the service delivery model need to re-oriented to be more community information services oriented.
- Library schools have a responsibility to educate librarians in serving a new group of clientele - the illiterate and the disadvantaged – whose information needs are vital for their survival.
- Library Associations and other professional associations have a responsibility to provide Continuing Professional Development programmes to update the knowledge and skills of the practicing librarians.
- Libraries alone cannot achieve them but need to build up partnerships with researchers, administrators, field workers and many other stake holders.

If we do not get the opportunity to make the libraries more socially, economically relevant the replacement of us with the emerging community Information centers, tele centers will be inevitable. This is some food for thoughts of the leading LIS professionals.

Thank you.