

Community empowerment activities of public libraries in Jaffna District

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Public libraries are community hubs that host a variety of programmes for all ages in the community. Outreach activities in public libraries are an important aspect of their goals to support the community. Therefore, the main aim of this study was to examine the nature, implementation, and challenges of outreach activities conducted by public libraries in the Jaffna District and propose strategies for enhancing their effectiveness in community engagement. There are 60 public libraries in Jaffna District and all were selected for this survey. The structured questionnaire was used as a study instrument. Forty libraries responded at the rate of 66.7%. Data were analyzed using SPSS. According to the results 36 libraries engaged in conducting outreach activities. A variety of activities are conducted, and among them school visits (n=34) predominate, followed by mobile library services (n=31) and competitions for students (n=31). The school students are the main target group for conducting outreach activities. In 42.5% of these public libraries, 2-3 staff members are involved in conducting the outreach activities, while 22.5% of the libraries mentioned that only one staff member is involved in conducting outreach activities. For 30 public libraries the local government is the major supporting body, and other supporting bodies are reader circle (n=22), library staff (n=22) and library advisory board (n=17). Among the participated libraries, 65% of the libraries accepted that outreach activities have an impact on community development. Three (03) libraries mentioned that they are not sure whether outreach activities have an impact on community development. The challenges faced by the libraries are financial restrictions, inadequate staff, lack of transport facilities, low public interest and no training. Very useful suggestions were made by the public libraries to enhance the quality of outreach activities. Based on the results, this study recommends that efforts be made to identify funding sources to support outreach activities, libraries should be manned with adequate human resources, transport facilities for these services should be provided by the respective local authorities, and training programmes for public librarians need to be organized with the support of national level library organizations and Higher Educational Institutions.

Keywords: *Community empowerment, Jaffna, Outreach activities, Public libraries*