

Community Library: Sustainable Modality

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Abstract

A community library established to serve the local people through the management of local organizations. This study aims to identify the basis of a library's sustainability. This is qualitative interview-based and observation research. The executive members, staff, and users were informants. The physical infrastructure, strong financial foundation, social cohesion, and trust library committee and community are basis for sustainability of library.

Keywords: community library, sustainability, sarvodaya pustakalaya tatha vachanalaya; ghorahi

Introduction

Community libraries serve educational, social, and cultural needs of specific communities. They are financially supported by the local organizations. The financial source may be a donation, fund, or allocated budget. They are set up and run under the norms of values established by community members. A community library is a social (Karki, 2012). A community library is based on local needs and is owned and managed by a particular community. The users are people from all walks of life. "A community library aims at meeting the information needs of the community within which it operates and rendering a more varied and more proactive service than commonly offered by public libraries" (Mostert, 1998). Community libraries especially operate through community participation, funds, donations, etc. It commemorates its heritage, culture, etc.

A community library is usually a branch library (although may be a central or mobile service) intended to provide advice-center functions and local information for the whole of its community, rather than only offering a book stock to readers (Prytherch, 2005).

In the context of Nepal, the community library is working as an integral part of the nation's development. From the history of library development in Nepal, we can conclude that libraries open from community initiatives have been playing role in increasing the literacy rate of Nepal. Political, social and education movements of Nepal had contributed on the development of community libraries.

The community library is different from other libraries such as academic libraries, and special libraries. It is itself a parent organization unlike academic library. Some reknown community libraries like Sharada Library, Kathamandu, Dhawal Library, Palpa, Mahabir Library, Butwal and so on had glorified history, but the present existence is gloomy. Some of them are non-existent. The sustainability question has bee serious question to be answered in the context of Nepali community library. It would enlight the possible solution upon such grave questions for community library. In addition, it had supported local government and social organizations to make right decision related to community library.

Sustainability of Community Library

Sustainability in the context of a community library means how this library maintains its operations, importance, and impact on community engagement and development. The library promotes social cohesion and inclusion by providing resources and programs that meet the diverse needs of the community promoting lifelong learning and community engagement. Community libraries require environmental, financial, physical, and social . Environmental sustainability is assured by minimizing ecological impact such as promoting sustainable materials. Financial sustainability is assured by securing financial foundations such as donations, gifts, grants, etc. Physical sustainability is assured by having owned land and buildings. Social sustainability is assured by promoting lifelong learning and community engagement.

Sarvodaya Pustakalaya Tatha Vachanalaya: A Case

Sarvodaya Pustakalaya Tatha Vachanalaya, a community library, which was established in 2010 B.S. This library is located in Ghorahi, Dang district of Lumbini Pradesh. This library was established with a community initiative in 2010 BS and since then it has been serving its community with great pride and responsibilities.

This library is open at 11:30 AM every Sunday to Friday. Users of different age group, sex, religion, etc. are allowed in the library. There is a facility for borrowing books. For this, the users have to deposit the original ID card or citizenship card in the library and then only users are allowed to borrow books for 15 days. The library is providing the service to its users free of cost. A working committee was formed from active and creative personalities in the educational sector of Dang, Nepal. As mentioned in *Sarvodaya Pustakalaya Tatha Vachanalaya* Operating Directory 2061, this committee includes the president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and members. Nine members are nominated by the president of this committee. There is also a provision to nominate five advisors and one legal advisor by the working committee according to the needs of this committee. "There must be 33% women's participation. The tenure of this committee is of three years.

The UNESCO/IFLA Public/Community Library Manifesto (1994) defines a public or community library as 'the local gateway to knowledge, which provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups. Based on this definition, Shrestha reports that 'The survey report (of 2003) shows a very poor picture about public (community) libraries. More than 90% of the public libraries were not in a position to support specific needs and the small collection of books and newspapers is insufficient to provide library services to the community (Koirala & Bird, 2011; Bajracharya, 2020)

According to the 'Survey reports on public and community libraries in Nepal' conducted in 2022 by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Shanti Volunteer, Read Nepal, there are 222 community libraries in entire Nepal, and there are 34 community libraries in Lumbini Province, where *Sarvodaya Pustakalaya Tatha Vachanalaya* is located. INGOs like "Room to Read", and "READ Nepal" are most actively working in the development and sustainability of libraries. READ Nepal is establishing community libraries as a part of its community development program. Since the start of its activities in 1991 to 2021, READ Nepal has supported the establishment of 69 Community libraries in 43 districts (Pokhrel, 2022). As the effort for establishment of libraries is important, so the sustainability of them is more significant too.

"For a lasting impact, it is important that the initiative is self-sustainable. The local community needs to manage and maintain the initiative on its own for a long time. Sustainability is maintained by three major components: - physical sustainability is ensured when the library has its infrastructure, social sustainability is ensured when the library has maintained social trust, linkage, and partnership with local organizations, and financial sustainability is ensured by sustaining enterprise and partnership" (Shrestha, 2013).

Methods

For this qualitative research, a case study method was used depending on the study area and nature. *Sarvodaya Pustakalaya Tatha Vachanalaya*, Dang of Lumbini province was selected for this study. The executive members, library staff, and library users of this library were selected as key informants, and data was collected using a structured interview as well as observation techniques. Data collected were analysed thematically and descriptively.

Discussion and Findings

Components of Library Sustainability

Based on data analysis, the sustainability components of the community library were categorized into the following themes.

Neat and clean surrounding

A library is a place where sources of information are preserved and disseminated to its users as per their needs and interests. It should promote ecological health by encouraging sustainable practices among users. For libraries environmental sustainability is the new concept. The area where this library is located is one of the busiest markets of Ghorahi, Dang. Nearby, we can find hospitals, boarding schools, medical, fancy Shops, etc. Easy access to vehicles has made it easy for users to access over there. The outside environment of the library is noisy due to excessive use of vehicles. The library has no solar panels, LED lights, and no recycling of waste. But the area near the library is kept neat and clean. The place where the library is situated has been awarded twice as an excellent town by the municipality. "Community members always stay aware so that no one can throw the cover of cigarettes, gutkha, etc. If any of this waste is found, community members quickly throw it into the dustbin. They want the area around the library to be neat, clean, and free from smoking and alcoholic activities"(Gautam, Sudip, personal interview). Though the location of the library is in the midst of traffic noise and people's crowd, the community effort for keeping the area neat and clean around the library is appreciated and acknowledged the town for its cleanliness. The library has special contribution for cultivating cleanliness around it.

Financial Sustainability

The library building has two floors, and under ground floor was under construction while this research was carried out. The ground floor was given for rent purposes, where NRS. 87,500/- was the monthly income to sustain financially.

Library had faced several financial challenges in the starting period, including newspapers, books and salary expenses. Later, the Ghorahi Municipality provided budget annually for library operation, and it continued for a few years. Now the library has successfully overcome basic financial challenges because it has its monthly income from rented rooms. "There are so many helping hands who donate books, furniture, etc. to the library" (Janaka, Pokhrel, personal interview). The research shows people as per their interest donate books, furniture and sometimes money to the library on special occasions. While visiting the library we can find these things. During the period (2074-2078) Rs 10 lakh from the Ministry of Education, Rs 3 lakh from the District Education Office Dang, Rs 3 lakh and 50 thousand from the provincial Directorate of Education Butwal, Rs 7 lakh from Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Rs. 30,000 from ward no. 14 of Ghorahi Sub Metropolitan City, Rs. 51 thousand 151 supports were received. Computers, Furniture, Books, etc. have been purchased from this received amount.

"This library has served as a milestone for educational advancement among intellectual people and in the latest generations as the elders have been saying. It was a place of contemplation for the development of literature. It is a heritage that needs to be developed. Because of the positive thinking towards this library, the local government, municipality, and community have been protecting it" (Gautam, Sunder, personal interview, April 27, 2023). According to the treasurer of the library, "for the major projects of the library, such as building construction, hall construction, wall construction behind roads, etc. plan should be submitted to the provincial government and sub-metropolitan city and if they find it necessary then they will allocated budget for these but the library run general expenses such as staff salary, purchase of books, etc. from its rent" (Acharya, Numananda, personal interview, May 5, 2023).

After democracy, the door to freedom of thought, expression, and social activities was opened. The need for education was highly felt. In the context of Dang, 2010 B.S. was a significant year in terms of educational and social activities. Though the official data on the establishment of this library has not been found, according to Khagraj Lohoni, a social personality, Sarvodaya Pustakalaya Tatha Vachanalaya was established at Ghorahi in 2010 B.S. (Gautam, 2079). Educationists, Social workers, and Scholarly elders of that time were highly dedicated to library opening activities.

In the starting phase, with the efforts of people engaged in the opening and developing library field, this library was opened by keeping books in the Khatiya in front of Dhurba Bahadur Shrestha's house in the square of Ganesh Mandir. After this, there was an attempt to build a permanent building for this library under the Pipalbot, the way to Rajhena, but for some reason, this attempt was interrupted and stopped.

Ghorahi Panchayat donated NRS 1455.30 in 2018 B.S. and NRS. 1248.55 raised donation for library development fund later. With the accommodation of such a smaller amount, the current building was constructed on the land donated by Pandit Teknath Gautam of 262.62 m² (0-0-15.5 dhur) (K.No. 127 J.B) (Gautam, 2079). The Though this library was purely established at the public level, after the Ghorahi Panchayat, it took interest in it. Rs 1455 and 30 paisa from the development fund and Rs. 1248 and 55 paisa and other donations were organized for the construction of the library building under the leadership of the then secretary of the library Ekraj Sharma. It seems that the construction of the building has been completed with a total amount of Rs. 3117 and 70 paise. The support from the District Panchayat continued in the year 2024 B.S., even after the completion of building construction. It was decided to give Rs 500 to the library in the meeting chaired by Sher Bahadur

Thapa, District Panchayat Chairman. The library operated in this way and became the victim of a Student's fight. There was a theft in the library in 2026 B.S. Though the books were found, it was difficult to operate in this condition, so the district Panchayat took over the management of the library. For the construction of old buildings, according to Rasmiraj Nepali, the timber was obtained free of cost from the forest of the Northern part of Masina. The location near today's building was a place for brick burning and the students of Bharatpur High School used to carry wood and bricks. Some other teachers and social workers also helped in such tasks. Books for the library were allocated from the embassies of India, USA, Russia, and China as help (Nepali, 2070). construction was completed with a total amount of NRS. 3117.70. The support from the District Panchayat had also donated NRS 500 in 2024 B.S., even after the completion of building construction. District Panchayat chaired by Sher Bahadur Thapa.

For the first time, the government of the Lumbini Province allocated the amount of NRS 50 lakhs to this library. It was felt that this amount would not be enough to build a building that would meet the needs of the library and in Magh 2075 B.S.; the delegation team of the library reached to Butwal and met with the then chief Minister, Shanker Pokhrel. According to the chief minister's assurance that an adequate budget will be arranged for the library building, the state government allocated Rs. one crore twenty-five lakhs for the construction of the library. In 2076-02-25, the foundation of the library building was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Province 5, Shanker Pokhrel. The new building of the library was constructed for Rs. 80 lakhs 81 thousand 6 hundred 97 and 64 paise (excluding VAT) which was built by Balarupi Construction Services Pvt. Ltd. Under the contract given by the Urban Development and Building Office, Dang and the newly constructed building were handed over to the library in 2077-04-02. On Wednesday 21st of Shrawan, 2077 B.S, the newly constructed building of the library was inaugurated by Chief Minister Shanker Pokhrel.

“Having its’ own land and building has brought The library has faced so many troubles because of the dilapidated buildings. The library building was not so good. During the rainy season, the roof of the library used to leak, which caused damage to books and newspapers. In the same way, books were damaged t the library up to here”. “This is possible because of love, passion, and dedication from the community. The next most important reason is that it has land and buildings. If the library has no building in their ownership, this library would have remained in history only”. The response from informants identified the need for own building (Gautam, Sudip, personal interview, May 7, 2023).

Social Sustainability

The library promotes lifelong learning, local culture, and relations with the community, creating a safe space for the personal and professional development of all age groups. The library is a good and safe place to utilize leisure time as a healthier leisure. I bring my grandchildren to make them engage in educational activities (Acharya, Chitrakanta, personal interview, May 8, 2023). "This library runs interactive programs related to social issues and some social personalities from the community are invited. Those people who have been using this library for a long time are recognized as an established people in the society. This library is helping to increase the educational level of community people" (Sharma, Sarada, personal interview, May 8, 2023). "It has left an epoch-making mark in the history. This library is taken as a birthplace for some reputed institutions of Dang like Rapti Sahitya Parishad, Nepal Journalist Federation, and Jaycees" (Gautam, Sushil, personal interview, May 7, 2023). The library has launched a campaign for language refinement on signboards. To promote reading culture, various interactive programs were organized between readers and writers.

"There is a big difference between having a hotel, and bar and having a library in this area. Because of the library, we can see the flow of intellectual people such as journalists, lecturers, students, writers, etc. Some people who visit this library buy things from my fancy shop. This library also conducted an awareness campaign together with the Bal club during Corona time, which is a very good thing. I am one of the advisors of this Bal club" (Shrestha, Nabin, personal interview, April 25, 2023).

Analyzing the above personal responses from informants, this research shows that there is a good relationship between community members and the library. No doubt it was established by the initiation and initiative of the community, so it is targeting its services for the all-round development of the community. People are satisfied with the services provided by this library. Both of them are found to benefit from each other that there is a relationship between the library and the community, and this is one of the main reasons for the social sustainability.

Conclusion

This research paper conducted through observation, interview, and key-informant interviews has clearly attempted to identify the four major components of library sustainability. With the changes of time, it is also incorporating technologies in its services.

Sarvodaya Pustakalaya Tatha Vachanalaya, a community library, opened from the community level, has now been established as an organized institution. Looking at its history, it has faced so many problems related to finance, building, dilapidated buildings, drainage systems, modern building construction, etc., but now it has overcome such problems and moved on and served the community with great pride. This library is an example of the practice of not being afraid of problems and moving forward with new changes. The library is not only a place where people get access to needed information but also a safe space for interacting, connecting, and engaging people in many lifelong learning activities.

For the people of Dang district, this library is as important as a treasure. This library is helping to increase educational levels among youth, children, etc. This library has attracted new generations to use the library by organizing various programs. This library can be a good source for the preservation of local culture, art, etc. Library has a positive appreciation in the community. Overall, this library has served its community so far. Hence, this library has to be preserved and promoted.

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