



The role of Parliamentary libraries in increasing citizens' access to knowledge and its barriers in the developing countries

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Abstract:

The added value and benefits that parliamentary libraries bring to society is much more than the costs of providing & maintaining them. These libraries can help with a constant education and development of the citizens in their awareness of society. In addition, these libraries can provide needed information to citizens and managers to make their vocational or economical decisions. Parliamentary libraries make governmental services more accessible to citizens, provide social justice and democracy and let people communicate with their deputies more freely; even let them influence their deputies' functions and approvals.

In spite of these advantages, Parliamentary libraries often don't have suitable quality services in some developing countries and the citizens can't get their needed information from these libraries. Some of the most important barriers that cause difficulties for society to get information from the libraries are because of:

- *the appointment of nonprofessional managers,*
- *the lack of specialist staff,*
- *the lack of financial support,*
- *managers not having enough vision about the effective role of the parliamentary libraries in the permanent learning process of citizens,*

- *not having a continuous program for increasing citizen's information literacy and information seeking skills,*
- *unsuitable organization of information resources,*
- *difficult websites for users,*
- *not having enough suitable technical and communication infrastructures,*
- *legal restrictions of common use of those libraries,*
- *not being clear about the place of parliamentary libraries' in national information system*
- *As a result these barriers can cause serious problems for democracy in these countries.*

Taking the above mentioned points, this paper attempts to clarify the real role of parliamentary libraries in making knowledge accessible for citizens and to discuss the most important barriers in providing suitable services in these libraries in developing countries.

Keywords: *Parliamentary libraries- developing countries- barriers- information accessibility*

Parliamentary libraries and developing the citizens

✓ **Parliamentary libraries' added value:**

Keyes, Griffiths and King try to show in their research that libraries have an annual return on investment of 515%. That equals quintuple of the annual investment (Keyes, 1995; Griffiths and King, 1993). Also, McClure and his colleagues indicated that the research advantages of library services are much more than their founding costs (McClure et al., 2000). This fact has another facet, especially in parliamentary libraries. This research shows that, the value of the time citizens spend in parliamentary libraries is much more than the expenditure of service operation in these libraries. People and organizations are satisfied with the expenditure they make for using the library services, because they believe the knowledge gained in this way is guaranteed to achieve a complete success in operating a project, a good return and benefit on investment as well (United Nations. Economic and Social Council. Economic Commission for Africa, 2003).

✓ **Parliamentary libraries and education process and citizens constant developing:**

Researchers state that if libraries and educational institutions in a country educate the people and develop citizens' skills, the country will attain an increased efficiency and effectiveness in a global economy. Having such skilled and aware citizens, can make them into a more efficient workforce and lead their country to gain significant economical developments (Matson et al., 1995). It is difficult to deny that the role of parliamentary libraries in increasing citizens' skills in the educational and scientific areas directly contribute to development of their country. These kinds of libraries play an educational role for their citizens and increase their social and vocational efficiency. Also, as centers for literacy education and for developing the mental investment in a society, these libraries are an essential component in improving citizens' ability, awareness and efficiency with their scientific supports (McClure et al, 2000).

✓ **Parliamentary library as a tool for accelerating the economic development at an international and local level:**

As the national and global economy become knowledge-based, every day knowledge gains a special place as an essential tool for economic development. Local occupations depend on theories; information and new knowledge delivered by libraries for increasingly efficiency, and parliamentary libraries have an essential role in this. In fact, we can say the philosophy of parliamentary library's existence is one of the key ingredients in making proper economic, industrial and occupational decisions, because information is needed for proper decision making. Also its role is to present to the citizens accurate and authorized special information. (Matson et al., 1995). On the other hand, parliamentary libraries play an important role in disseminating economic development knowledge to the user's society. Usually the types of information included in parliamentary libraries are special industrial statistics, general economic statistics, economic events, commercial statistics, market data, management requirements and taxes, life expenses data and work cost data, general information of occupational operations, and financial programming. (Miele; Nancy, 1995). Using this information can increase the awareness of managers and clerks and make their increase their influence at the international and local levels (United Nations. Economic and Social Council. Economic Commission for Africa, 2003) .

✓ **Parliamentary libraries, helping citizens to economic benefits:**

Most of the benefits from the services of parliamentary libraries come back to people. Financial benefits from these services are noticeable, too. Low cost of source loans, instead of purchasing them, circulating audio books, video tapes and CDs and the use of journals and databases are of great benefit to citizens. There are two kinds of benefits in these cases: the first is the citizens can save their money instead of spending it for purchasing these sources and can then spend it on more pressing requirements for their families. And secondly, by using the information in these sources, it can have significant effects on all affairs such as organizations' progress and even a citizen's personal life can be much better managed. Therefore, parliamentary libraries can enhance the quality of life of both organizations and employees. (Bolt, 1991; Keyes, 1995).

✓ **Parliamentary libraries, a factor for social development, solidarity, participation and making citizens more powerful:**

Information makes citizens and specially decision makers and employees more powerful and makes their decisions and occupational futures more stable (CILIP, 2002). Occupational stability increases the responsibility and attention to work and will help in producing more quality production and organization. This then helps in lifting the country's standing in the world. The reason for this occupational stability is the constant requirement of organization to have skill awareness and creative employees. Parliamentary libraries have most of the information and knowledge to help achieve these outcomes. These libraries are as a representative for social consistency and convergence because increasing the awareness and information in employees can ensure a positive relationship and enable them to use the new information and set them on a path to improve the society. In the Usherwood and Toyne study, one of the respondents stated that "because all members of a library are shared in the sources, it will cause a closer relationship between us" (Usherwood and Toyne, 2002) .

✓ **Parliamentary libraries, prerequisite for founding e-government, citizens' authority and democracy:**

In the program of e-government, the aim is to always attempt a better preparation of general services for citizens using the facilities afforded by the use of information technology (Berger, 1991). The main goals of e-government are:

- establishing the services that citizens share in founding a government and that make its services more accessible,
- providing social justice
- giving freedom and liberty in connecting with managers
- controlling their performance.
- gives citizens virtual access to managers
- helps citizens control the managers' performance
- gives citizens access to documentation (Pare, 2002).

Nowadays, librarians of parliamentary libraries can supply suitable information for the founding of e-government and the conversion to a free society, by the analyzing of information, indexing, organizing digital sources, designing and developing the multi-tasking software for information retrieval, gathering and sending the related governmental data. Also these libraries can make institutions and organizations aware of government performance and play a special role in the success of institutions and organizations (United Nations. Economic and Social Council. Economic Commission for Africa, 2003).

Some alternatives for improving the services of parliamentary libraries in developing countries

✓ **The necessity of changing the vision of policy makers towards the importance of investment in parliamentary libraries:**

Changing the vision of policy makers to ensure that investing in parliamentary libraries is not focused upon immediate benefits. It must be for long term benefits, macro development and making the quality of citizens and employees lives better forever. The macro policy makers will be able to improve the quality of the services of parliamentary libraries only with this vision (United Nations. Economic and Social Council. Economic Commission for Africa, 2003).

✓ **Direct participation of parliamentary libraries in providing the developmental information:**

The managers of parliamentary libraries must be conscious about the role of their libraries in development. They must present the programs which effect the development directly and help the mission of libraries in the development of society. For this purpose, they must try to present programmes to increase the skills of employees and develop the organizations. It is necessary for parliamentary libraries to form or expand the sections as Economic Development Information Centers (EDICs) which provide these kinds of services (United Nations. Economic and Social Council. Economic Commission for Africa, 2003).

✓ **Planning and performing the national information system:**

It is necessary for the services of parliamentary libraries to be considered as an essential element in the national information policies. Interaction between parliamentary libraries and other kinds of libraries must be considered in planning and performing the national information system. Also, it must be considered as an essential means in changing to e-government in future programs. In this way, parliamentary libraries and information networks must exist and governments and organizations must establish all kinds of libraries in order to have an effective e-government. This support will enable all kinds of libraries- university, school, public and parliamentary libraries- to have an interactive role in exchanging information which is the foundation of e-government (United Nations. Economic and Social Council. Economic Commission for Africa, 2003).

✓ **Organizing the supervisory council for policy making and controlling its execution in parliamentary libraries:**

There needs to be a supervisory council that is organized in the ministries of developing countries for policy making, coordinating, controlling and evaluating the activities of parliamentary libraries (Unesco, 2000). Some of its duties are planning the outlines of the activities of the parliamentary libraries, presenting alternatives to connect internal information units with parliamentary libraries, proposing and presenting some alternatives to plan the necessary standards, preparing detailed budget proposal for parliamentary libraries and so on.

✓ **Holding congresses, conferences and sessions in order to change policy makers' visions:**

These will help develop the most suitable alternatives to change policy maker's visions in developing countries about the role of parliamentary libraries. It is essential that these plans present the beneficial operations in countries that exhibit positive outcomes about their parliamentary libraries so that others can directly affect their viewpoints (Lundu, 1995).

Conclusion:

Parliamentary libraries are one of the most important tools for development in any country. But they have not yet been considered seriously enough in developing countries. Because of the policy makers' visions, the effect of underdeveloped cultural factors is more than many others, although there are many cultural, economical, technical and social reasons. It is really important that parliamentary libraries are information oriented, that they use the information in decision making, and that they believe in the role of parliamentary libraries in providing, organizing and disseminating suitable information for citizens and organizations. Also, updating the librarians' and information science experts' skills could increase the power of their organization and will demonstrate the advantages of parliamentary libraries to managers and policy makers in these countries which will lead them to make more investment in their libraries. Being successful and getting more attention to parliamentary libraries, there will be more development for organizations and citizens.

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