STATUS OF NON-GOVERNMENT PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

Public libraries are very important social organizations in building knowledge based society. There are two types of public libraries in Bangladesh i.e. Government public libraries and Non-Government public libraries. This article concentrates on the status of Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. There is very few literature on Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. Currently there are 972 Non-Government public libraries running in Bangladesh. In gathering data on Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh, the Directory of Non-Government Public Libraries published by National Book Centre is considered. A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) has been conducted to acquire comprehensive information about the status of Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. Eventually some problems of Non-Government public libraries have been addressed and as remedial measures a number of recommendations have been put forward by the authors.

KEYWORDS

Non-Government Public Libraries, Bangladesh, Public Libraries, Growth, ICT.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh emerged as an independent and sovereign country on 16 December 1971 following a nine-month war of liberation. Dhaka (previously spelt Dacca) is its capital (Banglapedia, 2006). The library development in Bangladesh is

closely related with the history of library development in Indian sub-continent. The history of library movement in Indian sub-continent can be traced from the history of ancient Indian libraries furnished by the travel diary of the famous Chinese traveler Fa-Hien, who visited India in 399 AD (Misra, 1979). The British settled and stayed on for nearly two hundred years in Indian sub-continent, initially, for the interest of trading. But, subsequently, they started to establish academic institutions and libraries in a small scale (Kabir, 1987). The Public Library in Calcutta, established in 1835 through private initiatives, is the pioneer of the modern libraries in India (Mannan, 2002). Various researches on library development of Bangladesh shows that before mid 1800's most libraries in Bangladesh were privately owned and their use were limited to certain groups.

The library movement in Bangladesh started with the establishment of four public libraries i.e. Woodburn Public Library, Bogra, Jessore Public Library, Barisal Public Library and Rangpur Public Library in 1854. Subsequently public libraries were established in other district towns and municipals of Bangladesh. Some of these are Raja Rammohan Rai Library, Dhaka (1871), Sirajgonj Public Library (1882), Northbrook Hall Public Library, Dhaka (1882), Rajshahi Public Library (1884) , Comilla Birchandra Public Library (1885), Pabna Annada Gobinda public Library (1890), Noakhali Public Library (1896), Khulna Umesh Chandra Public Library (1897), Natore Victoria Public Library (1901) etc. These libraries were run and maintained by private initiatives and without any assistance from government agencies. (Ahmed, 1998, p. 39).

Government initiatives in setting up a countrywide Public Library System started long before the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, but it was too slow. Primarily in implementation of central government sponsored social uplift schemes in the education sector and followed by a report from Mr. L.C. Key (Library Consultant of the government of Pakistan) in 1956 three Government public libraries were set up. These are the Central Public Library at Dhaka and two divisional public libraries at Khulna and Chittagong.

The foundation stone of the Central Public Library was laid on February 5, 1954 at the present campus of the Dhaka University Library and its door was opened to the public on March 22, 1958 with a stock of 10040 books. The library was intended to be the main centre of the public library system in the province of East Bengal of the Pakistan.

As articulated in the literature of public libraries in Bangladesh, non-government public libraries are considered not only as the forerunner of public library movement, but also library movement in the country.

PRESENT SCENARIO

In Bangladesh there are mainly two types of public libraries from the administrative and management point of view, viz. Government and Non-Government Public Libraries (Ahmad 1994, p. 53). Non-government public library movement started with the establishment of four public libraries in the year 1854 whereas, government public libraries started their journey with the opening of Bangladesh Central Public Library in 1958. However, the real number of public libraries and situation of government and non-government public libraries in Bangladesh is frustrating as compared to the population of the country. Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and the people have diversified education and information needs to be served by the public libraries. But the public libraries in Bangladesh being non-profit organizations get less favour by the government and affluent people as well. The numbers of Public Libraries are given below:

Government Public Libraries

The government public libraries in Bangladesh are run by the Department of Public Library under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Since the establishment of the central public library in 1958 the total numbers of government public libraries are as below:

Table 1: Number of government-run public libraries in Bangladesh

Sl. No.	Library	Number
1.	Bangladesh Central Public Library	01
2.	Divisional Central Public Library	05
3.	District Library	58
4.	Branch Library	04
	Total	68

Non-government Public Libraries

The development and maintenance of non-government public libraries in Bangladesh follow no definite principles as there is no authorized body for their monitoring yet. Basically different circumstances given birth of non-

government public libraries without extensive future planning. And it is evident from the consultation of different issue of *Bangladesh National Book Centre's Library Directory* that many of these libraries drop out after few years of their establishment. Therefore instead of continuous development of the number of non-government public libraries the number varies largely from one year to another mainly. So, through the nature of continuous ups and downs the latest number of non-government public libraries in Bangladesh is 972 (*Library Directory, 2011 Bangladesh National Book Centre*).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The core purpose of the study is to unearth the status of Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh.

Other objectives are:

- To find out the current collection strengths, collection development policies of the Non-Government public libraries
- To find out the members strength of the Non-Government public libraries
- To find out the ICT facilities in Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh.
- To find out how Non-Government Public Librarians define the concept library
- To find out the problems that hinder the gradual development of Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh
- To offer some suggestions to improve the current status of Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative methodology. In collecting general information like total number of Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh, their collections, administrative structure etc. we used the latest Non-Government Public Libraries Directory-2011 published by the National Book Centre. We verified the data on the Directory for up-to-datedness by making phone calls randomly to the representatives of 50 Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh.

A Focus Group Discussion was conducted in Dhaka city with 18 librarians of Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. This was supported by the

National Book Centre. The Focus Group Discussion was made on April 24, 2012. 18 librarians of Non-Government public libraries from 18 difference places of Bangladesh participated in the study. The whole conversation was recorded using Nokia E63 mobile recorder facility. The participants of the study were informed about the study and they were allowed to leave the study anytime. The study was conducted for one and half hour.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Number of Non-Government Public Libraries and Their Year of Establishment

The NBC Directory on Non-Government Public Libraries listed 972 Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. We analyzed the data presented in the directory to find out the growth of Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. Table 2 Presents the Establishment Year of the Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh.

Table 2: Establishment Profile of Non-government Public Libraries in Bangladesh

Period of Establishment	Number
Before 1971	133
1971-1980	78
1981-1990	176
1991-2000	298
2001-2010	270
No Info	17
Total	**972**

Table 2 reflects that before independence there were 133 Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. After independence in ten years 78 Non-Government public libraries were established. However major growth of Non-Government public libraries is seen in the time span of 1991 to 2010. More than 500 Non-Government public libraries were established during this period. Confusion may arise regarding the number of Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh as the Non-Government Public Libraries Directory published by NBC in 2003 listed 1603 Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. Whereas the current directory listed 972 Non-Government public libraries meaning that about 700 Non-Government public libraries stopped working from 2003 to 2011. However, for the purpose of the current study, the authors will rely upon the data presented in the latest directory as it claims to be up-to-date and accurate.

Collection and Collection Development Policy

Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh developed their collection by donation from Government, their members and by yearly purchase of books. To assess the current collection strengths of the Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh we divided 972 Non-Government public libraries in different categories which are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Collection of books

Number of Books	Total	Percentage
Less than 500	221	22.74
500-999	231	23.77
1000-1499	138	14.20
1500-1999	71	7.30
2000-2499	54	5.56
2500-2999	43	4.42
3000-3499	30	3.09
3500-3999	19	1.95
4000-4499	20	2.06
4500-4999	12	1.23
Above 4999	120	12.35
No Info	13	1.34
Total	**972**	**100**

It is evident from Table 3 that majority of the non-government public libraries in Bangladesh possess less than 1000 books. This is not unexpected when we consider that they do not have enough funds to purchase books regularly and their collection is developed mostly by donation. Therefore, having 1000 books should be considered positive. A good picture is illustrated at the above Table i.e. 120 libraries are having collections over 5000. These libraries are sustaining for a long time and getting support from their members time to time.

Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh also subscribe to daily newspapers and magazines. Table 4 shows the collection information on newspapers and magazines possessed by Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh.

Table 4: Collection of newspapers and magazines

Number of Newspapers	Total	Percentage	Number of Magazines	Total	Percentage
Less than 05	826	84.98	Less than 05	521	53.60
05--09	66	6.79	05--09	46	4.73
Above 09	32	3.29	10--14	7	0.72
No Info	48	4.94	15-19	4	0.41
Total	**972**	**100**	20-24	3	0.31
			Above 24	1	0.11
			No Info	390	42.21
			Total	**972**	**100**

Table 4 depicts that majority of the libraries are subscribing to less than 5 daily newspapers and magazines. Subscription of newspapers and magazines actually depends on the monthly income of the libraries. As most of the Non-Government public libraries have no fixed income, the subscription of newspapers and magazines may vary time to time. Apart from the subscribed magazines some libraries e.g. *Sheikh Russell Pathagar*, *Momtaz Library* etc. publish magazines on national occasions.

Financial Status

Majority of the Non-Government public libraries are financially insolvent and have no assurance whether they will sustain in the future or not. About half of the libraries listed in NBC directory receive Government's nominal donation yearly. Local philanthropists are the major source of income for Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. Some libraries also receive continuous financial support from their members. Some other rent their space to private coaching centers and earns some money from it. Most of the librarians are voluntary workers. There are some librarians who get small amount of honorarium from District Council and the social and religious institutions e.g. Mosque, Temple etc. managing the libraries. Therefore, to sustain they require very small amount money to purchase books and reading materials and for some periodic maintenance of the libraries. It has been revealed from the Focus Group Discussion that some librarians doing business or having permanent jobs do contribute for the sustainability of the libraries.

 "I do pay every month some amount of money from the profit I gained from my business to run my library and consider it as service to my society"- Non-Government Public Librarian from Satkhira.

 "I always try to pay small amount of money to my library from the salary I receive from my permanent job"- Non-Government Public Librarian from Kushtia.

Registration, Constitution and Executive Committee

From the Analysis of the data presented in the NBC Non-Government Public Library Directory it is evident that about 49 percent libraries are registered either with Directorate of Social Welfare or Directorate of Public Libraries. The registration status of Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh is presented in the following Table:

Table 4: Registration Status of Non-Government Public Libraries in Bangladesh

Registration	Total	Percentage
Yes	476	48.97
No	475	48.87
No Info	21	2.16
Total	**972**	**100**

It is clear from the above Table that about 50 percent of the non-government public libraries in Bangladesh have not yet been registered with any authority. While conducting phone discussions with some of non-government public librarians in Bangladesh, it is found that they are not aware of the registration process. Some of them are interested to get the registration but consider the process administratively complex.

 "Though I want my library to be registered either with the Directorate of Social Welfare or Directorate of Public Libraries; unfortunately my attempt to register my library went vain when the authorities asked for several documents." Non-Government Public Librarian from Sherpur.

The authors of this paper think that registration process for non-government public libraries should be simple and hassle free. Since these libraries are not business organization and they are offering voluntary services to the community, their registration should be free of charge. Majority of the libraries i.e. 790 (81.28%) non-government public libraries listed in the directory have constitution to run the library. About 94% i.e. 909 non-government public libraries in Bangladesh have Executive Council to run the library.

When asked who the members of the Executive Council are, they replied that the Executive Councils usually consist of persons who are interested to patronize the library and have good educational background. Non-Government public librarians do collect donations from political leaders in their area for the development of their libraries and sometime political leaders nominate members for the Non-Government public libraries' executive council. Most of the time Executive Council members are selected by the general members. In some libraries in addition to Executive Council, there is also a General Committee consisting of general members of the library, which is responsible for the day to day activities of the library.

Membership System

Majority of the Non-Government public libraries have membership system. They charge a nominal fee to be member of the library. In some libraries as revealed in the Focus Group Discussion two types of membership systems i.e. life membership and general membership exist. For life membership the charge is usually BDT 1000 (about 12 US dollar) and for general membership it is yearly about BDT 50. Current membership strengths of the Non-Government public libraries are illustrated in the following Table.

Table 5: Number of Members in Non-government Public Libraries

Number of members	Total	Percentage
Less than 100	443	45.58
100-199	238	24.49
200-299	76	7.82
300-399	40	4.12
400-499	34	3.50
Above 500	55	5.65
No Info	86	8.84
Total	**972**	**100.00**

As illustrated in Table 5, it is clear that majority of the libraries have less than 100 members and the percentage is 45.58 while 6.65% (55) libraries have more than 500 members. About 24.49 percent libraries have less than 200 members. Membership of the libraries varies from area to area depending upon the literacy rate, reading habits of the inhabitants, number of inhabitants etc.

Daily User Visit to Non-Government Public Libraries

Information on daily user visit indicates that above 40 percent Non-Government public libraries are visited by 20-39 users per day. Over 22 percent Non-Government public libraries are visited by less than 20 people. 65 Non-Government public libraries are visited by 100 users per day which is undoubtedly a positive picture on user visit to Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. Users consist of members and non-members.

Computerization and Internet Facility

No libraries except very few are able to install a computer. Logically when the sustainability of the Non-Government libraries is threatened by severe shortage of funds, no one can think of maintaining computer and its related technology. However, while conducting the Focus Group Discussion, it was interesting to note that the majority of the participating non-government librarians were planning to purchase/collect computer and Internet technology for their libraries in immediate future. The libraries possessing computers with Internet connections have purchased it either at the expense of the librarian or from donations given by local philanthropists. The comments made by some librarians regarding purchasing of computer at their libraries are worth mentioning.

- 'I have planted some tress, when these tress will grow, I will sell them and buy a computer with the money'-Focus Group Participant from Khulna.

- 'I have submitted a proposal to District Commissioner's Office for donating a computer to my library'- Focus Group Participant from Satkhira.
- 'I will manage a computer this year for my library. I started searching for donor who might fund us for purchasing a computer'- Focus Group Participant from Chittagong.
- It is revealed from the study that some of the participants of the study have access to e-mail and Facebook. They use their computer at home and mobile in accessing e-mail and Facebook.

DEFINITION OF LIBRARIES BY THE NON-GOVERNMENT PUBLIC LIBRARIANS

At the end of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) the participants were asked to define the concept 'library'. The main intention to ask this question was to see how do they define the concept library? The concept/definition of the library is presented in the following Table.

Table 6: Definition of Library by the Non-Government Public Librarians

Participants	Area	Definition of Library
Participant 1	Joypurhat	A place where knowledge is disseminated and books are kept for future use.
Participant 2	Panchagar	A centre of knowledge sharing.
Participant 3	Satkhira	Libraries are the social organization creating bridge among the past and present and preserving knowledge for future use.
Participant 4	Rangpur	A place where all kinds of information is available for use.
Participant 5	Nawgaon	An organization collecting and disseminating books to its users.
Participant 6	Pirajpur	An organization from which citizens receives reader's service and be enlightened.
Participant 7	Dinajpur	An institution that collects and disseminate information.
Participant 8	Cox's Bazar	A place where people gather to enrich their knowledge.
Participant 9	Kustia	A social service institution where knowledge is exchanged and disseminated for the development of human beings.

Participant 10	Barishal	An organization where information service is offered.
Participant 11	Patuakhali	A place where citizens gathered to enrich their knowledge

Surprisingly, all the definitions offered by the Non-Government public librarians are from the perspectives of library and information science professionals, although none of the Non-Government public librarians have any professional background and even majority of them have no high school certificate. They consider a library as a social institution, an organization or a place where books are kept, information service is offered, and knowledge is exchanged and disseminated. Some participants also consider library as a place to enlighten citizens of a nation. However, none of the Non-Government public librarian defined the concept library from the technological perspective. This is because none of them have orientation with digital/ electronic/ virtual libraries.

PROBLEMS OF NON-GOVERNMENT PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Non-Government Public Libraries are continuously facing a whole range of constraints that impede their gradual development. During the Focus Group Discussion the authors of this paper tried to unearth the major problems confronted by the Non-Government public librarians while running the libraries. In the following we discuss the major problems confronted by the Non-Government public librarians.

i) Financial Crisis: The first and foremost problem of Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh is acute financial problem. Non-Government public libraries are facing continuous financial problems for its sustainability and maintenance. There is no fixed monthly income for most of the Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. The nominal Government grant does not ensure its sustainability or proper maintenance. Due to financial crisis purchase of books, magazines, newspapers and other reading materials are hindered greatly. Moreover, financial crisis hindered the introduction of new technologies in the Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. Also due to financial problem it is not possible to offer a minimum honorarium to most of the Non-Government public librarians for their voluntary service to the society.

ii) Lack of Infrastructural Facilities: Most of Non-Government public libraries are housed in small places. As the libraries do not have continuous fund support and big donation for building their infrastructure, these are running with severe infrastructural problems. Due to shortage of space the libraries are unable to offer large reading room services to their users and are unable to initiate computerized services. Each year some Non-Government public libraries in

coastal areas and other disaster-prone areas face huge problems due to climate change causing cyclone, tornado, storm, etc.

iii) Lack of Government Support: Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh are not receiving much support from the Government. This is one of the major reasons why Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh are not flourishing. Non-Government librarians do not receive recognition/reward from the Government of Bangladesh for their service to the community. They are just offering voluntary services to their community. Lack of recognition/reward discourages people to work for community service. Non-Government librarians are not receiving monetary benefits for their continuous service to the libraries.

iv) Lack of Continuous Training: Most of the Non-Government public librarians have no background on organizing library collections and offering library services. Training is very important for the development of Non-Government public library services and to organize its collections. Non-government public librarians need continuous training to offer better library services and to organize their collections systematically. Each year very few librarians receive training organized by the National Book Centre (NBC). That is really not enough to train the non-professional librarians.

v) Lack of Support from the Local Authorities: Not all Non-Government public libraries receive support from local authorities. There are very few libraries that receive support from local authorities. Lack of support from local authorities hinders proper running of Non-Government public libraries.

vi) Lack of Information about the Funding Sources: Most of the Non-Government public librarians have lacking of information about the available funding sources. This issue was raised in the Focus Group Discussion. Only a handful of the 18 Non-Government public librarians were aware of the possible fund support from the District council. Of the 18 librarians, only a few were able to manage funds from Union Councilor members.

Researches on public libraries of Bangladesh i.e. Shuva (2005), Mahmud (2002), Majed (2002) agree that the development of ICT in public libraries is hampered by the problems of inadequate funds, lack of infrastructural facility, lack of government and administrative support, lack of skilled professional librarians and lack of proper planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In spite of pioneering and spearheading the library movement in Bangladesh, the non-government public libraries in Bangladesh are suffering from various problems. Most of these libraries are still unable to ensure their sustainability. Considering the present abject position of Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh, Government should come forward in saving the Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh offering

services to thousands of people. Government should continuously support the Non-Government public libraries by offering yearly financial support to the registered Non-Government public libraries through the district council. Registration system should be made easier and hassle free and Non-Government public libraries should be able to register with the District Council or District public libraries run under the Directorate of Public Libraries. The financial support for the Non-Government libraries may be managed by the Districts councils. Government should offer support for purchasing books, introducing new services, maintenance of charge and honorarium for the working librarians. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs offers nominal annual support to purchase books for the registered Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. Non-Government public libraries should be able to purchase books with special discounts from the publishers. Government can ask the book publishers to offer special discounts on book purchasing for Non-Government public libraries.

The Government, as part of its 'Digital Bangladesh Initiatives' can offer at least one computer with internet facilities to all registered Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. We strongly believe that ICT support to Non-Government public libraries will help waning of digital divide exists in Bangladesh. Library Association of Bangladesh (LAB) and Bangladesh Association of Librarians, Information Scientists and Documentalist (BALID) should jointly organize training programmes for the Non-Government pubic librarians in Bangladesh on basic organization of library materials and offering basic library services.

Sustainability is the most important matter for the Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh. The libraries attached with institutions or religious organizations will be able to survive and continue their services. The authors of this paper are mainly concerned about the libraries having no attachment with any organization and having no fixed fund for their maintenance. The Government of Bangladesh can form a National Committee to assess the real situation of Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh and to find the possible sustainable plan for these. Non-Government public libraries can only be sustained if they offer better services to community. In the age of ICT, Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh can earn money by offering ICT based services to its users like Community Information Centres in Bangladesh. Non-Government public libraries can offer education, health, agriculture support services to its users and may get some money for their services. However, to offer all these services the person working in the Non-Government public library must be skilled enough to harness the opportunities available on the internet and computer technologies.

We firmly believe that if Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh receive adequate support from the Government and philanthropists, they will be able to contribute towards building a qualified future generation. If the Government wants a Digital Bangladesh by the year2021 then it should offer financial and ICT support to the Non-Government public libraries in Bangladesh immediately.

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