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Transforming Libraries into Centers of Community Engagement: Towards Inclusion, Equality & Empowerment

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Abstract:

An array of socio-political changes around the globe have stirred debate and discussion on questions of exclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged groups and ways of eliminating this imbalance through policy interventions . The question of just social representation has come centre stage “due to increasing social unrest and quest for understanding patterns of social representation and strategies for inclusive public policies have exploded around the world marked by an upsurge of interest in strategies of inclusion ranging from different kind affirmative actions, more inclusive representations and creating a institutionalized mechanism that addresses the needs of various marginalized groups on the basis of race, religion and ethnic backgrounds. The overall purpose of paper is to examine as to whether libraries can reposition themselves as nerve centres of community engagements by building capacities of common masses so as to partner with public policy programme for building an inclusive and equal society” (Ashraf, 2017) . Paper argues that libraries as empowering and democratizing institutions can engage communities by “outreaching and take up expansive roles which are confined to not only serving as information resource but much more. It is found that as powerful social institution with sizeable presence , libraries have started engaging with local communities by transforming themselves as socio- cultural & capacity building hubs globally”.

Keywords: Public policy, Social inclusion , E-governance, Community Engagement, Libraries

1. Introduction

With nearly 1.3 billion population, an amalgamation of 29 states and 7 union territories, India is one of the vast countries with extraordinary characteristics and diversity in terms of its geographical, linguistic, religious, social-cultural features etc. “Comprising of thousands of distinct and unique cultures of all religions and communities.

India's languages, religions, dance, music, architecture, food, and customs differ from place to place within the country". It is also one of the most unequal societies, both socially and economically.

As economic and social trends over the past quarter century have exacerbated inequalities and produced an increasingly polarised society, "it has stirred debate and discussion on questions of exclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged groups and ways of eliminating this imbalance through policy interventions". This focus "raises issues around the potential role of improved access to services in promoting social inclusion and led to an upsurge of interest in strategies of inclusion ranging from different kind affirmative actions more inclusive representations. This has led to awareness that creating a institutionalized mechanism that addresses the needs of various marginalized groups on the basis of race, religion and ethnic background is necessary for equity, justice and social cohesion" (Ashraf, 2017).

Moreover, people are disempowered by negative perception of, and feelings about, the locality, by stigmatization processes, and by lack of cultural and social capital. According to Zoya Hasan (Hasan, 2009) "India is one of the few countries in the post-colonial world that took up the challenge of building an inclusive democracy in a highly diverse, multicultural, multilingual and multi-religious society". India "which is marked by overwhelming patriarchal and hierarchical values and suffers from extensive social inequality, deprivation and oppression, the establishment of democratic polity was undoubtedly a defining change". (Hasan, 2001) However, according to Hasan "nearly seventy years after independence, impressive economic growth, and primacy given to equality and social justice as the cardinal principals, India largely remains one of the world's the most unequal societies revolving around the axis of class, caste, tribal status, religion and gender". (Hasan, 2009). Across the social groups, differences are "sharply marked, with major contrast of income, employment, education, health and so on".

According to a report, "*Regional Geography of South Asia and the Himalayas Inequality and Poverty in India*", "after 70 years of Independence, with unprecedented access to goods and opportunities, inequality is still very much a fact of life in India, largely a result of deep-rooted social and economic structures that perpetuate privilege and limit opportunities for the poor". (<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~dib2/asia/inequality.html>)

The findings of 68th National Sample Survey Organization's (NSSO) 2011, "the highest official surveyor of government of India, seem to reaffirm that the benefits from this spurt in the economy have been mostly cornered by the upper strata, while the poor continue to languish in deprivation". www.library.ifla.org.

According to a survey report, which was conducted in 2009-10, "the monthly expenditure of the poorest 10% population in rural India has risen by only 11.5%, while that of the richest 10% has gone up by 38% in the two years. A similar widening of gap is witnessed in urban India as well. While the monthly expenditure of the poorest 10% of urban population has risen by 17.2%, that of the richest 10% is up by 30.5%"

According to a recent World Bank report, "social exclusion has its roots in India's historical divisions along lines of caste, tribe, and the excluded sex, that is, women. inequalities being more structural in nature and have kept entire groups trapped, unable to take advantage of opportunities that economic growth offers".

2.1 Poverty, corruption and social exclusion

According to United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) programme "270 million or 21.9% people out of 1.2 billion of Indians lived below poverty line of \$1.25 in 2011-2012". <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>. "In addition to massive poverty and inequality, corruption is another malfeasance which is eating into India's social cohesion as it is resulting into more

deprivation and exclusion. Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) placed India at 76th rank out of 193 nations in year 2016". (Fountain, 2001). "India is ranked below neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka and China, while Afghanistan, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh fared much worse than India when it came to corruption in public sector undertakings". (Fountain, 2001).

2.2 E-Governance: A Gateway To Social Inclusion And Transparency

Due to these wide spread socio-economic inequalities, "it is a challenge before the governments to create a variety of conditions for the growth of citizens through good governance, a prerequisite for the human well being and development. Good governance manifests itself in creating conditions for upliftment of all concerned particularly the weaker sections of the society by improving bureaucratic and political accountability and promoting people's participation". (bhatnagar, 2004).

According to citizens "report on governance and development 2015, "there is an urgent need to make the policy process participatory starting from formulation right up to the implementation. The state has to reorient its policy direction in order to fulfill the aspirations of a large number of deprived sections of the society". (sinha, 2010).

2.3 ICT & e-Governance:

Essentially comprising of "processes and structures involved in deliverance of electronic services to citizens, e-governance enables the general public to interact with government through electronic means for getting the desired services resulting in simplifying and improvement of governance and enabling people's participation in governance through information and communication technologies".

Studies suggest that "ICT has the ability to bring dramatic changes and transform government institutions profoundly. The introduction of e-Governance can contribute positively towards administrative reform by improving internal processes, better connectivity to citizens and services, and by enhancing interactions with the society". (Heeks, 2001).

Some authors suggest that, "Information and Communication Technologies could contribute positively towards achieving better governance by making them more efficient, transparent and effective (Bhatnagar, 2004; Fountain,2001) and they have a crucial role in reducing poverty by improving information and communication flow (Marker, McNamara & Wallace, 2002). Fountain (Fountain, 2001) suggested in her book that, networked organisations resulted in reducing red tape, levelling of hierarchies and significantly reducing bureaucracy. Bellamy & Taylor (1998:34) suggested that de-layering of hierarchies and new organisational control techniques will be encouraged with the introduction of new ways for organisational control". In a study published in 2001, Heeks "provided three main change potentials for improving efficiency and effectiveness of government services by introducing e-Governance. This is achieved by introducing ICT tools which results in reduced investment and marketing, lesser delivery time, increased quality of the services, reduced cost, innovative outputs and an increased quantity of outputs". (Bhatnagar, 2004; Fountain, 2001).

The UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development acknowledges, "that the spread and spawning of ICT and global connectivity has great power to accelerate and accentuate human progress and to develop knowledge societies". It sets out "ambitious ICT developments targets in the goals agreed for education, gender and infrastructure, with ICTs recognized as a means of implementation for all Sustainable Development Goals".

It is, thus, concurred that "e-governance initiatives provide a gateway to inclusion of poor and marginalized sections when traditional governance channels perpetuate exclusiveness and elitism".

The advent of internet has led to a “rapid automation of core administrative services, boosted up the delivery of services and promotion of transparency and accountability”. According to World Development Report, 2016, “by 2014 all 193 member-states of United Nations had national websites, 101 enabled citizens to create personal online accounts, 73 to file income tax online, and 60 to register a business, 100 have digital identification system”.

In recent years India has launched major initiatives in this direction.

3.2 Some important initiatives:

E-Governance in India has progressively “evolved from computerization of Government Departments to initiatives which contain the focal points of Governance, such as citizen centricity, service orientation and transparency. The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), is a holistic E-Governance initiative which forms into a collective vision and a shared covering areas and services like ,Central excise, E-office ,Income tax, Insurance, Immigration, Visa and Foreigner’s Registration & Tracking (IVFRT)Ministry of Corporate Affairs -MCA21, UID and National Population Register, Passport, Posts, Pension, Banking, Employment exchange, Education, Agriculture, Police, National Land Records Modernization Programme (NLRMP), Road transport, e-District, Commercial taxes, Municipalities, e-panchayat, Health, Public distribution system, Common services centers , Electronic Data interchange (EDI) for e-Trade, e-procurement, National e-Governance Service Delivery Gateway (NSDG), e-Biz, e-Courts etc.”. www.negp.in

3.3 Digital India Programme & Digital Identification:

In August 2014, the government of India approved yet another initiative names “digital India, aiming at making government services more efficient and available to all citizens electronically”. Over the next three years, the “program envisions a national optical fiber network will connect thousands of India’s most distant *gram panchayats* — village-level governments — with a total population of more than 800 million. India’s department of electronics and information technology (deity) is the agency that help develop and now is driving the implementation of this transformative agenda to bridge digital divide and bring high-speed internet and government services to the rural and underprivileged parts of the country by 2019”. Coupled with near completion of “unique digital identification registry called *aadhar*, the e-governance programme is definite way forward in curtailing corruption massively facilitating direct benefit transfer of subsidies , wages to the bank account of the workers linked with aadhar card number , efficient management of monthly pension and provident fund: , opening new bank account replacing bunch of documents to the banks and finally payment of scholarship to students which would completely remove corruption and delays particularly in rural and remote parts of the country”. [Www.uid.in](http://www.uid.in)

3.4 . Impact of Digital Technologies on Livelihood

Application of digital technologies can help in “sustaining livelihood in agriculture sector by providing accurate information about weather conditions, prices and market logistics, facilitate market transparency , improve supply chain and promote co-operatives and aggregation” . (World Development Report, 2016)

Digital technologies promote “access to financial services and digital payment system help overcome barriers for women, poor and small businesses and lead to financial inclusion”. Similarly women can work from their homes through online platforms and balance their family lives more effectively and connect them and other poor segments to markets. The get empowerment by direct transfer of cash to their accounts under social welfare schemes

Yet another powerful contribution of “digital technologies has been promotion of employment through off-shoring, out sourcing and online work and countries like India, China and Philippines are reaping the benefits by hosting BPO services related to banking, finance, insurance and medical transcriptions. Online technologies connect labour markets to potential employers and addresses several fractions by matching workers with their jobs”. (World Development Report, 2016)

A far more interesting impact of “online digital technologies has been on consumers by offering them convenience, expanded choice, better quality and more time for leisure by saving on travel time and cost”. (Marker, 2002).

The above e-governance schemes by “interlinking development processes with a range of modern information processing and communication technologies has vastly improved the effectiveness, efficiency and service delivery while promoting inclusiveness by making them equitably available to all”. (Prabhu, 2009).

According to analysts a “far reaching impact of e-governance initiatives has been fostering social inclusion and empowerment of marginalized section who with a click of mouse can leverage several benefits from governmental agencies. This has also cut the red tape, corruption and discrimination substantially and promoted entrepreneurship through open and transparent procedures among low caste and poor masses. According to World Development Report 2016, the BPO industry in India employs more than 3.1 million workers, 30 percent of them women. It has also increased school enrolment among young girls, by 3-5 percentage points. Similarly using 6500 kiosks provided by e-Chapals, nearly 4 million farmers in more than 40,000 villages are able to place orders for inputs and directly negotiate the sale of their produces”. According to report “the profit of fishermen in Kerala has reported an increase of 8 percent by use of mobile phones for information on prices and also reduced waste in sardine catch”. (World Development Report, 2016, p107).

Babajob, an online job portal have reached “the bottom of the pyramid by using text messaging and missed calls to connect low skilled and informal workers to vacant posts”.

“The Digital Identification System, *Aadhar*, has reduced leakage in government welfare programmes. Similarly Biometric registration, authentication and payment in India’s National Rural Employment Scheme reduced the time for paying the beneficiaries by 29 percent and leakage by 35 percent”. (World Development Report, 2016)

4. Barriers in e-Governance:

A larger overview of E-governance projects in India and most of Asian countries reflects the scenario as “a curious mix of achievements, intent and wishful narration of possibilities”. According to an e-governance report, “the progress has been “uneven, as there is absence of commitment and requisite action to translate policy into reality in many of the states”. There is a wide gap in computerization rate and the actual use of IT-enabled applications within and outside the government. According to report, “the disparities are glaringly present across the social groups like poorly literate, tribal, women and minorities”. “A bigger problem is of access for a large chunk common citizens, particularly those who are weaker and socially and educationally backward”. (Heek, 2001).

Despite massive investment in e-governance projects in India and other Asian countries, “the digital divide is proving stubbornly persistent in terms of access to broadband internet, including the last mile access to remote rural, poor and tribal communities. According to World Development Report, 2016 more than 800 million people lack mobile access worldwide and 4.3 billion lack internet access. Illiteracy and lack of skill and crucial barriers”. (United Nations. Information Economy Report, 2015)

Affordability is increasingly “tick marked as crucial in widening access to broadband in developing countries, especially LDCs with huge differences”. By most recent data for 2014, “fixed broadband services remain expansive, costing an average US\$ 74.5 compared with just US\$22.5 in developed countries”. Mostly “positive impacts by using digital technologies are being cornered by those already better off”. (United Nations. Information Economy Report, 2015)

5. Promoting Inclusion through libraries: Community engagement for economic, social and cultural development

Libraries are in a “unique position to experiment with creative spaces, to take up expansive roles which are confined to not only serving as information resource but much more”. Libraries possess tremendous potential to act as empowering agents for poor and disadvantaged sections of society by tapping “into spirit of their user community, assess their requirements and provide customized resources, foster e-governance, impart information literacy, help content creation in native languages and provide lifelong learning to poor, deprived and marginalized sections”. (Ashraf, 2017).

6. Features of Libraries

As powerful social institutions, libraries have following features which can be utilized for socio-cultural development of poor.

6.1 Empowerment: By providing “access to socio-economic and scientific contents, libraries empower poor and marginalized sections of the society. Critical thinking, complex problem solving, creativity and expert communication are some of new skills which libraries can provide to workforce through resources”.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323691483_Socio-Economic_Development_and_Empowerment_of_Disadvantaged_Groups

6.2 Equality: Libraries as social institutions do not discriminate between poor and rich, lower and upper castes and are tremendous equalizing agents. There are thousands of success stories of poor transforming their lives with support from libraries.

6.3 Diversity: Libraries are known for honouring diversity of users across race, colour, religion, ethnicity, gender and nationalities and by developing collections and services as per their diverse needs.

6.4 Democratic: Libraries promote democracy and participation by taking on board all the stakeholders and recognizing them as their prime focus and their regular feedback and participation.

7. How Libraries can Engage Communities:

Libraries have served as hubs of culture and scholarly and scientific inquiries, positioning themselves as sources of knowledge and wisdom. It is believed that accessing libraries enhance the emergent meritocracy. Libraries have tremendous potential to reach out to large community through various online platforms as well as physically. Some of the areas and cases in which libraries are engaging with disadvantaged and weaker communities are as under:

7.1 Promoting Literacy & Life Long Learning among Poor:

The local libraries, acting as a “vehicle for access to knowledge, ideas and information and as a free service open and available to anyone”, have been providing literacy to poor children. These

community libraries bring reading and literature to areas where books are hard to come by. “Run by Deepalaya Community Libraries and Reading projects in India, a library of such a kind, is set in the dense neighbourhood of South Delhi,— home to a community of waste-pickers. Most of the library’s members are from the Basti”. (Bellamy, 1998).

Similarly, “at Banashankari in Bengaluru, a new library called Buguri is modelled after Deepalaya. The library was started by the non-profit Hasiru Dala, which works with more than 10,000 waste-pickers”. “The Great Stories Club set by some American Libraries is a library-led book club model that gives underserved youth facing significant challenges the opportunity to read, reflect, and share ideas on topics that resonate with them. They engage more than 5,000 underserved young adults in readings and discussion that aim to dig deep into and ultimately discard the deeply held, and often unconscious, beliefs created by racism. Created in 2006 by ALA, the Great Stories Club has reached more than 700 libraries in 49 states and more than 30,000 young adults (ages 13 to 21). Great Stories Club programs are conducted by libraries working in partnership with juvenile justice facilities, alternative schools, residential treatment facilities, group homes, and other community service organizations”. www.apply.ala.org

The project seeks to bridge embedded divides and generate the will, capacities and resources required for achieving greater equity and healing, particularly in the lives of young adults facing personal challenges such as detention, incarceration, addiction, academic probation, poverty and homelessness.

Sri Lanka based , e-Library Nenasala Programme , has been “designed to provide digital literacy and facilitate access to digital technologies too poor living in remote rural areas, offering modules in basic computers, accessing information through the Internet for a wide variety of locally relevant knowledge”. (www.nenasala.lk/liblist.php) “Romanian librarians trained by Biblionet helped “100,000 farmers get US \$187 million in subsidies via new Internet and computer services in 2011-2012 by helping them how to use the technology in libraries to access financial forms and submit them to the government, saving time and money”. (Heeks, 2001b).

7.2 Fighting Racism & Promoting Harmony

Libraries can engage with communities to sensitise them towards the menace of racism and can hold counseling sessions for meaningful treatment of racism as a structural phenomenon. Libraries not only promote diversity through varied contents, but by also by building diverse communities of members and promoting their regular interaction.

According to John Pateman, CEO of the Thunder Bay Public Library, “ the job of libraries is to listen to, and respond to, the needs of the community. The head of the Thunder Bay Public Library believes it should be about much more than books. And that's why one of the new focuses for the organization, is combating racism”. Thunder Bay Public Library in its strategic plan, identified decolonization and anti-racism efforts as priorities.

According to Pateman, “racism has made Thunder Bay the subject of national and even international headlines in recent years. “It also emerged as a frequent topic in community consultations held by the library, to get a better sense of what people hope for and worry about in the city”. One of the first steps take the library was to appoint an indigenous liaison worker, who in turn, put together an indigenous advisory council which is guiding the library as it moved forward”. “The creation of these knowledge centres also prompted several libraries to take a critical look at books in their collection; in particular, books about Indigenous people written by non-Indigenous people leading to discussion and debates about what is sitting on library shelves”. (Pateman, 2013).

7.3 Services to Migrants/ Refugees & Asylum Seekers

Libraries are increasingly providing social services and building partnerships with migrants by “involving the local immigrant community in the life of the library, solicit their advice on programs

and services and invite immigrants and representatives from community organizations and local agencies to serve on advisory councils or working groups”. www.slideshare.net . During Syrian crisis last year, several European libraries opened their portal to Syrian immigrants. “The Toronto Public Library began its partnership with five settlement agencies as part of Toronto’s settlement and education partnership in 2002. From then on, summer settlement services were offered at branches, with workers assisting newcomers across the city when schools were closed for summer vacation”. www.librariansgroup.blogspot.com.br

In US libraries are helping refugees “stay in touch with their own culture while also supporting them as they find their way into U.S. society. Whether they provide books in their native language or offer free activities, libraries are making refugee children feel welcome and giving them opportunities for positive involvement”. www.tumblr.libraryjournal.com

According to IFLA “Throughout Europe, public libraries have a proud tradition of welcoming everyone, regardless of ethnic origin. Libraries welcome refugees arriving into European countries with plenty of activities for children and adults, as well as access to information and education. The European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations has created a special page on their web site with links through to news and stories on this subject”. (www.ifla.org). "In October 2016, Norwich’s iconic Millennium Library became home to a new social work service for migrants and refugees in the form of the People from Abroad Team. The five-strong team delivered community-based social work in the heart of the city centre to people who face additional barriers to accessing traditional services because of their immigration status." Similarly Swansea Libraries are using their spaces as donations centres, for the public to bring in much needed supplies for refugees, including tents, sleeping bags, clothing, shoes, soap and blankets. (Taken from the SCL/ASCEL Statement)

In a remarkable outreach effort, Toronto Public Library (Canada) helps “the immigrants by providing much sought after Newcomer Settlement Services consisting of legal, childcare, housing, health and citizenship information and support and other government benefits”. (Ashraf, 2017).

As one of “the most disadvantaged communities, the suburbs of Medellín, are receiving support from Columbia’s public libraries in social and educational programs to benefit the local communities”. (Bellamy, 1998).

7.4 Building Healthy Communities

Librarians have gradually taken on other “functions well beyond lending out books. In many communities, librarians are also ad hoc social workers and navigators”. They help local people figure out the complexities of life, from navigating the health system to helping those with housing needs. This “go-to role has influenced library programming and events, with libraries providing advice and connections to health, housing, literacy, and other areas”. For instance, “the National Library of Medicine of US is helping local librarians to be more effective local navigators by regularly hosting webinars and training sessions for local librarians on how to navigate social services, aging, mental health, welfare and public assistance, housing resources, health care, and education and employment resources”. (www.brookings.edu).

Some libraries “have hired in-house social workers to help address the needs of visitors. San Francisco Public Library, where an estimated 15 percent of the library’s visitors are homeless, was one of the first”. A recent study from “researchers at the University of Pennsylvania explains how Philadelphia’s libraries, as a trusted local institution, have partnered with the University to address population health and social determinants of health. With librarians now trained as community health specialists, the libraries offer programs and assistance for people of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds. In 2015, almost 10 percent of the libraries’ 5.8 million in-person visitors accessed”. (www.brookings.edu).

The Dallas Public Library in 2013 “launched a Homeless Engagement Initiative. The emphasis is on making all library visitors feel welcome. The library runs a Homeless Engagement and Leadership Program (HELP) Desk where customers can obtain one-on-one assistance with job applications and resumes, food and housing referrals, legal aid, and library music and arts programs”. (www.brookings.edu).

The Queens Borough Public Library in New York, “has partnered with the Queens Health Network, the largest healthcare provider in the area, to design health-related and community-centered programming targeting the needs of its immigrant populations”. (www.brookings.edu) According to a report , “81% of local library in England provide access to e-information on health issues and general wellbeing to the residents which has a direct bearing on improving health conditions”.

In Cuba, “an electronic information network facilitates the exchange of electronic information between a group of libraries, information centres and other organizations as part of Cuban National Information System of Medical Sciences in the Ministry of Health” (http://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/sdg/Content/wsis-sdg_draftbooklet.pdf)

Botswana Library Association contributes to policy initiative called Botswana Vision 2016 “by empowering communities through knowledge and the ability to access information for themselves”. (<http://library.ifla.org/258/1/201-radijeng-en.pdf>). In a highly “acclaimed programme, the National Library of Uganda runs an information & communication training program for women farmers providing access to weather forecasts, crop prices, and support to set up online markets in Ugandan languages”. Boekstart (Bookstart) in the Netherlands collaborates with “healthcare centres, public libraries and the primary school to provide books and literacy training to 75,000 children per year”. (Boekstart Netherlands www.boekstart.nl)

San Juan Planes Community Library (Honduras) in a “remarkable feat have established a water purifying project in the main square of the town and provide safe drinking water to the entire community”. (Prabhu, 2009).

7.5 Supporting Shelter, Fighting Isolation /Old Age

Several Public libraries are going even further and contributing to “government goals of tackling isolation by providing services for older people, people living with dementia, the visually impaired, the disabled and victims of domestic abuse”. Libraries in Northern Ireland provide space to tackle the “isolation of older people by combining the opportunity to socialise with the chance to relax through knitting and crocheting”. (Hasan, 2009). Through these activities, these groups learn new skills.

There are many more examples of innovative public library programmes “aimed at digital empowerment of their members. Many of the programmes mentioned in the preceding paragraph have been made possible with support from EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries)”, “an international not-for-profit organization committed to enabling access to knowledge through libraries in more than 60 developing and transition countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe under its Public Library Innovation Programme”. These programmes “are helping in providing access to government welfare schemes and ensuring transparency and equity in their implementation by minimizing human interface, thus promoting inclusion and empowerment”. (<http://www.eifl.net/programmes/public-library-innovation-programme>).

8. Conclusion

In the face of declining usage , libraries are constantly repositioning themselves into socio-cultural spaces and engaging with different communities and user groups. They are combining the access and trust characteristics with a “hub role in the community – using partnerships with other institutions to

connect people with services and help. There are plenty of challenges with this role. Community needs and the requests of visitors are increasingly straining or overwhelming library funds; and although many libraries are retraining staff, achieving the appropriate mix of skills is difficult. But as the University of Pennsylvania study found”, “public libraries are dynamic, socially responsive institutions, a nexus of diversity, and a lifeline for the most vulnerable among us.”

Policymakers and government officials “need to recognize this, and incorporate libraries into budgets and plans to build a culture of health and upwardly mobile communities” with the direct intervention and support from libraries.

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