

## Making This World A Better Place through Information Literacy: In4skill Campaign for Rural Communities

### Yazid Ibrahim

Malaysiana and Foreigns References Center  
National Library of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
Email address: [yazid@pnm.gov.my](mailto:yazid@pnm.gov.my)

### Zuliana Ab. Rashid

Department of Information Literacy Movement  
National Library of Malaysia  
Email address: [zuliana@pnm.gov.m](mailto:zuliana@pnm.gov.m)Copyright



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### Abstract:

*This presentation explores the appropriate model of information literacy for rural societies to assist them in education, human development, economic development, social development and lifelong learning. Information literacy is a main catalyst for educational change transforming the rural societies of today to an information society of tomorrow, and to ensure that they are information literate societies. This will enable them to improve living standards, increase economic value and rise social welfare. Producing such societies will require a library to promote, integrated and teaching information literacy in to their programs. High information literacy (IL) skills will enable rural societies to improve their decision making skills, innovation capabilities and lifelong learning ability. The National Library of Malaysia (NLM) offers and provides comprehensive training to improve the IL skills among rural societies, with efficient instruction and high-quality training materials. The NLM specifically designed a training program to achieve the national agenda, including Vision 2020, development of a knowledge society and a knowledge-based economy. The NLM has also produced an IL model and module to develop practical and focused IL competencies, such as information searching techniques, information evaluation, etiquette and use of information to enhance the skills in this information-rich world. An In4skills campaign was also launched by the NLM to promote information skills among the Malaysia society. The NLM also facilitates IL education by providing free databases and building partnerships with other organizations to enable rural societies to access accurate information sources and gain the information needed. This presentation will share the experiences of the NLM in developing and implementing a program, module and teaching method that*

*can be used by other libraries. It also proposes guidelines for developing effective media and information training for the rural society.*

**Keywords:** Media and information literacy, information literacy, rural societies, rural communities, community literacy

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## **Introduction**

In the era of information and communication technology, we witness the vast growth of information into the society regardless of their status, whether rich or poor, educated or not educated, from an urban or rural society, people need information in their daily life routine. If they successfully use information in every step, then they can succeed. The transformation of rural community has to go through a lot of development and this highly rely on knowledge creation, access to information and analysis of information. Information literacy is the great program that can produce advanced rural community which uses the skills to better their lives. Many studies have confirmed that, rural society are equally enthusiastic in obtaining information for their day to day lives as urbanites are (Uhegbu 1997; Moyo, 1994). However, the rural community is much more disadvantaged because of the widening information gap or information poor, and as a result they are less developed in every aspect of their life. The rural community needs information to alleviate their fears of uncertainties. Therefore, the information literacy program for the rural community will help them find more information and actively to do research to improve their knowledge in areas such as increased agricultural and fishery profit, health, social welfare and overall economic growth. Mchombu (1995) identified six sub categories of rural information needs as follows;

- i. Information on income generation
- ii. Community leadership
- iii. Literacy support
- iv. Financial information
- v. Government policies on rural development
- vi. Soil conservation

This signifies that developing a rural community to become more information literate society requires knowledge and a rural community can only become knowledgeable if they recognize and use information as their tool for development. Stanley (1990) said “information is one of the basic needs after air, water, food and shelter. Man requires information to be able to manipulate the factors of production as land, labour and capital resources into meaningful and productive use”. Rural society need to identify information needs, locate, analyse and use information to allow them to survive.

Based on the above statement, we can conclude that information literacy is needed in the rural community, especially information literacy related to the agricultural, financial and others. The significance of the application of agricultural literacy, financial literacy and other literacy in rural community emphasizes how information literacy can improve the economy, living standard, health and social welfare which contribute to the happiness of the rural community.

## **Background**

The rural community in Malaysia is predominantly involved in agricultural, construction labour, fishery and even in the government sector, which have small or low income. Rural community also produce food for the citizenry. As a result, they should be exposed with the necessary information literacy skills, knowledge and resources that will assist them to achieve the goal of improving their sources of income. The population in Malaysia is 32 million peoples and approximately 26% or 6.8 million are living in rural areas. Most of the rural community or 41% are involved in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Unfortunately, the increase in income has not been substantial for the past ten years.

Rural development cannot be denied as one of the major focuses of the government and of course the main recipient of this development is the rural community. Malaysia has a systematic and effective plan for its rural development. The government of Malaysia has established two stages of rural development transformation and evolution. The first stage was conducted for 47 years starting from 1957 (the year of Malaysia's independence) till 1994. Two policies had been designed in this period and known as Pre New Economy Policy and New Economy Policy. The focuses of these two policies were on providing basic infrastructure, agriculture development based on main commodities, equity development, poverty alleviation, land and regional development and dissemination of subsidy. The second stage of the transformation (1994- 2020), which is still in progress, is based on the New Philosophy and Policy on Rural Development which has the mission of being a developed state in 2020. Under the second stage of transformation, two new policies have been developed and known as National Development Policy and National Vision Policy. Unlike the first transformation stage, the second transformation stage is aimed at a balanced development, human resource development, regionalization of land development authorities, a better quality of life, achieving sustainable development, poverty alleviation and lower income group, developing attractive, developed and profitable rural areas and focus of rural development on specific groups (Ministry of Rural Development, 2018).

To support these national agenda, the National Library of Malaysia (NLM) will play a vital role through the village library by serving as a community center. NLM organizes events like information literacy programs for the non-information literate farmers, fishermen, mothers and students. Librarians from NLM and the village library assist them in locating information, analyzing information and using the information to improve their living standard. Librarians also can assist them to do a basic research technique to improve their living standards.

## **Definition of Concept**

### **1. Information Literacy**

The importance of information literacy emerged with the development of information technologies in the early 70s. Over the years, the information literacy has become a critical skill for the twenty-first century. The mostly cited definition of IL was issued by ALA (American Library Association,1989), "information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." Some organizations interpret their own definition such as CILIP (2018) defining information literacy as "Information literacy is the ability to think critically and make balanced judgments about any information we

find and use. It empowers us as citizens to develop informed views and to engage fully with society”. UNESCO stated in the Prague Declaration 2003, “Information Literacy encompasses knowledge of one’s information concerns and needs, and the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, organize and effectively create, use and communicate information to address issues or problems at hand; it is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the Information Society, and is part of the basic human right of life-long learning”. This definition implies several skills. The skills (or competencies) needed to be information literate require an understanding of:

- i. A need for information
- ii. The resources available
- iii. How to find information
- iv. The need to evaluate results
- v. How to work with or exploit results
- vi. Ethics and responsibility of use
- vii. How to communicate or share your findings
- viii. How to manage your findings

## **2. Rural Community**

Community comes from Latin word “cum” which means togetherness and “munus” which means giving each other. A common definition of community is a group of people with diverse characteristics linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engaged in joint action in geographical locations or setting. The community is where people define an important social bond in building and identity, practice, role in an institution such as family, home, work, government and more broadly (James et. al., 2012). It can be said that the community consist of individuals who form a group based on their similarity and interest to a particular topic along with the social interaction that occurs within group which can deepen their knowledge and skills (Ninik Alfiyah, Anisa Septyo Ningtis, Nurma Pandwita Utami, 2017). There is a lot of definition on “rural” and has not been agreed on for decades because some organization defined “rural” as a *geographical concept*, a location with boundaries on a map, and some defined it as a *social representation*, a community of interest, a culture and way of life. (Ninik Alfiyah, Anisa Septyo Ningtis, Nurma Pandwita Utami, 2017) stated that “rural community is a community that is located in an area far from the city and has lower access than the city in terms of health, technology, and others.

## **Overview of Information Literacy Scenario in Malaysia**

### **1. National Library of Malaysia Information Literacy Programs**

As stipulated in the National Library Act 1972, one of the National Library of Malaysia’s (NLM) functions is to promote and facilitate the inculcation of the reading habit among Malaysians. Although the ability to read is still a basic survival, it is no longer enough. Information literacy skill is now a critical life skill in today’s information explosion. Information literacy means more than being able to read or use a computer. In this era of globalization and the advent of the Internet, getting information is easy but getting the right information can be difficult. Technology is changing the way we live, learn, work and govern. It means knowing how to find, evaluate, and use the best, most current information available to us and use it in our everyday life. Thus, NLM has a key role to play in helping our communities become information literate.

## **2. National Reading Promotion Programs**

In this context, the Information Literacy Division was set up in 2002 to inculcate reading habits of Malaysians by planning and coordinating reading and information literacy programs throughout Malaysia. NLM as the National Reading Promotion Secretariat has collaborated with various government agencies, Government Link Companies (GLC) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to implement its reading promotion programs throughout the country and to inculcate reading habits and information searching skills among Malaysians. Most of the activities and programs are carried out in collaboration with other libraries, agencies and NGOs. NLM also have smart partnerships with relevant organizations such as Government Hospitals through “Lets Read My Love” Program, the Malayan Railways through “Travel Far Widen Knowledge” Program and the Prison Department “You Are Still in My Heart” Program. All the program are based on the “1Malaysia Concept” which form the basis of unity in this multi-racial country. A total of 5,804,052 participants for “Lets Read Together” Program which include the donation of books, reading promotion activities, information and media literacy workshops were carried out throughout the year.

### **IN4SKILL Program**

NLM obtained a grant of RM20,000 (USD7,000) from the Malaysia National Commission for UNESCO to formulate the National Information Literacy Module and conduct a Training of Trainers Workshop on Media and Information Literacy in 2011. The Media and Information Literacy Module was launched in 23 December 2011 which consist of an Introduction and six (6) modules, namely Module 1: Identifying Information Needs, Module 2: Effective Information Searching, Module 3: Information Evaluation, Module 4: Information Management, Module 5: Ethical Use of Information and Module 6: Information Dissemination. NLM conducts Information Literacy Programs for its users to expose them to reference sources and techniques to access information available in NLM and online. Subsequently, NLM rebranded the MIL programs as the In4skill Program and continues to initiate the program throughout Malaysia in collaboration with various government and private agencies. NLM has developed three MIL modules for basic, intermediate and advanced stages. These modules will be tailored to the participants based on their educational background, type of work and upon specific requests of the participants. In4skill programs includes definite objective of:

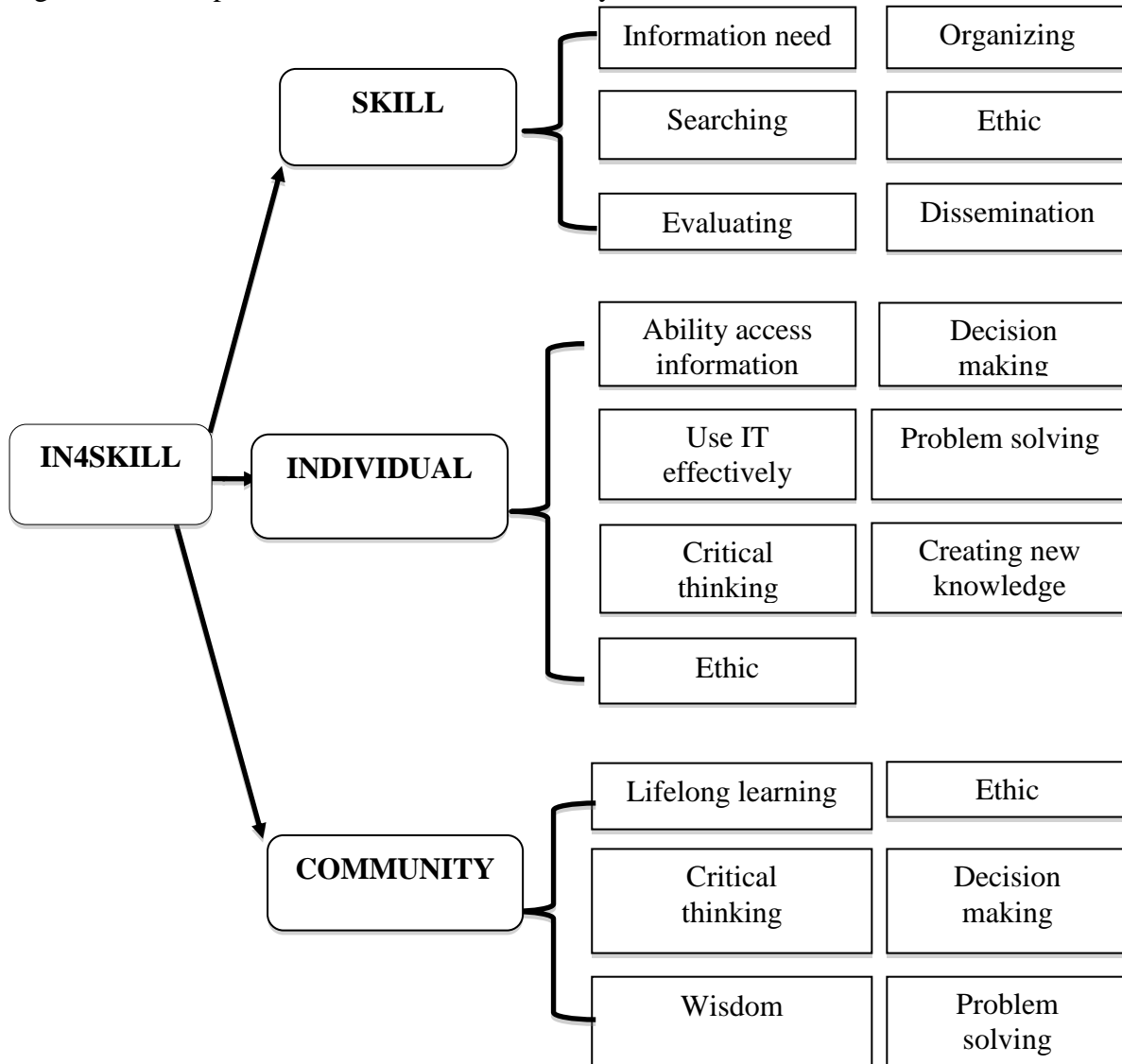
- i. To identify information needs
- ii. To identify type of information sources (printed/non-printed)
- iii. To formulate searching strategies
- iv. To locate and access information needed
- v. To evaluate information sources
- vi. To use a different type of technologies to organize information
- vii. To identify issues related to the copyright, fair use and plagiarism
- viii. To identify different type of citation.
- ix. To identify different type of technologies to disseminate information

Table 1 is the In4skill Information Literacy frame which will be used as a guide for instructors in teaching information literacy.

Information Literacy Skill	Elements
Introduction to the information literacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Importance of information literacy</li> <li>2. Awareness about the use of information from the Internet/social media</li> <li>3. Benefits of information literacy skills</li> </ol>
Information needs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify topic of research/information</li> <li>2. Identify variety types and formats of information sources.</li> <li>3. Identify type of research</li> </ol>
Information seeking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify and construct search strategy using keyword, Boolean, truncation, command languages and online protocols</li> <li>2. Locate and access information</li> </ol>
Evaluation of information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify evaluating criteria for printed and non-printed information</li> </ol>
Organizing of information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify method of organizing information (physical material and online material)</li> </ol>
Ethical use of information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify and understand issues of intellectual property, copy right act and fair use</li> <li>2. To demonstrate an understanding of what constitutes plagiarism</li> <li>3. To identify an appropriate documentation style and use consistently to cite sources</li> <li>4. To identify and use appropriate language</li> </ol>
Dissemination of information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify different types of channels to disseminate information (printed and online)</li> </ol>

In4skill Information Literacy framework is specially designed to improve the information literacy skill among Malaysians. The mission of In4skill program is to empower Malaysians in becoming information literate and confident in their information seeking abilities, thus able to apply critical thinking in the retrieval, evaluation and ethical use of information.

Figure 1: The impact of the In4skill for the Malaysians.



### Information Literacy in Rural Community

Information literacy for rural community in Malaysia is an initiated program based on the background of the community. The rural community in Malaysia needs a lot of information to become more competitive and contribute to the Malaysian economy. Educational disadvantage and low income are the factors that affect the lives of rural community. The rural community requires information for the entire agricultural process, from selection of crops to be grown and suitability of the soil to marketing of the agricultural produce. They also need information about health, education, avenues for additional income, and availability of financial assistance. Hence, there is a need for them to become information literate to make the best use of the available information (Parvathamma & Pattar, 2013).

From 2011 to 2017, the In4skill Information Literacy program has moved forward at a larger scale by collaborating with various rural community agencies, non-government agencies, rural schools, and also state and village libraries. Table 2 shows that NLM has organized 13 In4skill Information Literacy Programs with 769 participants. NLM has already trained 876 teachers from urban and rural schools and 1,529 libraries staff from the state and village

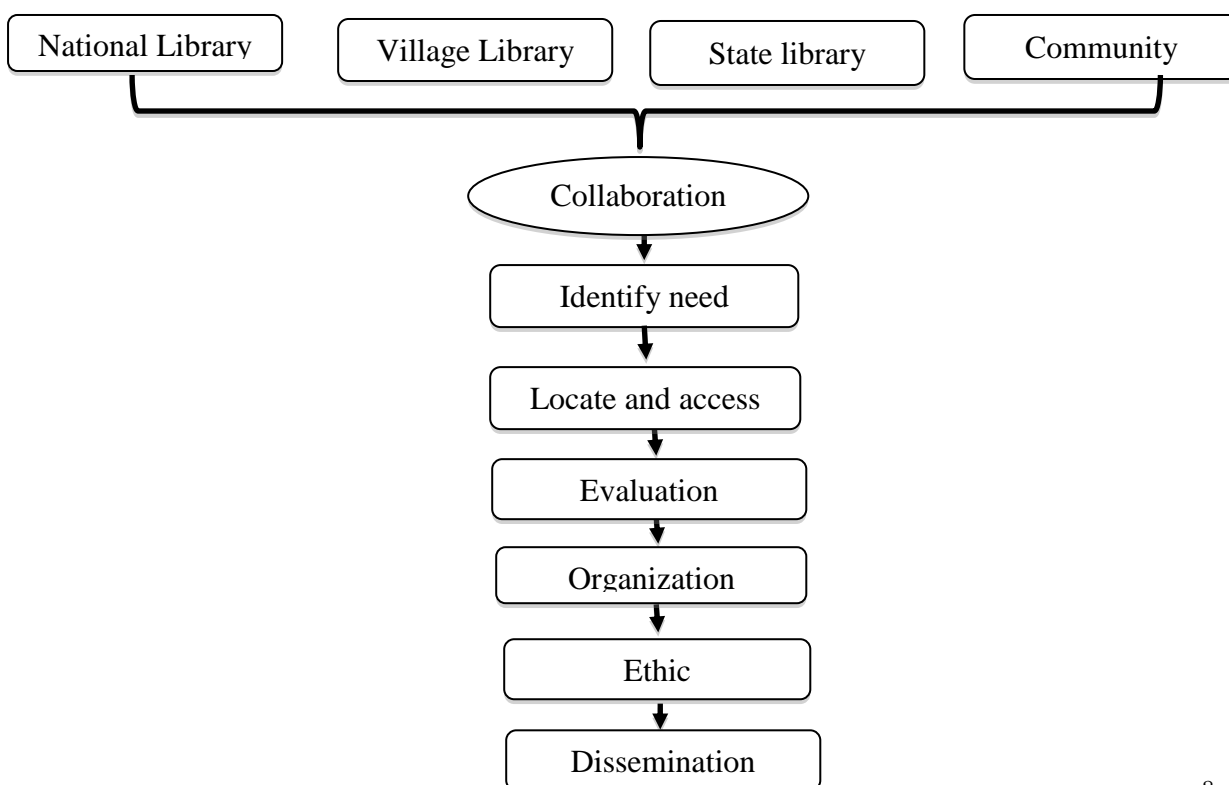
libraries. Trained trainers will organize information literacy programs in their own community or collaborate with other organization/agencies to teach information literacy.

Table 2: In4skill Information Literacy Programs Conducted and Participants

Years	Information Literacy Programs		Training of Trainers	
	Rural Communities	NGO	Teacher	Library
2011	-	-	-	-
2012	-	-	-	6 (582)
2013	-	1 (44)	2 (65)	3 (157)
2014	1 (100)	-	1 (25)	5 (152)
2015	3 (210)	-	1 (200)	1 (20)
2016	-	2 (40)	1 (34)	4 (239)
2017	2 (330)	-	3 (161)	3 (134)
2018 (May)	2 (41)	-	3 (391)	20 (245)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8 programs (681 participants)</b>	<b>3 programs (84 participants)</b>	<b>11 programs (876 participants)</b>	<b>42 programs (1,529 participants)</b>

In addition to offering the In4skill Information Literacy Program, NLM collaborated with various libraries, such as the state library and village library, to promote the information literacy program. NLM conducts the Training of Trainers Workshop for the state and village librarians and assistant librarians. This is to ensure rural community are not left behind in finding useful information for their life and work.

Figure 2: Information Literacy Model in Rural Community





**i. Identifying information needs**

The librarians provided reasons for the requirement in defining the information needed and it can be done by introducing participants with the accurate technique. The need for information is based on the participants' requirement such as agriculture, government policies and programs, health and politics. This skill is aimed at providing participants on how to recognize the lack of information related to their life and work.

**ii. Locating and accessing information**

This module is concerned with the information searching strategies and tools to locate the information. The librarians will guide the participants on how to use basic searching strategies such as keywords. Participants will also be exposed to the different types of information sources such as printed materials/human sources/institutional sources/free open access for agricultural, health, financial and politic. NLM also provide ubiquitous library or U-Library to provide quick and easy information to the rural community. Most of the rural community are not aware of the existence of online sources which can help them to gain more knowledge about their life and work.

**iii. Evaluating**

These activities will use the evaluation strategies such as authority, objectivity, quality, time and relevancy. The participants will be given an example such as articles from printed and non-printed sources and they will evaluate the article.

**iv. Organizing**

Organizing of information is also important to ensure the participants can quickly retrieve the information that they have gathered. The librarians will share organizing techniques for printed and electronic materials including online materials.

**v. Ethic**

This session will lead into the mechanics of legal or copyright issues, intellectual property and plagiarism.

**vi. Dissemination**

This module is all about how participants can disseminate their writings, such as articles, reviews, assignment, theses and others, using available mediums such as printed, electronic and new media such as social media.

The implementation of information literacy model in rural communities will close the knowledge gaps between urban communities and rural communities. In4skill Information Literacy Programs also provide solutions on how information literacy can improve the economy, health and social welfare, which in turn will also affect the lives of villagers.

## **Recommendation**

The following recommendations are based on the NLM's In4skill Information Literacy Programs and initiatives in promoting the importance of information literacy. The importance of information literacy should be implanted in the minds of the people.

1. Public libraries, especially state and village libraries, should cooperate more with various government agencies and NGOs in improving information literacy rate among the rural community, ensuring rural communities are information literate and having the skills to acquire information and use advanced technologies to use information effectively related to their work and daily life.
2. Using audio-visual materials to conduct information literacy program for rural community with low literacy rates. This to ensure they are learning information literacy at their own capabilities.
3. It is important to provide enough funding for the development of information literacy
4. Collaboration between libraries and media organizations and professional bodies to promote information literacy.
5. Establish information literacy commission that can monitor the implementation of standard for information literacy, information literacy initiatives, and giving advice to organizations and agencies regarding information literacy.
6. Continuous support from the top level management of government agencies and private agencies for ensuring information literacy as one of the main skill that should master by their staffs for life long learning
7. Increasing the broadband speed in rural areas because the good broadband speed can help improve the economy in rural areas and to bridging the information gap between urban and rural areas.

## **Conclusion**

The provision of information literacy for the rural community to empower rural community is necessary to ensure they can contribute to the nation in terms of economy and social development, as well as for their own living standards. These rural people are industrious and eager to enhance their lives, thus assistance should be provided to enable them to improve in their occupations. If librarians can contribute more in the information literacy programs for these people, more impact will be made to the people of rural community.

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