

## National Information and Library Policies in Support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals: Perspectives in India

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### Abstract:

*The paper analyses the national information and library policies so far formulated in India and examines their contents if they have supportive perspectives for UN SDGs. It also suggests to incorporate provisions for the same if such policies are revised and reformulated in future in the country. Report of the Prof. D.P. Chattopadhyay, recommendations of the National Mission on Libraries and Indian Public Library Movement and the Public Libraries Acts of the country are referred. Analyses the contents of these policy documents in order to understand if they support progress towards achieving the Goals. Efforts are found to formulate policies for library and information systems in India before the UN adopts its 2030 Agenda setting 17 Goals. There is a missing link between the policy documents of the country and the set goals of the UN as far as the supportive aspects towards the goals are concerned. The Chattopadhyay Report, recommendations made by the National Mission on Libraries and IPLM and the Public Libraries Acts of different states, however, constitute major policy documents in this regard. They need to incorporate provisions for manifesting their roles to support the goals. The paper is limited to the available policy documents of the concerned issue to have an in-depth analysis that provides many clues on the same. Policy makers, after thoroughly analysing the SDGs, can incorporate provisions for supporting the goals in future in revising and reformulating such policies. The paper chalks out possibilities of incorporation of provisions in the policy documents to achieve SDGs in respect of India.*

**Keywords:** IFLA ; India; Library Policy ; SDGs.

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## **1 Introduction**

The Main Working Document of the UNISIST-II (Gray, 1977) considers a National Information Policy (NIP) as “a set of decisions taken by a Government, through appropriate laws and regulations, to orient the harmonious development of information transfer activities in order to satisfy the information needs of the country”. NIP aims to achieve a progressive upliftment of the socio-economic development of the country through the provision of access to and availability of information and knowledge with speed and efficiency to all those involved in the activities of national development. Library Policy of a country is also a set of such decisions taken at the national level for the all-round development of the country by means of the provisions for access to and availability of library and its resources and services. Library and Information Policy of a country has a crucial role in serving the basic information needs of the citizens of the country giving full freedom of access to its library and information systems. As IFLA indicates, our libraries can drive progress across the UN 2030 Agenda having 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), so such a policy needs to have suitable provisions towards this end. It is in this context that the present paper has assessed the available policy documents of India to understand these aspects.

## **2 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**

The UN’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were declared in September 2000 after signing a global alliance by 189 member countries, came to an end in 2015. The Post-2015 agenda prepared by a team comprising of more than 60 institutions and agencies of the UN family and other international organisations was presented in the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012, under the theme “The future we want”. The report became the roadmap for defining a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2015-2030. Finally, the UN General Assembly approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on 25 September 2015. Thus, SDGs comprising of 17 goals and 169 targets came into being, through which nation, state, civil society and private sector can guide and measure their role, responsibility and contributions to sustainable development. These 17 SDGs include the following:

**Table-1: UN Sustainable Development Goals**

<b>Number</b>	<b>The Goals</b>
1	End Poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2.	End Hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable Agriculture.
3.	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
4.	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
5.	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
6.	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
7.	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
8.	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

9.	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
10.	Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11.	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
12.	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
13.	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
14.	Conserve and sustainably use the Oceans, Seas and Marine resources for sustainable development.
15.	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
16.	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
17.	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

Through a number of activities and programmes, libraries and information systems across the world can contribute their roles in achieving these SDGs. The policy frameworks of different countries of the world, as such, need to incorporate relevant provisions.

### 3 Indian Perspectives

India has 29 states and 7 territories including one National Capital Territory as below:

**Table 2: States and Territories of India**

States			Union Territories
1.Andhra Pradesh	11.Jharkhand	21.Punjab	1.Andaman and Nicobar
2.Arunachal Pradesh	12.Kerala	22.Rajasthan	2.Chandigarh
3.Assam	13.Madhya Pradesh	23.Sikkim	3.Dadra and Nagar Haveli
4.Bihar	14.Karnataka	24. Tamil Nadu	4.Daman and Diu
5.Chhatisgarh	15.Maharashtra	25.Telangana	5.Lakhadweep
6.Goa	16.Manipur	26.Tripura	6.Pondicherry
7.Gujarat	17.Meghalaya	27.Uttar Pradesh	<b>National Capital Territory</b> 1. Delhi
8.Haryana	18.Mizoram	28.Uttaranchal	
9.Himachal Pradesh	19.Nagaland	29.West Bengal	
10.Jammu and Kashmir	20.Odhisha		

In India the need for the formulation of National Policy on Library and Information System has been attracting the attention of the Indian library profession since the 1950s (Ajit Kumar, 2012). The country has her own policies and other guidelines for the promotion of Library and Information systems at the national level as well as at the levels of the states and union territories. Not only the government agencies but other parties are also found to actively participate in such policy-making perspectives. The following documents reflect many aspects of the issue:

- *Report on National Policy on Library and Information Systems*
- *Report on National Policy on University Libraries*
- *Freedom of Information Act*
- *Information Technology Action Plan*
- *Different Public Libraries Acts of India*
- *National Mission on Libraries under National Knowledge Commission*
- *Recommendations of the Indian Public Library Movement*
- *Policies, programmes and activities of different Information Agencies, etc.*

#### **4 Objectives, Scope and Approach**

The basic objectives of the study are:

- *To understand UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);*
- *To survey the national information and library policies and other related documents available in India;*
- *To analyse the policy documents to understand if they have any supportive aspects towards SDGs; and*
- *To suggest the incorporation of provisions to achieve the goals in the policy documents.*

Through an exhaustive survey the policy documents such as a) Report on National Policy on Library and Information Systems, b) Public Libraries Acts, c) National Mission on Libraries, d) Recommendations of the Indian Public Library Movement (IPLM) have been examined to assess their supportive perspectives.

#### **5 Information and Library Policies in India**

The identified policy documents, as mentioned above, are being discussed in the following sections.

##### **5.1 National Policy on Library and Information System (NAPLIS)**

Understanding the significance of the policy guidelines and initiatives taken up by IFLA and UNESCO, agencies like Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF), Indian Library Association (ILA), Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centres (IASLIC), Society for Information Science (SIS), etc. urged the Government to initiate efforts towards formulating a National Information Policy. Draft policy statements prepared by the ILA and RRRLF were submitted to the Government of India in 1984 to formulate “National Policy on Library and Information System” consequent upon which a committee under the Chairmanship of Prof. D.P. Chattopadhyay was set up by the Department of Culture (India, 1986). After a number of considerable efforts, the Committee submitted a Draft Policy on May 31, 1986 recommending its main aims which include:

- *To foster, promote and sustain, by all appropriate means, the organisation and use of information in all sectors of national activity;*
- *To take steps to mobilise and upgrade the existing library and information systems and services and initiate new programmes relevant to our national needs, taking advantage of the latest advances in Information Technology;*
- *To encourage and initiate, with all possible speed, programmes for the training of library and information personnel on a scale and of a calibre adequate to provide library and information services and to recognise their work as an important component of the quality and level of such services;*
- *To set up adequate monitoring mechanisms for ensuring the rapid development of library and information facilities and services to meet the information needs of all sectors and levels of the national economy;*
- *To encourage individual initiatives for the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge and for the discovery of new knowledge in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom;*
- *In general, to secure for the people of the country all the benefits that can accrue from the acquisition and application of knowledge; and*
- *To preserve and make known the nation's cultural heritage in its multiple forms.*

This policy document covers different chapters dealing with Public Library System, Academic Library System, Special Libraries and Information Systems, National Library System and Bibliographical Service, Manpower Development and Professional Status, Modernization of Library and Information System, General Professional Issues & Implementing Agencies and Financial support to Library.

## **5.2 Public Libraries Acts in India**

Public Libraries Acts can play a crucial role to serve as a living force of education, culture and information as the revised version of the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (UNESCO, 1994) considers. In India there are 20 such acts. The States and Union Territories having such acts include (Sinha, 2017): 1) *Tamil Nadu (1948)*; 2) *Andhra Pradesh (1960)*; 3) *Karnataka (1965)*; 4) *Maharashtra (1967)*; 5) *West Bengal (1979)*; 6) *Manipur (1988)*; 7) *Haryana (1989)*; 8) *Kerala (1989)*; 9) *Mizoram (1993)*; 10) *Goa (1993)*; 11) *Gujarat (2000)*; 12) *Odisha (2001)*; 13) *Uttaranchal (2005)*; 14) *Rajasthan (2006)*; 15) *Uttar Pradesh (2006)*; 16) *Lakshadweep (2007)*; 17) *Bihar (2008)*; 18) *Chattisgarh (2009)*; 19) *Arunachal Pradesh (2009)*; and 20) *Jharkhand (2009)*.

These Acts have ensured that public libraries in the states have well-defined and efficient governance, administration and financing structures. A library system is found to form with necessary administrative infrastructure from State to Village levels with a pyramidal structure. In some acts there is statutory provision for the perennial source of income through library cess (i.e., a kind of tax state government collects as revenue for the functioning of public *libraries*) and state grant. Provision for mobile library services is found to be reflected in some of the acts. The provision of State Library Authority, with Minister of Libraries as its head with executive powers as done in the Western countries, is missing in most of the Acts. There is no clear provision to maintain or protect or save the heritage libraries. Service to the disadvantaged and down-trodden people of slum and remote areas is very less. The public library service in India still seems to remain as a middle-class affair which is against the provision of the UNESCO Manifesto. In our country, there are about 30% illiterate people for whom there is no clear provision in most of these existing Acts to help. The library cess or taxes collected are not found to be spent for the benefit of illiterates. This is indeed something unsocial. Most of

the public libraries still suffer for the lack of minimum essential facilities. Such acts need to be flexible enough so that they could be reviewed from time to time to suit the social context and the changing needs of the society. The most challenging task is that in spite of enacting the acts by 20 states of India, their implementation is seen only in a few states.

### **5.3 National Mission on Libraries**

India's National Knowledge Commission (2007) has recommended setting up a National Mission on Libraries to ensure sustained attention to development of libraries. Accordingly, the Ministry of Culture set up a High-Level Committee, i.e., National Mission on Libraries, vide notification no. 18-4/2009-Lib (Pt.) dated 4 May 2012. In order to achieve the objectives, the High-Level Committee held a number of meetings and formulated the scheme – “National Mission on Libraries – upgradation of Libraries providing service to the public”. Its Guidelines (<http://www.nmlindia.nic.in/>) provides the following four important components of the scheme: (i) Creation of National Virtual Library of India, (ii) Setting up of NML Model Libraries, (iii) Quantitative and Qualitative Survey, (iv) Capacity Building.

The purpose of National Virtual Library of India is to facilitate a comprehensive database on digital resources on information about India and on information generated in India, in an open access environment. The setting up on NML Model Libraries would develop 6 Libraries under the Ministry of Culture, 35 State Central Libraries and 35 District Libraries with particular emphasis on economically backward districts, as model Libraries. In addition, 629 district libraries across the states would be provided with network connectivity. The Quantitative & Qualitative Survey of Libraries would be undertaken to prepare a baseline data of libraries in India through a survey of 5000 Libraries. Capacity Building would be undertaken to enhance the professional competence of library personnel.

### **5.4 Recommendations of IPLM**

The Indian Public Library Movement (IPLM), funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Global Libraries initiative and hosted by NASSCOM Foundation, has been working closely with the library community and state governments to rejuvenate public library systems in India. Its recent four regional consultations on Public Library Legislations and National Policy recommended on two key aspects. Recommendations of the IPLM (2017) on national policy on public libraries include the following:

- *The subject of public library should be shifted from the State List to the Concurrent List for better provisioning for public libraries.*
- *The National Policy should bring about uniformity and standardization in the public library system. It should also specify minimum infrastructure, services, collections, etc. to be available in different category of libraries.*
- *There should be a Ministry exclusively for public libraries with a Minister-in-Charge.*
- *Accountability of various public library stakeholders should be clearly defined in the Policy document.*
- *Financial autonomy of the public library system should be taken up in the policy as key – Libraries should be given the much-required priority when preparing national development plans.*
- *The Central government should allocate adequate budget for public libraries as it does for other planned components, like Education, Health, etc.*

- *The Policy should focus on strengthening the existing rural public library network with provisions for their infrastructure enhancement, adequate staff deployment, collection development and display.*
- *An Indian Library Services cadre like IAS, IRS should be created for public librarians in order to give these institutions their due place in the system.*
- *There should be mechanisms in place to ensure regular capacity building of public librarians to make them aware of the changes in the library sphere.*
- *The Policy should also articulate the vision of designating public libraries as a key platform to publicise, provide and implement all government services, programs and schemes for the citizens. It would also require proactive support from related Ministries.*
- *The Policy should make it mandatory for all important government publications (except highly confidential ones) to be made available in the public libraries.*
- *The Policy should redefine the concept of public libraries – these institutions should be seen as community knowledge and resource centres offering a number of information and knowledge related services and activities.*

## **6 Supportive Perspectives on SDGs**

As review of the policy documents shows many clues on the supportive perspectives of the SDGs. Goal-1 is found to be supported by all the four policy documents under considerations that provide space for public access to information to improve their lives while Goal-2 and 3 are partially supported by public libraries acts of few states and IPLM. However, most the acts and NML have supportive aspects for Goal-4 and 5. Most of the documents do not provide aspects related to Goals-6 and 7 while the recommendations of IPLM, NAPLIS and NML provide perspectives of providing training of the library professionals thereby supporting Goal-8 and partially Goal-9. A few state acts and NAPLIS consider about the significance of Goal-11. For the Goals-12, 13,14 and 15 , most of the documents seem not to provide any aspects while Goal-16 is partly supported by NML, NAPLIS and few library acts. Concerning the Goal-17, the contribution of the NML would be of great significance. The overall scenario in Indian context about the supportive perspectives of the considered policies are very small. In fact there seems to be a missing link between these policy documents of the country and SDGs as far as the supportive aspects towards the goals are concerned. However, there are aspects and provisions, though weak in nature, contributing towards these goals.

## **7 Conclusion**

If the libraries and information systems are to carry out programmes and activities to support the SDGs, then provisions need to be incorporated to be implemented in about the next 10 years in the tune of the UN's 2030 agenda. According to IPLM, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, India needs at least 30 years forward-looking National Policy for public libraries. Of its different prerequisites for such a Policy, the following two are significant for the SDGs:

- *It should be based on IFLA guidelines according to which the public library is the prime community access point designed to respond to a multitude of ever-changing information needs.*
- *It should address the development priorities of the country. To achieve this, libraries need to be aligned with national goals. Public libraries should be seen as spaces that would help the country in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).*

The attainment of the SDGs through library and information systems needs to be given priority by the UN member nations. In India, the IPLM also considers that the attainment of SDGs through public libraries could be a good starting point for the National Policy. To support these goals it is suggested to restructure the existing policy documents by incorporating suitable provisions to be implemented in the years to come. The Ministry of Culture, Government of India has been very actively working in launching different initiatives towards having policies concerning promotion of libraries and information systems in the country particularly. Its NML throws light on many promotional perspectives in this regard. The same, as expected, will contribute towards manifesting its policies to achieve the SDGs through libraries. At the same time states having library acts should come forward to implement the same by introducing new dimensions in the library services to achieve SDGs at the state level. The activities of IPLM should also continue to progress further towards this end. Concerted effort is called for from all sections of the country to promote library and information services so as to play a crucial role in achieving the SDGs.

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