

# Community Information Services

V Venkatappaiah\*

*Community services have been existing in India since the inception of Gram Panchayats, but the term Community Information Service (CIS) is of recent origin, and may have its roots in the West. It has been emerging as a fact of public library system in the developing countries; with Britain and America taking the lead in this regard.*

The term Community Information (CI) was coined to describe the services as these were neighbourhood-based, serving as signposts to charities and services available within the welfare system. The Library Association (London) defines Community Information Services (CISs) as "services which assist individuals and groups with daily problem-solving and with participation in the democratic process. The services concentrate on the needs of those who do not have ready access to other sources of assistance and on the most important problems that people have to face, problems to do with their homes, their jobs and their rights". According to A Bunch, who first attempted synthesisation of CI has the following two common aspects:

1. Providing information in the community to help people with daily problem solving or in raising the quality of their lives.
2. Concerned with a specific clientele, namely, those who belong to the lower socio-economic groups or are disadvantaged through an inability to obtain, understand, or act on information that affects their lives.

JC Donohue, one of the earliest creators of CIS, stated that the following two types of information should be provided by CISs:

1. Survival information such as that related to health, housing, income, legal protection, economic opportunities, political rights, etc. (Information and Referral).
2. Citizen action information, needed for effective participation as individual or as members of a group in the social, political, legal, and economic process (Public Policy Information).

The public libraries which are working with a statutory provision should take a lead in India. The Government of India appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of Prof DP Chattopadhyaya (Chairman, RRRLF) to prepare a draft of National Policy on Library and Information System (NAPLIS). The draft of NAPLIS, submitted to the Government of India in March 1986, has strongly emphasised on the need for provision of information services to citizens. It included the following under the heading Objectives of National Policy. Library and information sources are vital for all sectors of national activity. The availability of information, expeditiously and pinpointedly, supports all decision-making processes at all levels. Relevant information accelerates the pace of national development. An informed citizen is an asset to a democratic system of government and the proper utilisation of information can improve the quality of citizens. Further, it stated that one of the main aims of the national library and information policy should be to foster, promote and sustain, by all

appropriate means, the organisation, availability and use of information in all sectors of national activity. It is heartening to note that Prof Chattopadhyaya Committee had stated that the main thrust in the area of public library system should go to the rural public library. It said that a village or a village cluster with an adequate population should have a community library which will also serve as an information centre. Resources of different agencies engaged in the work of public health, adult education, local self-government and such others may be pooled to build up the composite centre.

In March 1986, the Government of India appointed another committee called Empowered Committee under the Chairmanship of Prof DP Chattopadhyaya to suggest what recommendations of NAPLIS report should be adopted. The Empowered Committee in its report, submitted in March 1988, underlined the importance of CISs. It said, "NAPLIS has recommended that the main thrust should go to the rural public library which should be developed like a community library and information centre". It will serve all sections of the community: the adult and the children, the literate and the illiterate, through reading materials and audio-visual packages. Such a rural library or community centre library should be developed by pooling the resources of different Central Government and State Government agencies engaged in rural developmental activities. The Empowered Committee feels that this kind of rural library service should be made available in each village under the Minimum Needs Programme by 2000 AD.

It appears that some of the above recommendations are in the process in the Department of Culture, Human Resources Development, Government of India.

A developing country like India may concentrate its services to a few thrust areas in the initial stages. Some of the suggested areas are:

Health—immunisation, hospitals, specialists, admission procedures, first aid, grandma's remedies;

Education—courses, colleges, teachers, admissions procedures;

Employment—both local and out-station, including self-employment;

Agriculture—new farming methods, seeds, insecticides, fertilisers, etc;

Village industries—assistance for setting up, financial sources, technical know-how;

Utilisation of local resources—human and material;

Transport—bus, rail, etc.;

Daily necessities—strong supplying provisions and foodgrains at reasonable rates;

Sources of finance—banks, governments subsidies, etc;

Redressal of grievances of villagers—contact points, government agencies/departments;

Government welfare schemes—rural development, weaker sections, etc.;

Consumer services;

Housing; and

Schemes mainly intended for most backward areas.

So, the Government should direct the universities to include CIS in their curriculum, arrange orientation programmes for the inservice candidates and also insist upon public libraries, Nehru Yuva Kendras and Chaitanya Kendras started under adult and continuing education programmes to start CIS in their organisations.

An attempt was made to collect four authoritative papers from the experts working in CIS area. These papers give theoretical foundation of CIS and highlight new vistas in modernising the services with a network, and even marketing the CIS. It is hoped that the use of this material will be highly benefitted in revamping the libraries with novel and needy community information service.

**\*Dr V Venkatappaiah** is President, Foundation for Information and Communication and Secretary, Prof Kaula Endowment for Library and Information Science. His contact address is: 4-22-27 Ithanagaram, Tenali- 522 202, Andhra Pradesh.