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## **The Role of the Librarian of a Research library: with relevant to field of Agriculture**

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### **Abstract**

Any research library provides specialized information facilities to its user community. Therefore the librarian in a research library has to play a vital role in satisfactory its readers. Present paper briefly describes the functions and responsibilities of a librarian in a research library

### **Introduction**

A research library is a reference library, which provides specialized information facilities where exhaustive investigation carried on in a particular field as in a technical library or in several fields as in a university library. These research libraries were established under the research institutes, which carried on research in various fields to fulfill their goals and objectives.

Agricultural research was initially originated around 350 years ago and basic research was based on plant breeding, Soil Science and Agricultural Machinery. The science and technology was developed on agricultural technology subsequently. Introducing of new plant varieties, plant breeding nursery management, and pesticides, applying of the fertilizer and irrigation techniques were gradually developed over the latest research findings. This technological information was transferred to the farmers through the recommendations, advisory papers and bulletins, which were published by the research institute. The value of this agricultural information is not limited to the one country or nation, but vital to the whole world. The research librarians have done a significant role in collecting, organization and the dissemination of this scientific information.

There are international as well as local level research stations through out the world that work towards the enhancing productivity from farm lands by safeguarding the

environment. There are individual research institutes for crops like tea, coconut, rubber, sugar cane, and rice in Sri Lanka that have good research libraries. The research librarians render an enormous service to the nation providing information to the needs of the scientists of Sri Lanka as well as foreign countries.

The research librarian should be able to provide an effective and efficient information service to the users. The librarian should be user friendly, helpful, as well as have a sound knowledge in the relevant subjects. The research librarian should identify the subject fields of the researchers who work in related research, as well as form, objectives, time, quantity and depth of their information needs. The librarian should also understand information seeking habits of the researchers, for collecting, organizing, storage, retrieval and dissemination of the information. The research librarian should have alternatives to obtain information to give satisfactory services to the users

### **Identification of the subject fields and needs of users**

The main role of the research librarian is identification of the subject fields and information needs of the researchers. The research librarian should have understood the goals and objectives of the mother institute properly. Detailed descriptions such as subject fields, periodicals that are interested, keywords for literature searching of the researchers can be obtained by giving a questionnaire. The Most of the researchers use the library to collect information, to write articles, for their studies or research work. The research librarian can identify the information to the needs of the researchers by understanding their objectives of the collecting information. The researchers collect information to provide their target group, such as policy makers, designers, cultivators, industrialists, producers, students and public. The role of the librarian is the providing information sources to fulfill above objectives of the researchers. Therefore the librarian should understand the above social status, when providing information to the researchers.

### **Collecting information**

The role of the librarian has become a complex at present due to multiplication of various information sources. He engages in collecting, organizing, storing, retrieval and dissemination of information, which derives from different sources utilizing computers and electronic technology. The research librarian uses a set of techniques to achieve this purpose. He involves analyzing, classification, indexing, abstracting, and providing thesaurus for content of the documents. The librarian has to provide primary, secondary and tertiary sources to the users, as they have not a perfect knowledge on their interested fields of study or research.

### **Purchasing**

The most precise, effective and convenient way of collecting library resources is purchasing. Therefore the librarian should have a good analytical mind of selecting

appropriate information and purchasing the required amount. He has to put utmost care about the usage of information and the information media of researchers. It is very obvious that the most of the researchers prefer printed materials although the Internet, electronic and audio-visual media have become the strong communicating media at present. The research librarian has to consider the readers' interest and needs while purchasing of publications such as handbooks, manuals, technical reports, journals and text books which are so essential with their day today work.

Library book collection in a research library is not so magnificent like in a public library or in a university library. However, the collection must contain core subjects and also related subjects of research area. Purchasing of books and periodicals basically should meet this requirement of researchers. As the research publications and periodicals are too expensive, the research librarian has to keep in touch in obtaining monetary grants from the organizations and he/she has to seek for other alternative ways of getting information sources. Actually the library collection depends on the efficiency of the research librarian. The fund allocation for purchasing books in research libraries is curtailed, however the prices of publications increase by about 15-20% annually. Therefore the research librarian has to follow under mentioned strategies to enhance the library collection.

The survey that was conducted to study the utilization of information sources of research officers at Coconut Research Institute shows that the usage of periodicals accounts to 89% where as usage of books and conference proceedings falls 75% and usage of abstracts is 60%. The following graphic depicts this finding. (Fig.

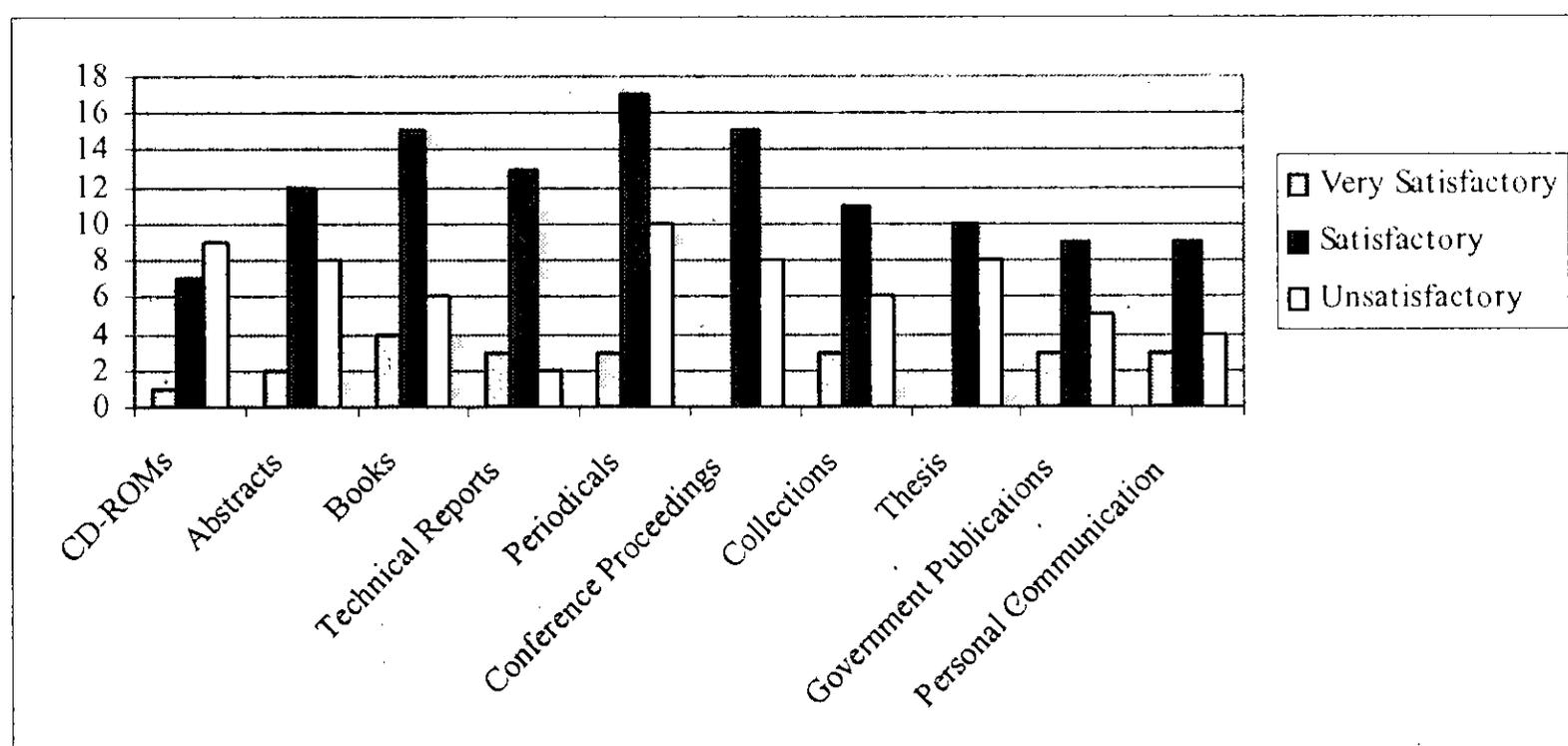


Fig 1. \* Source: Survey conducted to find out the utilization of information sources by Research officers at the Coconut Research Institute, 2005

## Publishing

The research librarian should be able to compile information sources such as bibliographies, indexes and current contents to provide information to researchers and other users. And also he should encourage publishing regularly the publications such as scientific journals, bulletins, annual reports, and technical reports on regular interval for the dissemination of information.

## Resource Exchanging

One prime role of a research librarian is to create links with local and foreign research institutes to exchange the institutional publications. Therefore the librarian has to develop trust and good mutual understanding among the librarians to achieve best results out of the resource exchanging process. If this process operates at optimum level, the institute will be able to save foreign exchange while entertaining the privilege of obtaining local, regional and international publications.

The following table depicts the library collection of Coconut Research Institute for instance;

Year	Total collection of Books	Annual Acquisition of books		Periodicals		
		Purchasing	Donation	Purchasing	Exchanging	
1995	4954	13	04	27	45	
1996	5021	62	06	27	39	
1997	5101	08	71	22	47	
2000	5582	94	41	12	44	
2001	5622	41	02	07	30	
2002	5666	00	09	12	44	

\* Source: Annual Reports; CRI

\* On going research by the author.

## Resource Sharing

The principle objectives of the resource sharing are to increase timely access to material users need and they are not available in local collections and to extend coverage by shifting costs through reduction of duplicate collections. As the prices of publications are increasing at an alarming rate and the multiplication of publications are emerging, resource sharing has become a successful strategy among research librarians.

Scientific information is a precious asset at present and it is estimated that 2.75 lakhs of literature items on agriculture has published. Out of them 2 lases are articles while rest is commercially available publications such as books, pamphlets and other periodicals. Therefore, it is obvious that not a single research library in the globe is self-sufficient on this aspect. The resource sharing and commitment towards to achieve the goal is another responsibility of a research librarian. Building institutional framework for resource sharing, purchasing, preparing databases, and coordination are other disciplines that a research librarian should concentrate on.

The research libraries possess mechanism to fulfill information needs connecting national, regional and international networks. This will lead to reduce the amount of purchasing materials in a given year. Agricultural Information Network (AGRINET), which is operated by The Council for Agricultural and Research Policy (CARP), is a classic example for this kind of network. AGRINET system coordinates around 30 agricultural libraries including libraries of Agricultural faculties of universities in Sri Lanka. It provides services such as Inter Library Loan (ILL); Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), Selective Dissemination of Content Pages (SDCP); Compilation of bibliographies, electronic databases and maintaining collection of CDs to provide literature search on request of it's member libraries. The research librarians utilize such network systems for resource sharing and it has become a latest responsibility of them giving the service to the researchers and scientists etc.

## Photocopy Services

The librarian has to acquire photocopies when the documents are unavailable locally. He/she has to get the membership of other libraries to achieve this purpose. For example, The National Science Foundation, Library of Coconut Research Institute has already taken the membership from British Library Documentation Centre. The National Science Foundation provides documents to other libraries from this project. For acquiring an article of 1-10 pages, it costs Rs.1600/-. For any additional page, another Rs.1600/- has to be paid. For acquiring process, it will take 5-10 days for obtaining photocopies by post though the order is made via e-mail. So the librarian has to undertake the decisions considering the necessity and needs of the researcher.

## **Special collection**

Another important responsibility of a research librarian is to maintain a special collection of documents based on the objectives of the institute. Generally, a special collection includes articles from journals, chapters from textbooks etc. Organizing and the maintaining a special collection should be given high priority by the research librarian. Microfiche or electronic media can be used to achieve this purpose by research libraries. The librarian should have an adequate knowledge and experience on maintaining the special collection.

## **Internet services and facilities**

The users at the research library should have access to Internet to obtain latest information. The librarian should prepare a database to get access into important web pages that have a high demand by the researchers. He can introduce the periodicals and information available freely at Internet to the readers. For instance, databases providing institutes such as AGNIC, AGRICOLA, VIEARS & AGRICS; CHEMWEB; AGRIGATOR can be easily introduced.

## **Analysis**

The information collection in a research library may be in different forms and media. Therefore the information requires further processing and organizing in a methodical way to utilize by the readers in printed, audio-visual or electronic medium. The research librarian utilizes strategies when organizing library collection. General textbooks are classified according to the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) or Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) Scheme. However, it is not necessary to classify articles from periodicals, conference proceedings, giving class numbers. So that articles are organized under the accession number to make it easy to handle the collection and under the given subject headings such as broad and specific subjects headings. When this preliminary analysis is over, the research librarian has to compile Indexes, key words by utilizing thesaurus. The researchers find it very useful the availability of scientific databases when they are doing literature search. There for the research librarian should be very technically qualified in areas such as indexing and abstracting. And he/she should be a subject matter specialist.

## **Organization**

The main task of a research librarian is to organize the information using high technology, so that the researchers will have readily access to required information. Utilization of computers for organization of information is highly adopted and the librarian should be capable enough to select ideal software for operation. Most

research libraries utilize CDS/ISIS; CDS/WINISIS; while the other libraries in Sri Lanka use different software such as LIBSIS, AFW, LIBSUIT, CDS/ISIS, CDS/WINISIS, and GENISIS. The research librarian has to select the most appropriate software for the library. It is the responsibility of the librarian to select the best software possessed with facilities such as database preparation, compilation of indexes and abstracts and literature searching. It also enables to obtain print outs in different formats according to requirement of researchers and suppliers of the information sources. The Library, Coconut Research Institute(CRI) of Sri Lanka utilized CDS/ISIS software for library automation in 1985. As a result, bibliographical information was computerized. Hence searching facilities were more efficiency and effective. Thereafter, the library enable to provide bibliographical information to the Agricultural Information Network (AGRINET), and National Library and Documentation Centre (NLDC) as well as Asian and Pacific Coconut Community (APCC) and SAARC Agricultural Information Centre (SAIC).

## **Information Retrieval**

Information retrieval is another vital area that the librarian has to pay much attention and care for the benefit of the users. To achieve this purpose, the librarian must prepare databases, search terms etc. The librarian has to categorize the books based on the following criteria for easy and convenient retrieval. Utilization of complete title or the part of the title of the publication or single word of the title or by author or part of the author's name as well as publisher or ISBN number can be employed for this purpose. The research librarian should introduce subject headings and keywords using appropriate thesaurus for information search. Therefore, providing information retrieval facility is a responsibility of a research librarian for the convenience and rapid access to the users.

## **Dissemination of Information**

One of the key roles of the research librarians is to provide information to the users very easily and most convenient manner when demand exists. The librarian can utilize audio-visual aids such as Internet, CDs, televisions of videos, and printed media for dissemination of information. Apart from this, exhibitions, seminars and meetings also would play a major role in this process.

The information provided to researchers should have a practical value as well as quality. Therefore, it is very important that the information that disseminates should be very precise, complete, meaningful, accurate, relevant, and up to date. The librarian should provide information that possess criteria mentioned above to the users and this would be the most important and widely accepted role of the research librarian.

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