

Poverty level and its impact over the information seeking behaviour and information poverty of rural citizens in Sri Lanka

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The paper is based on a part of a research study conducted to explore the community information needs of and provision to rural communities and information behaviour in rural Sri Lanka. Research design is a inductive approach as the study deals with information needs (demand) and provision (supply) at grass root level and tried to design a community information behaviour model for Sri Lanka.

It was found through the study that the type of information needed by the community was basically service-based (service-oriented); needing to obtain a service from the government or private sector. It was also seen that the information provision in these areas are highly supplier oriented (system oriented). The study reveals that the social and economic status of the citizen acts as an independent factor that affects the information behaviour of the citizen. It was also revealed that the level of education had affected directly to their income earning strategies and thereby had an impact over the behaviour in accessing relevant information, mostly the strategic information categories than the livelihood information category. The citizen attains higher level of fulfillment of obtaining information when he is educated and when compared with less educated citizen levels. Therefore the level of 'information literacy' also had become a supporting factor to this status. The study also reveals that the level of influence of these independent variables in determining the information behaviour also changes according to the nature of the provision and characteristics of the information itself.

The study concludes how a citizen could be trapped in a cycle of information poverty from which he has no escape without a diversion strategy. Therefore the success in obtaining correct information is not certain. The socio-economic status of citizens has a direct effect to this adverse situation. Hence the low level of 'attainment of information' creates a stagnated low knowledge level. Low knowledge level again causes non-attainment of information due to personal and other barriers, which leads to low fulfillment level of information needs and the citizen is trapped in an 'information poverty cycle'. The situation demands some kind of strategic approach to divert the citizen from the so called vicious cycle of information poverty, to a more efficient and comfortable information flow line to obtain desired information in a systematic and in an authenticated way.

Based on the situations emerged through the study, it was able to build an 'information poverty model' which indicates how the information user traps in a cycle where, information demand and information access to overcome prevailing information poverty by introducing a strategic information provision model. Prime objective of the model is to uplift the citizen to a higher level in the knowledge scale and thereby enable him to divert from the information poverty cycle he caught in at present.

Key words: Poverty, Information seeking behavior, Rural communities, Community information, Sri Lanka.

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