

Community Engagement through Public Libraries in Nepal: Outreach Initiatives in Gandaki Province

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Modern libraries extend beyond traditional four-wall services, actively engaging with communities to foster socio-economic and cultural development through diverse initiatives. The current study aims to analyze the community engagement of selected public libraries in Gandaki Province Nepal and their impact on literacy, digital skills, and community development. This study employed mixed method approach, including qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews of key persons of the concerned libraries and quantitative data obtained from the publication and social media. Data sources included interviews with key people, literature (books, journal articles, and theses), policy documents (government reports, regulations), national and international databases, and online resources (regulatory websites, news, and professional blogs). Out of 48 actively running public and community libraries, four libraries namely, Pokhara Public Library, Deepshikha Community Library, Vidhya Mandir Library, and Moti Community Library were purposively selected based on some criteria, such as, international collaboration and funding, historical background and performance, community engagement and sources of funding. This study found that these four libraries contributed to community literacy and education with distinct focuses. Vidhya Mandir Library preserved culture, Pokhara Public Library emphasized digital literacy and job support, Deepshikha Community Library promoted IT skills and women's empowerment, and Moti Community Library specialized in vocational training and healthcare. They supported underprivileged students, provide digital training, and fostered leadership through women's programs. Further these libraries promoted health, social inclusion, and outreach initiatives such as book donations and environmental campaigns. They also aided career development through CV writing, counseling, and training. It is concluded that public libraries significantly contribute to society through education and literacy by supporting underprivileged students, digital training, women's empowerment, job skills, leadership programs, health promotion, book donations, and environmental campaigns. The activities performed by public libraries need to be continued as these activities have a positive impact on society. It is recommended that public libraries address their ongoing financial constraints by securing sustainable and permanent sources of funding, as reliance on international development organizations may not provide long-term financial stability. They can raise funds through collaborating with libraries and carrying out income-generating activities.

Keywords: *Digital empowerment; Literacy promotion; Modern library; Public library, Skill development*