Civil society and governance: challenges for public libraries in South Africa

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Abstract

Purpose – To demonstrate that "civil society" is an important aspect of the democratic process, providing a vital link between the citizens and the state. One of the principal functions of civil society is to maintain a watchful eye on the activities of public officials. Public libraries play an essential role in fulfilling in this regard.

Design/methodology/approach – An examination of the philosophy of civil society and governance, with accompanying analyses for the potential social applications of a variety of civic principles.

Findings – The development of an informed citizenry is one of the essential functions of public libraries and this invariably affects the participation of civil society in the affairs of state. In South Africa, for civil society to ensure good governance, there are various challenges confronting public libraries that need to be addressed. This paper enumerates those challenges and points a way forwards.

Research limitations/implications – This paper gives a variety of interpretations of the relationship between social philosophy and information science that are capable of further sophisticated theoretical elaboration.

Practical implications – The broad thrust of this paper is to emphasise the potential social benefit and significant practical outcomes of promoting library and information services within the sphere of civil society.

Originality/value – This paper gives an original insight into the relevance of public library work to the furtherance of social betterment, with particular reference to the situation in South Africa in the post-apartheid era.

Keywords Public libraries, Social inclusion, Social responsibility, Government policy, South Africa

Paper type Conceptual paper

> Libraries are … essential to the functioning of a democratic society … libraries are the great symbols of the freedom of the mind.
>
> Franklin D. Roosevelt (quoted by ALA, 2002)

Introduction

The traditional mission of public libraries has been to support the self-education of the citizenry in order that they may participate fully in a democratic society. Today, this appears to have been devalued in favour of popularising libraries simply to attract more users. This shift has led to an emphasis on entertainment and marketing and the neglect of what appears to be the true purpose of the public library system.

This loss of democratic tradition has occurred simultaneously with the loss of civic space, which allows for public assembly and discourse on burning political issues and participation in the decision-making process so as to ensure good governance. Civic space has therefore also been downgraded into a series of venues for leisure and recreation rather than politics. As a result, citizens increasingly rely on profit-driven mass media for their "opinions".

This paper will argue that there is a need for both government and civil society organisations (CSOs) to take a common stance in the art of good governance and public libraries play a vital role in this, especially in South Africa.

Civil society and the quest for quality governance

Government, as steward of the country's huge resources and also the source of enormous patronage, is prone to "malfeasance", that is, misconducted by public officials. Throughout the world there is therefore a growing demand for greater public accountability in government and CSOs are expected to play a vital role in attaining this objective.

An overview of the civil society concept

The idea of civil society has become prominent in political and developmental vocabulary over the past 20 years. This is mainly due to successive waves of democratisation, beginning in Latin America and the Central and Eastern European countries and spreading across the developing world, including South Africa. Both political theorists and practitioners have come to the realisation that it is not state institutions and policy that in essence ensure a high standard of democratic governance but *the third realm*, civil society.

The term has become a notoriously slippery concept that is used to describe different ideological persuasions, supported by deeply ambiguous evidence and coloured with many questionable assumptions. To engage the concept in a rigorous analysis is beyond the scope of this article. It, however, suffices to make a summation of the theoretical foundations underlying the concept. Edwards (2004) classifies the civil society concept into three schools of thought.

Civil society: the associational model

The first set of theories, the *associational model*, regards civil society as a form of associational life. In this model, CSOs are regarded as "part" of society distinct from states and markets, formed for the purposes of advancing common interests and facilitating collective action. Commonly referred to as "the third sector", civil society in this sense contains all associations and networks between the family and the state, except businesses. One of the main criteria under this model is that membership is voluntarily, rather than legally required.

However, one of the criticisms of this three-sector model of society assumes that the state, market and CSOs are separate from and independent of one another, which is not realistic. For example, one can simultaneously be a citizen, neighbour, worker and consumer, with qualities developed in one of these roles spilling over into the others. Furthermore, civil society and the state have mostly operated interdependently, with the state providing the legal and regulatory framework.

Civil society: normative approaches

The second set of theories defines civil society in *normative* terms. The use of civil society as a metaphor for the "good society" is rooted in the Greek *polis* and the "commonwealths". The implication of this is that civil society, as distinct from the state and market, is considered the "values" domain with a set of civic norms and democratic practices that distinguish it from those other realms of human interactions. According to Naidoo and Tandon (1999), the normative dimension is buttressed on the foundation of social capital or the set of values and corresponding behaviours that

include trust, reciprocity, tolerance and inclusion, which enable individuals to feel secure in entering into relationships of mutual benefit and collective action.

This definition of civil society is criticised on the grounds that norms and values vary considerably between associations and associations are at times organised along ethnic or religious lines and mobilised politically. A compelling example is Rwanda (before the 1994 genocide), where strong networks of voluntary associations fomented intergroup violence. The name *interahamwe* given to the Hutu killing-machine means "those who attack together" (Edwards, 2004). Therefore, if killing, as among the *interahamwe*, is a "civic duty", then it is better "bowling alone" than conspiring together to murder (with apologies to Robert Putnam).

Civil society: the public sphere model
The *public sphere model* views civil society as an arena for public deliberations, rational dialogue and the exercise of active citizenship in pursuit of the common good. This model sees civil society as a watchdog to democracy and good governance. In its role as the "public sphere", civil society becomes the arena for argument and deliberation as well as association and institutional collaboration.

Some of the criticisms of this model are:

- the increasing commercialisation and concentrated ownership of the media and other vehicles for free expression;

- the distortion of politics by money;

- the inequalities in public voice and participation; and

- a narrow interpretation of intellectual property rights that favours business over open access to ideas.

This paper draws on the strengths of each model to argue that, with the help of public libraries, civil society can ensure quality governance for the people of South Africa.

According to Humphries and Reitzes (1995), the following are some of the functions performed by CSOs:

- promotion of their socioeconomic interests and defining the rules for settling conflicting claims and interests in ways that are beneficial to themselves and society in general;

- influencing public policy-making and its implementation through a variety of formal and informal channels, including lobbying;

- seeking empowerment for themselves and society through effective citizenship, to enable them to check the excesses of state functionaries and hold them politically accountable;

- engaged in advocacy, promotion and the protection of a system of rights and obligations; and

- facilitating the transition and consolidation of democracy where necessary.

Good governance
The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has described *governance* as the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of the affairs of a country at all levels. Good governance, in general terms, means a broad

array of practices that maximise the common good. According to UNDP (1997), some of the attributes of good governance are:

- *participation*, expecting all citizens to have a say in decision-making, either directly or through the legitimate intermediate institutions representing their interests;

- *rule of law*, which is taken to be the extent to which legal frameworks are fair and impartially enforced, especially the laws on human rights;

- *transparency*, with free flow of information as its linchpin; and

- *accountability*, the quest for decision-makers in government, the private sector and CSOs to be broadly accountable to the general public, as well as institutional stakeholders.

Public libraries and the information society

Public libraries are one of the most successful cultural facilities with their audience having a wider social base that cuts across social class. The library service is probably as strong in working-class areas as it is in middle- or upper-class environments. The service, in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, is essentially a local service, managed and delivered locally.

Essential features of public libraries

Some of the attributes of the public library system described by Greenhalgh *et al.* (1995) are:

- the historical principle of "the right to know", civic rights, the freedom of knowledge and the idea of human betterment;

- democratic, non-partisan, above-sectional interests, inhabiting the "value-free" world of scholarship and general interest;

- the espousal and encouragement of early childhood literacy and the enjoyment of reading, seen as a welcoming entry for the young into civil society and "the great book of life"; and

- a "window of the world", where newspapers can be read, the events of the day absorbed and followed and the latest reference books and novels keep the local community in touch with the wider world.

At a workshop organised by PubliCA (the Concerted Action for Public Libraries), a communiqué, the Leuven Communique, stressed the following to be the key role for public libraries in the information society:

- public libraries have a strategic opportunity to increase the quality of life and democratic possibilities for citizens of the information societies by providing free and equal access to high-quality information;

- public libraries support the growth of communities through the provision of information services designed to meet local needs and are important tools for reducing disparity between the citizens with rich and poor information;

- public libraries provide a cost-effective infrastructure for lifelong learning and easy access to the content of the virtual networks and support students at all levels of formal education through their widespread distribution; and

- public libraries are cultural institutions with a great responsibility for cultural heritage, literature and literacy (Aslib, 1998).

Public libraries and democratic governance

Civil society is an important aspect of the democratisation process because it provides a vital link between citizens and the state. It also provides an environment that can be used to enhance community cohesion and decision-making. Information is essential to civic participation and also encourages its development. The development of an informed citizenry has become one of the basic functions of public libraries, which invariably affects the participation of civil society in the affairs of state. Public libraries can help civil society to enforce democratic culture through the following:

Free and fair elections

One aspect of democratic governance is the holding of free and fair elections. According to the Centre for Democracy and Governance (1998), elections are important for the following reasons:

- they can be a primary tool to help force political openings and expand political participation;

- electoral campaigns tend to foster political liberalisation such as freedoms of speech, association and assembly;

- they tend to encourage political debates; and

- they are increasingly seen as a conflict resolution device following years of civil war.

Some of the essential elements of free and fair elections are impartial electoral frameworks, credible electoral administration, representative and competitive multi-party systems and informed and active citizenries. It is the latter element that directly draws public libraries into the fray of free and fair elections.

In many developing countries like South Africa, a high proportion of citizens are likely to be unaware of their rights and responsibilities as voters and political participants. Moreover, they may be unfamiliar with the mechanics of voting or the range of parties and candidates from which they can choose.

Public libraries, alongside CSOs, can help in civic education programmes and provide the necessary information aimed at developing an informed electorate. Public libraries, with their open access and usually being centrally located, can help with voter registration and even serve as polling stations in some areas. Again, public libraries, through their Internet facilities, can be used to reach out to politically disaffected or unmotivated citizens and publicise party positions, solicit feedback, new ideas and new members (Drake, 2001). Technologically developed public libraries can offer these facilities to those without access to the Internet. Currently, in South Africa, all the major political parties have web pages that are used to communicate with both party and non-partisan members.

Citizen participation in decision-making

A major hallmark of a democratic society is the freedom of individuals to associate with like-minded individuals, express their views publicly, openly debate public policy and petition their government. Through the advocacy efforts of CSOs, citizens are

given a voice in the decision-making process of the country. Organisations such as human rights groups, professional associations, business associations and labour unions play an important role in educating the public and the government on vital local and national issues.

Therefore, the process of governance becomes more legitimate when it is infused with democratic principles such as transparency, pluralism, representation, account-ability and citizen participation in decision-making. The ability to access and publicise information is a fundamental need of a politically active civil society. As Kranich (2003) suggests, effective citizen action is possible when citizens develop the skills to gain access to information of all kinds and put such information to effective use. Because libraries serve to prepare citizens for a lifetime of civic participation, they also encourage the development of civil society. Libraries provide the information and opportunities for dialogue that the public needs to make decisions about common concerns and ensure accountability from the government. The provision of Internet facilities in public libraries is bound to hasten such information exchanges.

Human rights
Human rights and fundamental freedoms are regarded as the birthrights of all human beings and they are inalienable. Their protection and promotion should be the first responsibility of government and respect for them is an essential safeguard against the might of the state. There are important links which exist between the features of democratisation and good governance, such as the rule of law and respect for human rights.

The proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 by the United Nations marked a turning point in the international protection of human rights. In South Africa, these rights are spelt out in Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Act 108 of 1996. Some of the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as adopted by the United Nations (1948) are the following:

- all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights;

- everyone has the right to life, liberty and security;

- no one shall be held in slavery or servitude;

- no one shall be subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;

- the prohibition of arbitrary arrest, detention or exile;

- the right to a fair and public hearing;

- the protection of privacy and family life;

- the right to freedom of movement;

- the right to freedom of opinion and expression;

- the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association; and

- the right to vote in free elections;

The declaration further makes provision for *economic, social and cultural rights*, which require society to use its resources for the well-being of its people including:

- the right to social security;
- the right to adequate standard of living, including medical care, food and housing; and
- the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community.

There is also what is termed *the third generation of human rights*, which is related to the self-determination of peoples, and requires the protection of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of all, including ethnic minorities.

In accordance with the principle of self-determination, public libraries are called upon to make their collections reflect the interests of all, including national minorities. South African libraries are therefore expected to fight against reverse discrimination and the fanning of ethnic and racial hatred through their collections and attitude towards clients.

Information access

Free access to information is part of the human rights issue that underlies the concept of democracy. Intellectual freedom is a fundamental human right, for without the freedom to think one's thoughts, conceive ideas, formulate views and express them freely there is no possibility of democratic governance (Byrne, 1999). A library "…freely opened to all, irrespective of age, profession, race or colour, and in which there is free access to any literature required" fulfills this function (Chandler, 1965). The concept, "knowledge is power", is generally conceived to be true. As far back as in 1822, James Madison was reputed to have written: "knowledge will forever govern ignorance and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives" (Hunt, 1910).

Libraries in the Anglo-Saxon tradition operate or are expected to operate, with this philosophy in mind. It is therefore of no surprise that the South African government during the era of apartheid thought it fit to ban the works and even the pronouncements of certain liberation personalities from being made available in libraries or other information set-ups. The library, therefore, enjoys a symbiotic relationship with democracy and good governance. An informed public constitutes the very foundation of a democracy and public libraries serve as pivotal community institutions upholding, strengthening and realising some of the most fundamental democratic ideals of the free world (ALA, 2002).

Public access to government-held information has been accepted by South Africa, through the country's constitution and the *Promotion of Access to Information Act*, as a *sine qua non* for a democratic state pursuing the values of accountability, transparency, openness and responsiveness in the affairs of government institutions.

Singh (1999) suggests that what is linked to the concept of access to information is the concept of freedom of information. This advocates that information possessed by government institutions is public information and can therefore legitimately be requested by private individuals and other government institutions, if it does not severely infringe on the privacy rights of individuals.

What is related to the concepts of access to information and freedom of information is the concept of transparency, which implies that any activity of a government body is open to public scrutiny and study. Libraries are, therefore, strategically positioned in the quest for good governance in this direction.

Libraries, civil society and sustainable development

Sustainable development, as defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) or the Brundtland Commission Report (1987), is "…development that meets the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". It focuses on the improvement of the quality of life for all people, without increasing the use of natural resources beyond the capacity of the environment to supply them inexhaustibly. The concept addresses the need to find innovative ways to change or put in place institutional structures and influence individual behaviour for the ultimate good of the present and future generations.

Hurka (1992) commenting on the concept of sustainable development, especially as propounded in the Brundtland Commission Report, suggests that it is an attempt to balance two moral imperatives:

- *development*, including economic development, mainly with regard to people in the developing countries whose existing poverty gives them a low quality of life;

- *sustainability*, ensuring that the future is not "mortgaged" for the sake of gains at present, with regard to future generations who would need non-renewable resources.

To a considerable extent, economic development is the main source of threats to the natural environment. However, as suggested by the Brundtland Commission, the two demands need not conflict; they can be balanced through the initiation of certain policies (WCED, 1987) and public libraries can help in this direction. At its meeting in Glasgow to commemorate its 75th anniversary, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) declared in a statement that "…all human beings have the fundamental right to an environment adequate for their health and well-being" and asserted that "…library and information services promote sustainable development by ensuring freedom of access to information"

(IFLA, 2002). Australia's National Library Board (2003) lists three ways that libraries are expected to be active players in promoting sustainable development:

- Timely and accurate information about sustainable development and environmental protection. For example, the Public Library of Cambridge, MA, has created the *Sustainable Development Information Network* with the *Centre for Civic Network* that provides public access to a wide range of civic and environmental information through the Internet and geographic information system technology.

- Promoting the idea of sustainable development within the community. For example, a joint project, *Libraries Build Sustainable Communities Project*, initiated by the American Library Association (ALA) and Global Learning. Published online, aimed at offering information and advice on how libraries can build sustainable communities. Moreover, ALA has put online *a Librarian's Guide to Global Programming for a Sustainable Future*, giving directions and suggestions for programmes on sustainability.

- As a mark of living by example, some libraries in the US have put up environmental-friendly designs, materials and energy sources in library building projects. For example, the Los Angeles Public Library entered into partnership with the Departments of Public Works and Water and Power in

Los Angeles to install solar panels in branch libraries of the Los Angeles area in an effort to conserve energy.

Community building

McCook (2000) regards community building difficult to define because in the US, for example, despite the concept's long-standing, it has changed and evolved with an increasing and broad-based national focus during the 1990s. Seven thematic approaches that differentiate the "new" community building of the 1990s from the narrower neighbourhood focus of the past, as identified by Kingsley *et al.* (1997), can be cited:

- specific improvement initiatives in a manner that reinforces values and builds social and human capital;

- it is community-driven with broad resident involvement;

- it is comprehensive, strategic and entrepreneurial;

- it is asset-based;

- it is tailored to neighbourhood scales and conclusions;

- it is collaboratively linked to the broader society to strengthen community institutions and enhance outside opportunities for residents; and

- it is consciously changing institutional barriers and racism.

Community building essentially involves building political capacity, that is, the capacity to make collective decisions amidst diverse and conflicting interests. A crucial component of this capacity is to develop a sense of responsibility among citizens to participate in and obligate themselves to collective decisions. In the community-building literature, governments interact with communities through formal community-building organisations (CBOs), such as community-development corporations, neighbourhood centres, faith-based organisations and service clubs (Sinclair, 2002). It can be deduced from the above approaches that the central theme of community-building is to remove completely from the community feelings of dependency and replace them with attitudes of self-reliance, self-confidence and responsibility, giving high priority to establishing and reinforcing sound values.

Community-building, furthermore, demands efforts to reinvigorate citizens with a sense of civic commitment, therefore a new type of citizenship. It calls for a partnership between citizens and government based on active citizenship as the foundation of governance. With ever-declining civic engagement, the need for community-building becomes more imperative. Civil society then becomes vibrant sharing in quality governance of the entire nation.

Most librarians work to build the community, but may not characterise their daily work in these terms, although the result of their work is fundamental to the development of a strong community capacity. Libraries can make a substantial contribution to community-building through the following factors:

- the public library plays a historical role in civic education;

- the public library is open to people of all ages, races and economic levels;

- it is a public meeting place for groups and individuals;

- it is a repository of the community's history and culture and enjoys popularity and a long tradition of service; and

- the public library extends service to the homebound and others with disabilities (McCook, 2000).

McCabe (2001) sees the public library serving as a centre of the community in a variety of important ways:

- fostering community identity by offering materials, services and programmes related to community characteristics such as history, economics, arts and natural environment;

- fostering community dialogue by sponsoring lectures and discussions on civic issues or simply providing meeting room for CBOs and lounge areas for informal social interaction;

- encouraging collaborative efforts to solve community problems by providing the information resources, meeting room and leadership to help organise such efforts; and

- assisting evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the community by serving as a clearinghouse for local planning information and also assisting the community in new evaluation techniques such as outcome measurement.

Challenges for South African public libraries

The South African public library system faces many challenges, ranging from funding to staffing. Some public libraries are yet to recover from the financial and human resource problems that followed from the creation of the country's new provinces in line with the post-apartheid constitution. It is often regarded as a cliché, but nevertheless true, to talk about the need to develop information communications technology in all the public libraries to ensure greater information accessibility. It will require very high capital spending. It is not the intention of this paper to discuss all the challenges the South African public libraries face. Rather, the discussions will be centred on three main areas where the financial requirements for their operation may not be all that crucial.

Promotion of informed and active citizenry

When Thomas Jefferson told Americans that no nation can remain free and ignorant at the same time, the right message was being given to public libraries. The public library should first be seen as a political institution, providing citizens with the necessary information to fulfill their civic duties in helping to sustain the democratic gains of the country. An informed citizenry is best poised to ensure good governance. In this regard, there is the need to educate and retrain public librarians as civic information specialists who are able to develop and actively disseminate critical issues like human rights, electoral processes, citizen participation in policy-making and government accountability. Citizens need to be empowered if they are to exercise their rights and duties as citizens and it is the job of the library to provide access to the information they need in this respect.

Promotion of social cohesion

Another major challenge to South African public libraries is how to combat social exclusion and create public space. The *Public Libraries Mobilising Advanced Networks*

(PULMANweb, 2003) names the following as some of the severe "risk factors" that increase the danger of poverty and social exclusion: Civil society and good governance

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- long-term unemployment;

- living long-term on low income and/or low quality employment;

- poor qualifications and/or leaving school early;

- growing up in a family vulnerable to social exclusion;

- disability or poor health, especially a terminal disease;

- drug abuse and alcoholism;

- homelessness;

- suffering from xenophobia; and

- sexual and racial discrimination.

Public libraries can help combat social exclusion by:

- mainstreaming social inclusion as a policy;

- consulting and involving socially excluded groups, so as to ascertain their needs, and satisfying them;

- locating services wherever there is a demand;

- providing mobile libraries to reach people in all the outlying areas and staging exhibitions in the community;

- forming partnerships with other CSOs and learning organisations with a view of developing and delivering services;

- providing services for people in institutions, such as hospitals and prisons; and

- changing the image of public libraries to make them more welcoming to socially excluded groups, while at the same time not alienating traditional users (PULMANweb, 2003).

In the US with an estimated 700,000 legal immigrants each year, public libraries are safe havens for their empowerment, acting as vehicles for learning a new culture, and important places to obtain information about services (Lesley, 1991). Furthermore, some libraries, like the New York Public Library, have created programmes with community shelters, such as setting up a depository of books for homeless children in shelters and also providing volunteers from the library staff one morning a week for a storytelling programme. Again, some libraries in New York help the "excluded" to the extent of collecting food for the homeless and also rendering assistance to the social service agencies (Silver, 1996). These are some of the innovations that the South African public library system could bring into its operations to win the souls and minds of the anxious, the lonely and the excluded.

Staeheli and Thompson (1997) describe public space as a setting for debate, the exercise of rights as citizens and a place where people of diverse backgrounds can congregate as a community. Community requires social interaction, a genuine coming together of people into physical contact to exchange ideas and feelings, debate and plan. Kranich (2003) reports that elsewhere in the US, public libraries are undertaking certain creative programmes that support civil society and the building of social

capital in their communities. Some of the programmes from which South African public libraries can take a cue are:

- converging groups to consider local issues and teach civic skills;
- building community information literacy partnerships;
- coordinating local literacy training;
- hosting community-wide reading programmes; and
- creating digital neighbourhood directories that link residents and services.

Promotion of economic and social development
Public libraries can enhance economic and social development in their areas as part of their contribution to good governance and by devoting considerable attention to the delivery of economic and scientific literature. Xiaoqin (1996) commenting on the way public libraries enhance agricultural development among the peasants in China, states that the libraries collect applicable materials from their collections, collate and publish many of the brochures on the production technology of planting and breeding, and send information to the peasants, especially to those with a higher educational level and experience. Perhaps, this is one area that public libraries in South Africa could explore to maximise their services to the local communities.

Provision of selective dissemination of information (SDI) services is another key economic area that public libraries in South Africa need to explore. With reference to the Chinese experience, since 1985 the Guizhou Province Library had successfully signed SDI agreements with Guizhou Province Institute of Economy, where the library provides the latest information to end users through its various scientific programmes and projects (Xiaoqin 1996). Other economic and social development areas that public libraries could explore are:

- savings to ratepayers through the use of a free or lower rate service for recreational and other purposes;
- provision of information to aid investment and enhance personal financial success;
- opportunities for skills development and transfer;
- provision of information that may directly save money, such as consumer information;
- enhancement of the quality of life and the promotion of a positive cultural environment; and
- stimulation of self-help initiatives.

South Africa is endowed with various tourist attractions, which are scattered throughout the country. Public libraries can capitalise on this asset by providing comprehensive information, making them accessible through brochures, road shows and other marketing techniques so as to attract tourists and would-be tourists to their respective areas.

Conclusion
These discussions have centred on the role the public library can play in conjunction with civil society to ensure good governance in South Africa. Some of the elements of

good governance are a democratic culture based on respect for human rights, free and fair elections, citizen participation in the policy-making process and the need for civil society to ensure government accountability and transparency. For civil society, to achieve these objectives, free access to information needs to be ensured. Public libraries play an important role in providing unfettered access to information, which is a necessary condition for good governance. Furthermore, libraries contribute to sustainable development by providing timely and accurate information on environmental protection and promoting the idea of sustainable development within the community. The public library also has a future if seen in the context of economic development and social inclusion. What is left to discuss is how to take up the challenge.

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