# RURAL LIBRARY SERVICES SERVING THE MINORITIES

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## ABSTRACT

*One of the major efforts taken by the National Library of Malaysia is the establishment of the village libraries in all state constituencies nationwide.  So far it has managed to build  1089 village libraries  to enable the rural people have access to information resources and services to meet the needs of individuals and groups.  One of the village libraries that has been established by the National Library of Malaysia is the Kemensah Library. This library is located at Kemensah Village, which is in the district of Ulu Kelang, under the State Government of Selangor.  The Kemensah library due to its location has to serve two main communities, the Malays approximately  sixty percent (60%) of the population of the constituency  and the Orang Asli or the Aboriginal People comprising forty percent (40%) of the population. Unlike the Malays, the Aborigines' family mostly come from the deprived groups of the community in terms of income, education and employment. Consequently, majority of  the Aborigines' family  are categorized as illiterate group of the community.  The research question that needs to be addressed here is what are the measures to be taken by the Kemensah library in order to encourage the Aborigines' family  to start coming to the library. The best approach to ensure that this Aborigines' family do not drift aimlessly in life is for the library to come along and teach lifelong skills needed by the Aborigines' family  to identify information needs, locate, and use the information resources accessible in the library effectively and ethically. It is only through applications of information literacy programmes that the Aborigines' family are made aware of the importance of information needed to perform their daily chores and the location to access the needed information.   If the right steps are taken to address these challenges, transformation at societal level could be achieved.*

**KEYWORDS :** *Rural library, Kemensah, Orang Asli, information needs*

**INTRODUCTION**

According to Bernard Vavrek, in his 1995 article, "Rural and Small Libraries: Providers for Lifelong Learning," he identified some specific issues that face by rural library. These planning issues that must be taken into consideration when working in or with rural libraries: library financing; traditionally conservative nature of rural and small towns; lack of academically trained staff; need for skill development of library trustees; limited, if any, analysis of community needs; perception that rural library typically is a place of books; technology is huge challenge; and provision of targeted services to Native Americans and tribal libraries. (Hildreth, 2007). Definition of rural library may not be as simple as it seems. Rural is an inexact term that can mean different things to different people which is also an attempt at defining rural range from demographic to psychological. In fact, defining rural becomes more of a subjective term than what is defined by any dictionary. Basically, Rural Library is a small library and located in an area with small population. Its aim is to facilitate communities who live around there to enjoy reading and also those who stay far away from city. Besides that, indirectly it represents as a social institution that is very beneficial for local communities as well as to help minimize loitering culture among youngsters.

Kemensah Library is one of the rural libraries under the National Library of Malaysia. As of 31st December 2009, a total of 1,089 rural libraries were built throughout the country. Rural libraries in Malaysia are agents of social restructuring as they provide learning and skill support to local communities in areas such as basic skills, family learning and education to the young. Most rural libraries are involved in reading campaign programmes for young people such as story telling and reading aloud. Kemensah Library is located at Kampung Kemensah, Ulu Kelang, Selangor Darul Ehsan. This library has been managed by two staff who are responsible to provide information for communities there. The library has applied CD-Win ISIS system for cataloging their books. Users of the Library come from the residents of Kemensah rural area.

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**Library Users**

The library is open to all or everyone and also to the people who is a resident in that rural area. There are three main general groups of rural library users which is adult, teenagers and children. The range of children age is around six to thirteen years old, while the range of teenager age is around thirteen to nineteen years old, and the range of adult age is around twenty years old and above. There are only few people that come to KEMENSAH rural library and the number of people that came to this rural library can be counted as few as three to four people for a day . There is none from adult group and only few from the teenager group that visit KEMENSAH rural library.  Most of the users or majority of group that usually come to the library are children. This is because the library is situated nearby the school. Mostly, they came after the end of the school or during  the break time. The fee membership is free and user can only borrow 4 books at a time. The duration for loaning the book is three weeks.

**Library Collection**

There are several types of collection  which are available including books, magazines, and newspapers. Most of the books are meant for light reading comprising fiction books, including  science fiction, novels, poem, some   history books, dictionary and few academic books that are  available in KEMENSAH rural library. There are also a good number of magazines as well as general-interest newspapers which  typically publish stories on local and national political events and personalities, crime, business, entertainment, society and sports. Most of the traditional newspapers also feature an editorial page containing editorials written by an  editor and columns that express the personal opinions of writers. Other features include display and classified advertising, comics, and inserts from local merchants. The entire collection is provided by the National Library of Malaysia.

**Budget**

The National Library of Malaysia provides nominal amount of budget appropriations for the Kemensah Rural Library. Among the other provisions from the National Library are the equipment including the  computers for staff  use , the collections and the shelves.

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**Library staff**

There are two staff and one local resident who acts voluntarily to handle library work.. The two staff are assistant librarians and their task are managing and maintaining the collection and organizing  the library. The local resident is a helper and she also helps in managing  and cleaning the Library.

**Services**

Among  the services provided by the Kemensah Rural Library are the following:
- Provides circulation services (for membership only);.
- Provides Reference Materials such as Dictionary, Encyclopedia, Bibliography and Biography;
- Provides light reading materials in the form of  monthly magazines for adults, teens and children, for example the Dewan Masyarakat, Dewan Pelajar, Dewan Siswa, Majalah PC, Mastika, Pa & Ma, Rapi, Saji, Wanita, Seri Dewi & Keluarga and Majalah Kuntum;
- Provides Newspapers (Daily) like Star and New Straits Times;
- Provides appropriate activities for children and adolescents/ adults.

**OBJECTIVES**

There are several objectives that can be highlighted for Kemensah Rural Library:
i. To help improve the educational achievement of students by providing additional materials and gain knowledge.
ii. To literate rural people via reading materials offered for example, Readers Digest, National Geography and so on.
iii. To make local residents aware on the importance of knowledge and the role of the library.
iv. To recognize talent in the children through organized activities.
v. To produce various roles of library as development in line with the theme of library in 2012.

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In order to improve the services rendered to the users a SWOT analysis could be used by the Kemensah Rural Library, including the process of **"environmental scanning"**. This is a relatively simply approach that includes the following components:

1.    Internal analysis of the organization

2     External analysis of the organization

3.    External macro environment factors

SWOT analysis comprises of four principles which are strength, weakness, opportunity, as well as treat. Strength and weakness would be applied in internal analysis and opportunity and treat applied in external analysis. External macro environment factors need to be examined too by using STEP analysis comprising  factors of social, technology, economy as well as politic.

The following is an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Kemensah Rural Library and the opportunities and threats it faces (SWOT Analysis) based on the thoughts, opinions, and perceptions of Kemensah Rural Library librarians and staff.

a)   Strengths of Kemensah Rural Library:

1.   Excellent, experienced staff

The library staff sees themselves as being at the forefront of the information business. There is general agreement that Library staff are knowledgeable, service-oriented, flexible, and that they try to co-operate with each other in fulfilling their responsibilities. Staff feels that they are dedicated to the Library and the society, and that they care about the needs of the Library's users. Staff development and training activities provide a supportive environment for Library staff. The Library tries to ensure that the skills and abilities of all staff are used to the fullest extent permitted by classification systems and collective agreements.

2.   Organization and Services

The Library's organization and services are strongly influenced by its service ethic/ orientation and focus on user needs. The Library attempts to provide evenhanded services to its primary users, the school children, teenagers, and society but there is also an external focus on the larger community, for the Library is open to all who wish to use its resources. The Library is open to its users for long hours – 9.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. from Tuesday to Saturday. The

Library's hiring policies and practices focus on recruiting and retaining staff committed to service excellence. In developing its services, the Library makes innovative use of funding initiatives, such as co-op funding, collection endowments, and grants from government and other agencies.

### 3. Collections

Kemensah Rural Library has a quite good collection of information resources in traditional print format. The collection contains current as well as retrospective materials. In certain areas, the collection is very strong, and contains significant and unique holdings. Examples include novels, and also children story books. The Library's collection development activities have been supported by the National Library of Malaysia through continuing increases to the collections budget in the face of cuts to other areas of the budget.

### 4. Youth programming

It is a fact that Kemensah Rural Library organized a lot of programmes which are suitable to the concentration and interest of the users of the library, whereas majority of library users is children and youngsters there. Thus, Kemensah Rural Library has organized programmes and activities on leisure and sport-based, as well as academic based which are suitable to the users' interest.

b) Weaknesses of Kemensah Rural Library :

### 1. Space and Facilities

Library's facilities are inadequate or of poor quality for both collections and users. In addition, buildings are poorly maintained, and there is a general lack of cleanliness. Staff feel that there are extensive risks to these facilities and the collections, users.   Poor environmental conditions contribute to the deterioration of collections and other materials throughout the Library. Out-dated structures can also pose personal security and safety risks for both users and staff, making  it difficult to install new equipment and technology, and lead to poor working conditions for staff. Lack of adequate space has led to split or stored collections and decentralization of services with consequent inconvenience to users. The Library does not provide 24 hour a day study space, nor does it make available word processing and related software to its users. Computing facilities for users, especially student lab space, are not there yet.

## 2. Inadequate Staff

Staffing is a crucial process in order to ensure the smoothness of library management process. Kemensah Rural Library only has 2 staff which are responsible to the whole activities related to the library including managing, performing, cataloging task, shelving books and etc. The inadequateness of staff in the library is one of the most challenging problem when it comes to organizing programmes which requires a lot of tasks that need to be done.

## 3. Organization and Services

To some extent, the Library is still operating with traditional and aging service models in a context of changing communication and information needs. Some librarians feel that the Library does not do enough to learn from best practices at other institutions or libraries.

## 4. Inadequate Systems and Technological Infrastructure

Kemensah Rural Library has no internet connection in order to connect to the open-networked world. Furthermore, there is no computer provided to the users to be used except for the staff which is the only computer to key-in data and performing cataloging tasks without any internet connection. Staff and librarian are concerned that most computer-related functions are still centralized in systems, and they feel there is insufficient local technical help and training for them. Staff members feel that there is a preference for non-cutting edge technology, and little flexibility in the choice of hardware or software for individuals or units. Some staff members feel that the Library is slow to get new technology, and some assert that often Systems needs drive the Library, rather than Library needs driving Systems. Besides, staff members feel that the online public access catalogue (OPAC) is importantly needed.

## 5. Funding

Lack of sufficient funding affects all areas of the Library. There is general consensus that the Library's budget is insufficient to meet the needs for materials, services, facilities, equipment, and human resources. Budget reductions affect processing levels, and have led to a reduction of serials subscriptions through cancellations. Funding is inadequate to keep up with the requirements for new technology and equipment replacement. Staff members are concerned about pay inequities and lack of incentives. Librarian and staff feel that funds to support academic programs and activities are inadequate. The one-year budget cycle, with a

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requirement to expend operating funds by the end of each fiscal year, is not seen by some to result in the most effective use of available funding.

c) Opportunities for the Kemensah Rural Library:

1. New Sources of Funding

Budget reductions can 'shock' the organization, force reassessment of priorities, and make it consider non-traditional funding sources. Some librarians feel that the latter could include library suppliers or publishers. There is general agreement that the Library should continue to expand its fund raising activities, seek out new donors, and establish links with the private sector and other non-government sources of funding. Wherever possible, it should seek endowments for collections, facilities, and staff. Co-operation and partnerships will be vital, as will support from new granting agencies to be rebranding activity which will then lead to the success of that agencies.

2. Staff Addition

An innovative approach to the adding up of staff offers the possibility of improvements in services and productivity, as well as the injection of new skills into the organization. Staff addition and renewal can provide opportunities for reorganization, the re-allocation of resources, and the rethinking of current practices. Career development and the effective use of training could be critical components of a staff renewal program. The Library could better utilize the talents and skills of all staffs, especially the knowledge of its senior employees. For example, a number of staff members feel that there should be staff involvement in the strategic planning process. Others note that to obtain maximum value from training, the Library should provide the chance to use such training in the workplace. The Library could also make greater use of external learning opportunities such as conferences and workshops, where staff could be encouraged to demonstrate their information skills expertise.

3. Technology

New technology is accelerating the shift from paper to electronic information resources. In the long run this may lead to better and cheaper access for users, and shift the requirement for Library space from an emphasis on collections to an emphasis on users. Electronic resources

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are growing in number, and new developments include e-books as well as e-journals. From the staffs' view they feel that the growing importance of electronic collections suggests that digitizing the Kemensah Rural Library's materials should be a priority. The publishing paradigm is changing, and e-commerce offers possibilities of more cost effective ways of dealing with vendors. Kemensah Rural Library is hoping to offer the users web-based learning programme which is prominently managed by WebCT, other web-based learning systems, videoconferencing, and other methods of distance education can provide an enhanced role for the Library. The opportunity could be there for value-added work in terms of the presentation of Library collections and remote resources, including the online display of resources in East Asian and other non- Roman characters. There may be many internet alternatives to Library services such as OPAC which will totally ease users' search activity towards their materials' needed, and there could be an increased demand for the evaluation of such web resources. The Library should take a leadership role in the use of new information technology that would provide new learning opportunities for staff too.

### 4. Exploring the communities demographics

Kemensah rural area is basically consists of mixed communities between Malay as well as *Orang Asli.* Thus, Kemensah Rural Library users come from both communities. The Orang Asli are still upholding their inferiorities in social life which make them refuse to get along or being socialize with other communities among them. Consequently, they rebuff themselves from attending to library or even school. Besides, Library also plays the minor roles in educating the illiterate people in the communities where library may expose them to various knowledge fields via programmes and activities as well as library collection there.

### 4. Threats to Kemensah Rural Library

Analyzing library threats means evaluating factors outside the library that hinder its success. Like opportunities, many threats stem from the political, economic, social, and technical environment. Maintaining current awareness of threats allows the library administration to plan and act. This area requires frequent attention because the external environment often changes quickly. Despite the various opportunities available to the rural library, it is still faced with a number of threats. Explained below are the threats to the rural library.

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1. Restrictive Copyright and Licensing Agreements

The purchase, lease, or subscription costs of electronic materials continue to hamper the Library's ability to provide convenient access to all available electronic resources to its user community. Licensing agreements place limits on who has access to specific electronic resources and the number of simultaneous users who can use them. In many instances, it is not clear who owns and retains electronic back files when subscriptions are cancelled. To date, publishers and copyright holders have been unwilling to grant libraries the right to scan print materials and make them available to users in electronic format. This continues to be a major barrier to the provision and distribution of electronic course reserves in support of teaching and learning activities.

2. Alternative Information Providers

The Library is faced with internal as well as external competition in providing information to the users. Most users believe the internet has all the information for free and as such they prefer browsing through the internet to source for information. The Library does not have an exclusive mandate to provide information resources because the information can be sourced from anywhere via the internet and as such; they prefer to use the alternatives. These alternatives could become competitors in the electronic environment.

3. Misconception of Users about Library

It is not easy for the organization to adapt – what will be the role of a rural library in the future? Many librarians feel that there is a misconception on the part of users about the role of the Library and its services and of what information technology can provide. There is also the mistaken belief in the minds of some users that the 'electronic' library would not need buildings or physical facilities but could exist as a virtual entity. The short life span of hardware and software imposes financial pressures on the Library.

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4.  Increasing Cost of Materials

The cost of equipping the library with materials is very high. Subscription to Online databases is very expensive and even the ones in print such as journals and other serials are not easy to come by. Moreover, the library has to update and increase its collections always as to meet up with the standard.

5.  Rate of Change in Information Field and Information Technology

It is increasingly becoming a challenge for Library staff to keep up with the rapid and accelerating rate of change in both information technology and the information field. Thus, training and retraining for staff is of great importance and requires funding. In addition, the management of electronic resources is becoming more complex and time-consuming.

**CONCLUSION**

One of the major findings which was found based on the SWOT analysis is the condition of the Orang Asli in not having any interest of using the Kemensah Rural Library. It is therefore important for the Library to take concrete steps to overcome this problems so that the minorities interests is not jeopardized. The best approach to ensure that this Aborigines' family do not drift aimlessly in life is for the library to come along and teach lifelong skills needed by the Aborigines' family to identify information needs, locate, and use the information resources accessible in the library effectively and ethically. It is only through applications of information literacy programmes that the Aborigines' family are made aware of  the importance of information needed to perform their daily chores and the location to access the needed information.   If the right steps are taken to address these challenges, transformation at societal level could be achieved.

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