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'DS View', an academic activity in which students, researchers and faculty are encouraged to write short academic essays on the Development discourse, aims to generate discussion on issues concurrent to the times we are living in. The topical range may include academic debates on issues such as poverty, inequality, gender, conflict and human security. The essay for DS View can be expository, argumentative, persuasive or analytical.

The topic of seventh DS View is **'Libraries: A Foundation of Civilisations'** authored by Shanza Sohail

Dr. Zulfiqar Ali
Head,
Department of Development Studies

Libraries: A Foundation of Civilisations

Shanza Sohail

We know that wars bring forth destruction in all its forms but there also exist other ways to bring about destruction on to a society. How do we bring back a nation that teeters on the edge of destruction? There is more than one answer to this. Answers which are not so simple, but they are not so complex either as we make them to be. Institutions are the foundations of any nation and the answers lie in developing sustainable institutions: One such significant institution that has been woefully neglected in Pakistan but is what this nation needs if it wants to survive and prosper is libraries.

Not just any libraries but libraries adaptable to changing needs though their core service remains the same: Development of communities. According to International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), high quality information access is vital for the governments to achieve development goals and for citizens to make informed decisions to improve their lives. These institutions enable government, civil society and business to understand public information needs in a better way through supporting development programmes and providing services thereby working towards attaining development goals. By making equitable access to information along with guidance for using this knowledge, libraries help in addressing issues such as poverty reduction, exclusion and inequality by helping the public build skills that enable them to seek, access and use all types of information efficiently.

Through providing information services and communication technology, libraries help in capacity building of population and allow for sustainable use of information which ensures access for future generations as well. Information access is an issue that covers all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and libraries help to gain improved results across SDGs through various ways. Libraries also help in increasing digital literacy, ending gaps in information access and facilitating other institutions by forming innovative partnerships with them. These partnerships will be contributing to recognise information needs of the local communities, to play host to government programmes, to allow access to digital technology, to assist academic community, to preserve and allow access to the culture and heritage of local communities. With information and research dissemination, libraries can be of assistance to decision makers in fulfilling SDGs. As accessing information relating to health, environment and agriculture are part of SDGs, the libraries can provide this access through providing related research and infrastructure that can help in development of women, children, the vulnerable and marginalised communities.

The number of libraries today in Pakistan is not adequate for such a country which is expected to reach among twelve of the world's most populated countries by 2050. Most libraries that do exist lack a strong relationship with the community and do not provide sufficient and much needed resources and services to the populace. There are inadequate programmes, both in number and quality, which target youth, children and adults, leading to a barely existing interaction with the society and therefore a less chance to bring about a desired change in any aspect of the society.

The lack of investment in human capital has led to a disturbingly rapid rise of ignorance within society over the course of years, creating issues such as unemployment, rising intolerance, deficient skill set among others. This has entailed widespread poverty and rising inequality. A report by World Bank, "World development Indicators (WDI) 2015" finds more than 50 percent of the population of Pakistan falling under the poverty line, while 12.7 percent of the country's population is seen to be living under extreme poverty. The literacy rate does not fare well either. UNESCO's situational analysis of the education sector in 2011 showed an alarming 56 percent literacy which dragged itself to 58 percent by 2015. The inclusiveness of libraries here can be seen from the public libraries in Ghana that are operating a technology training program to battle high unemployment and dropout rates, while in Nepal social and financial inclusion programs are being aided by public libraries for the one-third of its population living under US$1 per day.

Libraries promote knowledge sharing and dissemination, and have potential to build wellbeing of the society, developing as well as strengthening the bonds between individuals, communities and between communities and institutions such as the government, NGOs etc. They can play a critical role in the economic and social development of the society and of the nation as a whole, particularly for developing countries. An example can be seen in Romania where more than 400 libraries helped 17,000 farmers obtain agricultural subsidies through accessing government portals which provided a return of more than $20 million into their communities. An instance of libraries supporting government development objectives is seen by public libraries in Botswana that assisted government goals under its National Vision 2016, which included introduction to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) access, computer skills, improvement of library consumers and building their capacity in education, business and employment. Another example of support of SDG related to empowerment of women and girls is when Uganda's National Library gave specially designed ICT training to female farmers, allowing women to access weather forecasts, prices of crops, and help in online market set up, using their local languages. Similarly, European Union worked towards achieving an SDG which focuses on gaining productive employment and decent work. In a year, 4.1 million adults used computers in public library to assist activities related to employment – 1.5 million used library computers to apply for jobs, while over a quarter of a million people attained jobs this way.

Knowledge is power and this power can come through libraries. The significance of libraries can be seen from the fact that there are 13 times more public libraries across the world than there are hospitals. These are places of innovation that can be formed into agents of development thus creating a healthy, balanced and civilised society.

As policy makers and professionals in the development sector face contracting budgets, the 21st century finds ideal partners in public libraries for cost-effective growth and development. An example can be seen in Romania where more than 400 libraries helped 17,000 farmers obtain agricultural subsidies through accessing government portals which provided a return of more than $20 million into their communities. An instance of libraries supporting government development objectives is seen by public libraries in Botswana that assisted government goals under its National Vision 2016, which included introduction to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) access, computer skills improvement of library consumers and building their capacity in education, business and employment. Another example of support of SDG involving empowerment of women and girls is when Uganda's National Library gave specially designed ICT training to female farmers, allowing the women to access weather forecasts, prices of crops,

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These examples show the power and importance of libraries, as a local institution, for the development of communities as well as nations. This foundation offers a more efficient and sustainable way of doing development. As societies evolve, libraries evolve and so nations evolve, and truly great civilisations are born.

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Ms. Shanza Sohail is a student of MPhil Development Studies at Pakistan Institute of Development Economics.