

Myanmar Library Survey

A comprehensive study of the country's
public libraries and information needs



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The Asia Foundation

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Myanmar Book Aid and Preservation Foundation

The Myanmar Book Aid and Preservation Foundation (MBAPF) was founded in 2002 by a group of committed librarians, business and civic leaders with the goal of promoting knowledge and learning among Myanmar people, especially those in disadvantaged communities. MBAPF works in conjunction with local and international non-governmental organizations to assist libraries with training and donations of printed and digital material, and the preservation of Myanmar historical and contemporary print culture.

Preface

The Asia Foundation and the Myanmar Book Aid and Preservation Foundation are pleased to present the first-ever national survey of Myanmar's public libraries.

In 2010, four decades of isolation and military rule ended with the country's first general elections. Since then, Myanmar has undergone rapid changes as the government embarked on an ambitious agenda of sweeping national reforms and integration into the global economy. Although Myanmar has a high literacy rate and the number of news outlets has exploded since the dismantlement of state censorship, access to information remains a challenge. An educated and engaged citizenry is necessary for Myanmar's democratic transition. To this end, libraries – public institutions with a mission to educate and inform – have the potential to catalyze the transition of Myanmar into a connected 21st century state.

For the past 60 years, The Asia Foundation has been dedicated to helping Asian leaders and institutions confront crucial challenges as countries embark on a sustainable path to prosperity and stability. Strong support for educational institutions remains a cornerstone of our development programs. Books for Asia, one of The Asia Foundation's signature programs, has provided approximately 36,000 books to 170 institutions in Myanmar each year since 2007. The Foundation recently re-established a resident office in Myanmar in 2013.

The Myanmar Book Aid and Preservation Foundation (MBAPF) was founded in 2002 by a group of committed librarians, business and civic leaders with the goal of promoting knowledge and learning among Myanmar people, especially those in disadvantaged communities. MBAPF works in conjunction with local and international non-governmental organizations to assist libraries with training and donations of printed and digital material, and the preservation of Myanmar historical and contemporary print culture.

Given The Asia Foundation and MBAPF's shared mission to improve access to information, we have collaborated on a much needed in-depth assessment of Myanmar's libraries. Our purpose is to establish baseline knowledge and inform efforts to develop Myanmar's information architecture and community initiatives. Indeed, this comprehensive national survey reveals that the nearly 5,000 active public libraries that exist in Myanmar are valued community hubs. While much can be done to improve infrastructure and better support their role as information centers, citizens perceive libraries as having a significant and positive impact on community resources. People rely on books and printed materials as a major source of information, particularly in rural areas where oftentimes electricity and internet are not readily available.

We would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Ministry of Information in providing existing library data and in making their local officials available for interview. The International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) and Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL) provided invaluable guidance on the survey's design. The research and analytical expertise of Myanmar Marketing Research and Development Co. were instrumental to this project's success. We would also like to acknowledge the role played by the Beyond Access initiative, a movement of people and organizations committed to the idea that modern public libraries help drive economic and social development, which convened the first international task force on Myanmar's public library system. This report seeks to contribute to Beyond Access' important mission.

We hope that the information in this survey will help illuminate Myanmar's pressing information needs and guide the library development strategies of the Myanmar government and donors.

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Executive Summary

The Myanmar Library Survey is the first in-depth nationwide study of the country's public libraries. Commissioned by The Asia Foundation in partnership with the Myanmar Book Aid and Preservation Foundation (MBAPF), the survey aimed to establish a comprehensive, current picture of the Myanmar public library system to help inform the development of Myanmar's information architecture and community initiatives. While much can be done to improve infrastructure and better support their role as information hubs, the survey reveals that citizens perceive libraries as having a significant and positive impact on community life. The survey findings will be circulated amongst key stakeholders, including governmental officials, policy makers, local and international non-governmental organizations, civil society, and local communities.

A country coming out of decades of isolation, Myanmar is now rapidly building the information infrastructure needed for its citizens to participate in the reform process and compete in the global marketplace. Myanmar's reverence toward libraries and its vast library network has the potential to aid this process. This study focuses on public libraries – defined in Myanmar as libraries registered with the government – because of their accessibility to a wider number of people and potential for scalability. In addition to public libraries, Myanmar has university, monastic, private, and specialized libraries, few of which register as public libraries.

There are 55,755 registered public libraries in the country, but only 4,868 are considered active. Prior to this study, very little was known about them. The objectives of the project were to sample active public libraries in order to:

1. Evaluate each library's location, condition, and capabilities, including technology capabilities;
2. Assess the current perception of libraries by users and non-users of libraries; and
3. Gather information on the country's most prevalent information needs and assess whether libraries are meeting those needs.

The field research was conducted by the survey and research firm, Myanmar Marketing Research and Development, over three weeks from October to November 2013, covering 26 townships in 13 states and regions, including the capital of Naypyitaw. Due to ongoing instability in Rakhine and Kachin, researchers were not able to include the two states in the study. In total, the researchers visited 206 different libraries and conducted 1,275 interviews with librarians, township officers of the Information and Public Relations Department (IPRD), village and ward administrators, and library users and non-users. IPRD, a division of the Ministry of Information, is the governmental department tasked with registering, supporting and monitoring libraries in the country. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed in the survey in the form of semi-structured questionnaires and guided interviews. In addition, the researchers held focus group discussions with community members.

In order to increase the likelihood of finding active libraries, the samples were drawn from the two townships in each state or region with the highest numbers of libraries. Libraries at the village (rural) or ward (urban) level – the smallest administrative units – were sampled, resulting in 190 village and 16 ward libraries. The study was skewed towards village libraries to reflect the government's focus on rural library development as nearly 70 percent of Myanmar's 55 million people live in rural areas.

Key findings:

- **Libraries play a central role in village life, and they exist in even the most rural and remote communities.** The majority of interviewees believe that libraries have a positive influence: 97% of them felt that their library has “some impact” to “very big impact” on community life. Many libraries were located in the center of the village or on the main road, and often functioned as a community center. The average number of borrowers per library is 57 in the past month, and the average size of the villages and wards visited is approximately 1,944 people. While the number of library borrowers is small in proportion to the population, many non-users interviewed had visited their library at least once to attend community meetings.
- **Library users are younger, more educated and better paid than non-users.** 48% of library users are between 16 and 25 years old, whereas the largest proportion of non-users (36%) are 26 to 40 years old. 33% of users completed high school and 35% of them have attended university. In comparison, only 18% of non-users had completed high school and 20% had attended university. The predominant income category for users (28%) is between \$100 and \$150 per month, while the largest percentage of non-users (32%) earn between \$50 and \$100 a month. This may be explained by the fact that more users come from households where the primary breadwinner works for the government or private sector, whereas non-users tend to be employed in low-wage casual work.
- **Funding is very limited and often unreliable.** Most public libraries have no real budgetary support. Only 44% of libraries surveyed receive funding from any source; those that receive funding reported that the average amount was \$24 a year or \$2 a month. Once a library is built, recurring IPRD support to village libraries is limited to \$20 a month for the transportation of books and journals. However, due to budget limitations not even this modest support is available to all public libraries. As a result, libraries rely on philanthropic community members and other donors to cover building maintenance, furniture, electricity and equipment.
- **Village libraries are staffed largely by volunteers, who are poorly compensated and trained.** Due to the severe budget constraints, there is no money available to maintain paid staff and the majority of libraries rely on volunteers. More than 80% of the libraries have less than 4 library committee members and staff, and 10% have between 5 and 10 persons on the library committee and staff. Given limited budgets, 98% of libraries surveyed have never invested in formal librarian training. Nevertheless, librarians are largely an educated group: 39% have finished high school and 31% have graduated or are attending university. Nearly half the librarians (49%) were under 40 years old, while over a third was between 40 and 59 years old. Among the 206 librarians interviewed, 67% were men and 33% were women.
- **Less than half of library users are satisfied with library facilities, with many lacking in chairs, tables and toilets.** 91% of the libraries are one-story buildings that they own or are provided by the government, and only 3% of the libraries have to pay rent. Almost half (43%) of librarians said that their libraries need some renovations, and more than half (59%) reported that they do not have sufficient desks and chairs to accommodate users. In addition, 82% of the libraries surveyed do not have a toilet, which would suggest that people cannot stay for long in a library. On the whole, less than half (42%) of users expressed satisfaction with library facilities with few completely satisfied or completely dissatisfied.

- **Libraries' opening hours and fees are varied but are generally acceptable to users:** 40% of village libraries open between 1 to 4 hours per day, and 44% open between 4 and 8 hours per day. 24% of the libraries open two days a week, 11% three days a week, 19% five days a week, and a surprisingly high 28% open every day of the week. Very few users and non-users cited library opening hours as an issue in their recommendations for improved library services. Membership fees and borrowing fees when assessed were very low, and more than 90% of users were either satisfied or very satisfied with the level of fees paid.
- **Library collection is generally small and not sufficiently updated.** The average number of books a library owns is 900, with a vast range from the smallest collection of 20 to the largest with nearly 10,000 books. Books are generally accessible to the reading public, housed mostly in open shelves with only 11% of libraries reported having closed shelves. The most prevalent subjects of books reported by librarians to be present in their collection were religious books (90%), general knowledge (88%), education (75%), health (70%), social science (50%), politics (50%), and economics (37%). 45% of libraries reported having children's books in their collection. On average, libraries receive about 80 new books and 180 new periodicals a year.
- **The types of material respondents most want to read are periodicals, biographies and general interest publications, such as accessibly written books on health, religion, agriculture, geography and Myanmar culture and traditions.** Only a minority of people surveyed were interested in education, economics, and social science (between 11 to 17%). Books in the Myanmar language are preferred; just 1% of users want English-language books.
- **Users are most dissatisfied with libraries' lack of variety and outdated books and periodicals.** Currently, most library users visit between one and three times a week. Although the majority of users are satisfied with library hours and facilities, 59% of library users are unsatisfied with the books and periodicals available in libraries, saying that they are outdated. IPRD officers and village authorities suggested that on-time arrival of newspapers would attract users to libraries as currently newspapers often arrive one to five days late. Having access to a TV can also help provide updated information to library visitors.
- **Most libraries do not have basic technology.** Only 55% of libraries surveyed have electricity. Almost all the libraries visited did not have a phone, television with cable service, DVD player, computer, printer or Internet access. 96% of the libraries visited do not have a fixed landline phone. Of the 4% with phones, four have fixed phones and another four libraries use mobile phones. Nearly three-quarters of IPRD officials recommended that having access to TV and to satellite channels through a cable service such as SkyNet, if possible, would make libraries more attractive and useful to users.
- **Computer ability amongst the general population is low, and computer availability at home and in libraries is almost nonexistent.** Only 4% of library users and non-users have a computer at home and most have little to no computer skills. 98% of the libraries visited do not have a computer on its premises, and only two have internet connection. Almost all librarians interviewed (87%) did not know how to use a computer.
- **People access the internet mainly via mobile phones.** Despite respondents' widespread unfamiliarity with computers and unreliable electricity, 9% of library users and 16% of non-

users say they have access to the Internet. Of those with internet access, 72% of non-users and 58% of users say they do so via their mobile phones. 80% of those who go online said they connect to the Internet primarily to read news. Both users and non-users alike do not yet see public libraries as a place for Internet access; only 11% recommend equipping libraries with computers or highlight Internet access as a service that would improve libraries.

- **Communities defined their top needs as better road infrastructure, electricity and mobile phone coverage.** The development of road infrastructure was singled out as a significant need in half of the focus group discussions and nearly all the key informant interviews. Adequate electricity supply and better mobile phone network coverage were also highlighted as community needs. The lack of access to electricity and familiarity with computers in rural villages likely accounts for the low demand for computers at libraries, but the growing availability of mobile phones for Internet access as mentioned above is also a contributing factor. 99% of all users answered no when asked if free Internet access would make their libraries more useful. However, nearly all the IPRD township officers interviewed said that computers with an Internet or Wi-Fi connection would attract more visitors to the township or village library.
- **Mobile libraries are popularly seen as a way to overcome barriers to access, but the presence of a more permanent library building is viewed by most people as a necessary community institution.** A third of respondents had heard of mobile libraries; of these, almost all say they would be useful for their community. They see mobile libraries as a way to expand the diversity of reading material their library can offer and to enable more people to access books, particularly those who spend the majority of the day working to make ends meet and do not have time to visit the library. Lack of free time was cited as one of the main reasons more people do not visit their community library. Nevertheless, it is important to underscore the fact that many indicated they would still prefer to have a more permanent library structure as they are integral to community life.

In conclusion, libraries are highly valued institutions that are supported in large part by their own communities. However, they do not have adequate infrastructure or secure funding to fulfill their role as community information hubs in a rapidly changing country. The fact that many citizens view community libraries as indispensable centers of community life also points to their great potential as an important local institution for community development initiatives in areas such as health and agriculture, and support to libraries should go beyond information access and consider them as spaces for active information sharing among the people themselves and civic participation within communities. Further study is needed on the different needs and challenges of urban versus rural libraries, as well as on the most appropriate ways to bring up-to-date information and services to rural libraries where the absence of reliable electricity is a real constraint. Approaches to Internet access, for example, should take into account the importance of mobile phones, but a more detailed analysis should be made to better ascertain the different types of information that can best be delivered through Internet access via either computers or mobile phones. Finally, given the high standing of libraries in community life and the large number of libraries operating on voluntary staffing and donations, examples of innovative and dynamic approaches to attracting funders, volunteers and users by successful libraries should be documented and disseminated widely.

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Acronyms

5Bs	Books, Brain, Building, Budget, Borrowers
FGD	Focus group discussion
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
IPRD	Information and Public Relations Department
KII	Key Informant Interview
MBAPF	Myanmar Book Aid and Preservation Foundation
MLA	Myanmar Library Association
MLF	Myanmar Library Foundation
MMK	Myanmar Kyat, which is converted at 1,000 MMK to 1 USD
MMRD	Myanmar Marketing & Research Development Co., Ltd
MOI	Ministry of Information
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
UCL	Universities Central Library

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale for the study

Myanmar boasted one of the best educational systems in Southeast Asia in the mid-1900s, due in part to the legacy left by the British colonial rule. When the country entered the Socialist Era in 1962, the educational system began a serious decline with growing government control over educational institutions.

A student-led protest calling for democratic change swept across the country in 1988 and led to a military takeover of the government and further tightening of political and social life. The same year, all universities in the country were shut down and then they resumed operations, correspondence education was the established mode of learning. This severely limited opportunities for people to interact or share knowledge, as students met as little as once a year with peers and professors for the sole purpose of preparing for exams. Media outlets were placed under strict control, and access to information was severely curtailed. Only government-sanctioned material was allowed to circulate freely. The Information and Public Relations Department (IPRD), under the Ministry of Information (MOI), was charged with creating and disseminating government policies and plans to the general populace. Public libraries, as part of an informal educational system and space for knowledge exchange, were stifled in this environment of distrust and censorship. Nonetheless, the decline in education strengthened people's desire to learn and self-educate, and restrictions on information made people thirst for more news and information.

In 2010, the military rule ended with the country's first general elections. The economic, political, administrative reform processes enacted by the government since then have been much lauded by the international community. The transition to democracy and improved quality of life for many cannot be achieved or sustained without the participation of an informed and engaged citizenry. Though educational reforms are in progress, change will be slow to come to the formal educational system. In meantime, the informal education resources immediately available are the country's public libraries. The role of libraries as an agent for social change and as centers of community life cannot be overlooked. Despite the lack of funds and attention from the government over the years, public libraries have grown in numbers due to the initiation and support of communities. They function not only as centers for informal learning but also as enduring community institutions central to civic life. The needs and current resources of existing libraries were virtually unknown, scattered as they are around the country with minimal coordination mechanisms.

Commissioned by The Asia Foundation in partnership with the Myanmar Book Aid and Preservation Foundation and with encouragement and assistance from the Ministry of Information, this survey was carried out by the Myanmar Marketing and Research Development and is the first-ever comprehensive examination of the state of Myanmar's public libraries. The findings will be used to inform governmental stakeholders, policy makers, local and international non-governmental organizations, civil society, communities and other stakeholders interested in contributing to the development of library systems in the country.

1.2. Research objectives

The specific objectives of the project were to sample active public libraries in order to:

1. Evaluate each library's location, condition, and capabilities, including technology capabilities;
2. Assess the current perception of libraries by users and non-users of libraries; and
3. Gather information on the country's most prevalent information needs and assess whether libraries are meeting those needs.

2. Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative methodologies were employed in the survey. For the former, key informant interviews (KII) were conducted with the township officers of the Information and Public Relations Department (IPRD) and village/ward administrators, and supplemented by focus discussions in selected communities. Quantitative interviews were held with librarians, library committee members, and library users and non-users. In total, the survey completed 1,275 interviews. The breakdown by respondent type is provided below.

Table 1. Overview of the Methodology

Qualitative Interviews via Guided Interviews	Quantitative Interviews via Semi-Structured Questionnaires
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Township IPRD officers (n=25)2. Village/ward administrators for basic demographic and socioeconomic data (n=206)3. Focus group discussions with community members including users and non-users who did not partake in the quantitative interviews (n=14)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Librarian or library committee members of registered libraries (n=206)<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Community-run libraries▪ Privately-funded libraries▪ Monastic libraries▪ NGO-supported libraries2. Frequent Library Users (n=412)3. Library Non-Users (n=412)

2.1. Sampling frame

The survey focused on libraries registered formally with IPRD, which is the governmental department tasked with registering, supporting and monitoring libraries in the country. The registration list held by IPRD cannot be considered complete, however, as the officials interviewed admitted that it is not updated regularly. Nonetheless, the proportion of libraries by state and region surveyed were drawn from the registration list as no alternate nationwide record of libraries exists from which to determine the sampling frame.

A total of 55,755 libraries have been registered throughout Myanmar since British colonial rule. Of these, 59% of the registered libraries have had the "5Bs" at some time in the past, a term used by the Ministry of Information to denote the basic resources of "Books, Brain, Building, Budget and Borrowers." Books refer to the libraries' in-house collections, brains to an active librarian and/or library committee to run day-to-day operations, building to a physical structure dedicated for library, and budget to funds available and borrowers to

users of the library. Overall, there are only 4,868 libraries (8.7%) with the 5Bs that are actively operating and therefore valid for the survey (see Appendix 1). No formal data was found to indicate the percentage of libraries that are operational on a regular basis. As explained in later chapters, IPRD officers are not able to visit every library under their administration.

The survey covered 13 of Myanmar's 15 geographical areas, including 12 states and regions and Naypyitaw, the capital. Two states, Kachin and Rakhine, were excluded from the sampling frame due to the security situation of the on-going ethnic conflicts. Based on the number of active and registered libraries in the 13 areas, the sample allocation by state or region was determined in two stages (see Appendix 2).

In the first stage, townships were selected purposively to reflect the greater share of libraries within the state or region. As each state or region has between 7-18 townships, the two townships with the highest numbers of active libraries were targeted. This often correlated with the most densely populated townships, but not always. The number of samples was set to meet 25% coverage of the registered libraries in each township, which resulted in 206 targeted libraries.

The number of libraries correlates with the number of communities visited, as there is usually only one registered library within a village (rural area) or ward (urban area).¹ Therefore the second stage of sampling was at the village/ward level. IPRD township officers provided guidance on which villages and wards under its administration had the most active libraries. If the number provided by IPRD was greater than the target sample for the township, the libraries were chosen randomly. For example, IPRD might recommend ten villages with active libraries in Loikaw Township (Kayah State) and the field team then would randomly choose three out of the ten villages to meet the sample quota. Since higher performing libraries are better known to the IPRD officer, it can be assumed that the sample is biased towards these libraries.

Out of the 206 libraries surveyed, 190 were village or rural libraries (92%) and 16 were ward or urban libraries (8%). There are several reasons why the sampling skewed towards village libraries. First, village libraries are often better known by the township officer because they are supported by smaller, cooperative communities that ensure the libraries are well-run. Also, the sampling reflects the proliferation of village libraries resulting from the government's focus on rural library development to support the nearly 38.5 million people (70% of Myanmar's population) who live in rural areas. The complete field samples can be found in Appendix 3.

2.2. Quantitative respondents

The final stage of sampling was the respondent level. The head librarian or member of the library committee was interviewed using a questionnaire. In the majority of cases, the librarian is also a library committee member. Two frequent users were identified with the assistance of the librarian/library committee members. Two library non-users were selected from a household that was a pre-determined distance from the library.

¹ In the survey findings, 91% of the villages had only one library in its vicinity.

Interview with a Librarian (right)



All respondents had to be residents of the village or ward for at least one year. The following details further criteria.

Library non-user selection criteria:

- Between 16 and 60 years old.
- Completed at least primary level education.
- Residence located roughly 10-house intervals away.
- One male and one female selected from every library community.

Library user selection criteria:

- Between 16 and 60 years old.
- Completed at least primary level education.
- Visits the library at least once a month. A high-frequency visitor list was developed with the librarian.
- One male and one female selected for every library. Participants were selected randomly from the high-frequency visitor list.

2.3. Qualitative respondents

As stated previously, an IPRD officer was interviewed in every township surveyed, yielding a total of 25 interviews². On entering the communities, the field team conducted 206 key informant interviews with the village/ward administrators to gain an overview of the community as well as collect basic socioeconomic information.

To further understand the information uses, needs and aspirations of the communities surveyed, one focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted per region/state for a total of 13 FGDs. The discussions were held in the most populous village in the region/state. One additional FGD was held in Kawhmu Township, Yangon Region, to allow the inclusion of the only mobile library the team encountered in the field. This does not mean

² One IPRD officer interview was not used by the research team because he was new to the job and could not adequately answer many of the question asked.

other mobile libraries are not operating, only that they were not suggested or known by IPRD officers, perhaps because mobile libraries change locations every few days or weeks.

All FGD participants had to meet the following prerequisites: completed primary education, over fifteen years old, permanent resident of the community for at least one year, possessed good communication skills, and expressed willingness to actively participate in the discussion. The composition of each eight-member FGD was:

- Village chiefs or elders – 1 person
- Teachers and students – 3 people, flexible depending on context of the village/ward
- Library users – 2 people not already interviewed in the quantitative survey; identified by the librarian
- Non-users – 2 people from random sampling of people at a predetermined distance from library

Focus Group Discussions in Shwebo and Hinthada Townships



2.4. Research constraints

The field research was carried out over three weeks from October to November 2013 throughout 26 townships. As in any research project, the teams encountered minor difficulties while conducting fieldwork. Mitigation measures were implemented, however, and the research was carried out successfully.

One of the main constraints was the lack of standardization amongst IPRD-supported libraries. The 5B's criteria for libraries (Books, Brains, Building, Budget, Borrowers) are more of a general motto than implemented policy. Detailed guidelines seemed lacking on how these were to be fulfilled at the township level, e.g. how many and what genres of books were to be kept in stock, minimum requirements for building size, or the types of furniture and facilities that should be installed. Nevertheless, books, building and brains could be tangibly observed by the field teams, but the presence of a budget or active borrowers could not be verified. In a handful of cases, libraries had stopped operating in the last year, or had been closed for several weeks and opened mainly to accommodate the arrival of field teams. This occurred for seven library samples and in such cases, the inactive libraries were substituted by an active library located as close as possible to the original sample site. The total number of libraries and proportional coverage of the 26 townships was not affected by this.

Another constraint was the language barrier in Mindat and Falam Townships in Chin State. Across the board, respondents spoke a variety of languages. This is usually overcome through the use of interpreters hired from the community itself. The quality of interpreters in the Chin villages, however, was lower than other areas. This affected the community's level of investment in the study, as the library users and non-users did not wholly understand the purpose or objective of the survey. Consequently, participants were less interested in the survey and their concentration was difficult to maintain. All this may have affected the answers of users and non-users

in these two townships, but field researchers attempted to mitigate uncertainties by deepening the librarian and IPRD officer interviews. In the other ethnic states surveyed – Kayah, Kayin, Shan and Mon States – the language barrier was not an issue.

3. Myanmar context

3.1. History of libraries

The importance of libraries in Myanmar can be traced back to ancient times, notably to the reign of King Anawratha (1057-1078 AC) who started the tradition of constructing libraries. Throughout the 19th century, “modern” libraries emerged in Lower Myanmar, some contained a variety of subjects but religious books still comprised the majority of library collections. In 1883, the Commissioner of Lower Myanmar, Sir Charles Edward Bernard, established the first public library, The Bernard Free Library, which is the origin of the National Library of Yangon.

From 1930 to 1938, during British rule, more than 3,000 libraries were built throughout the country.³ This peak in the construction of libraries stemmed from growing nationalist movements lead by educated politicians who set up reading clubs and libraries to share their knowledge and political views. Associations and communities also established libraries to inform and educate.

After the country’s independence from Britain in 1948, incentives were given to continue fostering libraries and the IPRD within the Ministry of Information was created to monitor them. In Yangon, the IPRD and private donors built many libraries. From 1950 to 1953, to honor Bogyoke (General) Aung San, a national hero who was assassinated just before Myanmar gained independence, Bogyoke Memorial Libraries were established in major towns in Upper and Lower Myanmar. From 1952 to 1956, the government organized the Public Education Council to improve public education in rural areas. The program focused on health and education and included literacy and library building campaigns in villages. Between 1953 and 1961, the IPRD also opened town libraries, and short-term library trainings were created for approximately 300 public libraries.

In 1971, Yangon University opened the first two year post-graduate degree program in library studies in order to tackle the shortage of librarians. Successive governments encouraged the creation of libraries yet once built, all libraries lacked sufficient technical and financial assistance.

From 1988–2010, during the military dictatorship, libraries were significantly suppressed. The IPRD functioned as the government’s apparatus to disseminate government-sponsored information. Its media censorship board was feared. Since the reform process began in 2010, however, the IPRD has become one of the most crucial stakeholders for the successful development of the public library system. More about the IPRD’s current role will be discussed in Section 5 on stakeholders.

³ *Situation of libraries in Myanmar under the British period (1826-1947)*, U Aye Kyu, Yangon, department of Higher Education, 1979.

3.2. Government libraries

National libraries

The National Library of Myanmar has two sites: a building in Yangon which has by far the largest collection in the country, and a brand-new building in Naypyitaw. There are also national library branches in each region of the country. These branches sometimes also host a museum on the premises. The National Library collects cultural heritage items and archives all available literature. Its collections are accessible to the public on site but people cannot borrow books. Currently, when a book is published, it sent to the National Library repository.

University and academic libraries

There are 47 university libraries throughout Myanmar, which the Ministry of Education supervises and manages. Due to previous government cuts to universities, university library collections do not wholly meet the needs of students and researchers.

There are five major academic libraries in Myanmar, and three of them are located in Yangon. The best academic library in Yangon is considered to be the Universities' Central Library, better known as UCL. The other top two academic libraries are located in Mandalay. These libraries are able to offer computers and Internet access for users but in other states, university libraries may not always have computers.

The Yangon University Library, founded in 1931, is the oldest in the country. In 1933, the first librarian who took office was trained in London and introduced the first library filing system to Myanmar. In 1940, the library contained 23,433 books in the Myanmar language, English, Chinese, Tibetan and other Asian languages, and included religious, academic and social science books. Unfortunately, a large part of the collection was damaged during World War II. Prior to its destruction, the Yangon University Library was well-known throughout all of South-East Asia⁴. The library exemplified the country's pride in its educational system, which was considered the best in the region.

Specialized libraries

There are approximately 100 specialized libraries across Myanmar. Although roughly half are dedicated to religion, spirituality and the study of Buddhism, specialized libraries exist for a variety of fields. For instance, the Medical Research Library, under the supervision of the Ministry of Health, contains a collection of English books and updated journals that are used by medical researchers. Online access to the collection is provided. There are other research departments in Yangon, Naypyitaw, Mandalay, and Bagan that house special collections, such as a library dedicated to archaeology in Bagan. Libraries reserved for use by staff in each government ministry, 36 in total, are another type of specialized library.

3.3. Public libraries

At the township level, there are libraries in all major towns of the 325 administrative townships that make up the country. These libraries are registered with the national IPRD office in Naypyitaw and are funded by the government. IPRD libraries are located in the main section of the township. They purchase books, and copy

⁴*Situation of libraries in Myanmar under the British period (1826-1947)*, U Aye Kyu, Yangon, Department of Higher Education, 1979.

and distribute them to village/ward level libraries under the township's administration. Township librarians and IPRD officers provide training to the village/ward librarians.

The government's stated goal for libraries since the Socialist Era was encapsulated in the slogan "one library, one village." Thousands of village libraries exist across Myanmar, and they are also registered with IPRD. Their collections comprise government publications, general and religious books, and current newspapers. An executive library committee composed of village administrators, elders and leaders committed to the development of their community run the village libraries. Every library that has been registered with IPRD is called a "public library," even if private donors contribute funding or if the community maintains its activities.

Libraries are required to register with the government in order to receive official recognition as public libraries and to be eligible to receive funding from the IPRD; otherwise, they are considered private libraries and are not eligible to receive funding.⁵ These may be motivating factors for libraries to become public. Libraries operate with a variety of funding sources in addition to those provided by the IPRD, including from the community, private donors, monasteries, churches, political parties or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

A requirement of the registration process for a new library is the formation of a committee, which typically consist of village elders, leaders and library enthusiasts. The average number of members is 9-15 people. They submit an application with the IPRD township library, providing the location of library, names of those who will makes financial donations, and names of the proposed committee members. The village administration must a write recommendation letter for the construction or adaptation of a site for the library. The library committee comes to a consensus on who should stand in as the librarian, or they may hire or ask a volunteer to work for the library. The librarian term is not fixed and sometimes rotates. The IPRD forwards the application documents to the District - and subsequently the national - IPRD office. Concurrently, the Township General Administrative Department and Settlement and Land Record Department must review the application and approve it as well. Each township IPRD official has a set number of libraries that the department can grant permission to each year. The benchmark is set by at the national IPRD office; it may change year by year, and differ by region or state. It is unknown what the numbers are based on. There are no fees involved in the application process and it takes roughly three weeks to complete.

The township IPRD then grants \$1,000 USD in two installments to contribute to the construction of the building. If a new library is to receive IPRD money, it cannot apply for funding from the Myanmar Library Foundation (MLF), the non-governmental organization that works with the government to support library development. The funding amount is the same and the restriction was put in place to stretch the IPRD's limited budget. There are no standard requirements for the size or style of newly constructed library buildings, and often village communities will raise additional funds to supplement IPRD or MLF support.

Most of the libraries in Myanmar use manual or traditional filing and record systems, and few of them are able to incorporate digital tools into their system. Only a handful of libraries in Naypyitaw, Yangon and Mandalay have an online library system and provide free access to Internet.

⁵ Interviews with the IPRD officers as well as the information on the website of the Ministry of Information, www.moi.gov.mm/zt

Manual system to record borrowings



3.4. Private, NGO and monastic libraries

Private players have led the way in terms of innovative and quality library services. Many privately funded libraries and Daw Khin Kyi Foundation’s mobile library – the focus of one of the FGD in this study – have been redefining traditional library models. NGO libraries typically contain collections comprised mostly of books in English on subjects that are useful to the community, such as social and youth development, modern technology, and accounting.

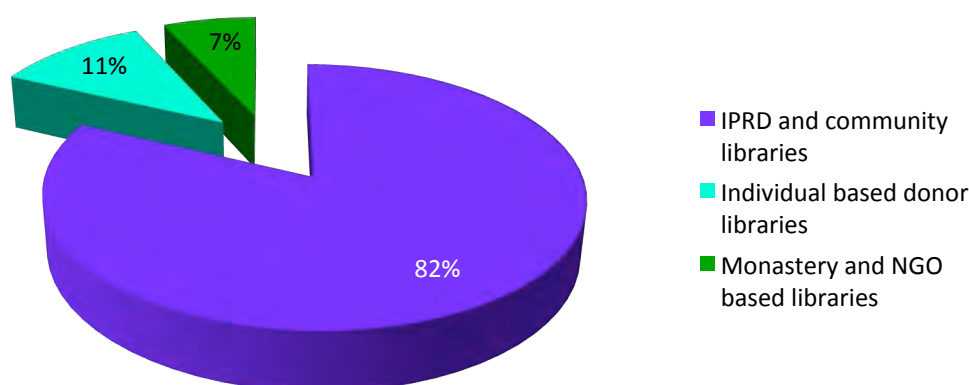
Monks historically have played strong roles as village elders, and monasteries often play the role of community centers. Monastic libraries provide an informal education to rural communities. At the village level, almost every monastery has a small library that the community members can use. Some monastery libraries are very similar to private and public libraries with collections comprised of periodicals as well as journals and English books for teaching but most books available are in Burmese and religious in nature, from famous texts on ethics and morality to the Buddha’s teachings. These libraries can be registered with the IPRD as public libraries, and the decision to do so rests with the head monks. In general, however, the IPRD prioritizes funding and support to libraries that are purely community libraries since they are less independent. This is likely why few monastic libraries are formally registered. The number in the sample size is not indicative of the real number of monastery libraries across the country that functions as public or private community libraries. No database exists for these so sampling specifically for them is difficult. In this research, every monastic library in the vicinity of the sample area was visited by the field team.

3.5. Community libraries

The respondents spoke of “community libraries” and “public libraries” almost interchangeably. The categorization of the existing types of libraries has not been set by any regulatory body. Users, non-users, IPRD officers and librarians define them in overlapping ways. Village libraries can be funded by the community, a private donor, IPRD/MLF, a monastery or church, a political party or an NGO. All of them can be called a public library when they complete registration with IPRD. Based on the flexible understanding of villagers, IPRD and other key informants, most of the village libraries surveyed by the research team would fall under the category of both public and community libraries.

Figure 1: Types of libraries

□



Base : Librarians=206

When categorized by source of funding, 82% of the libraries visited were labelled as IPRD/community libraries, 11% were private donor libraries and 7% were monastery or NGO libraries.⁶

4. Main stakeholders

4.1. Information and Public Relations Department

In 1942, during World War II, the Information and Propagating Branch was opened. This branch was reconstituted as the Public Relation Department in 1945 during the English era. In 1946, the Public Relation Department was established under the Ministry of Information. Under the administration of the State Law and Restoration Council, the information branch of the Information and Broadcasting Department was upgraded to the Information and Public Relations Department (IPRD) in 1991. In 2004, it started to open township offices and reached 77 facilities in 2013.

Library and television services were installed at State and Regions, District and Township offices for the purpose of public education, public relations and organizing activities for the public. In addition, according to the IPRD, self-help rural libraries were set up by the MOI since 2004 to improve the socioeconomic status of rural people.

The IPRD headquarters in Naypyitaw usually provides \$20 per month to each township library. Rarely do IPRD township libraries receive more than this, though they can receive supplementary funds from other donors. The IPRD township officers use these funds to buy books and periodicals, and copy and distribute them to village libraries. Neither the IPRD district or township office provides any financial support to village libraries for infrastructure, furniture or repairs.

IPRD's role at the township level is to:

⁶ There was only 1 NGO library identified, which was in Thabeikyin, Mandalay. For the monastic libraries, their numbers and location were: 2 in Pyinmana, 1 in Hpa-An, 1 in Kawhmu, 2 in Pale, 4 in Shwebo, 1 in Htantabin, 1 in Myaing and 1 in Thabeikyin.

- Provide training to librarians and members of the library committee;⁷
- Distribute newspapers and reading materials donated by IPRD headquarters, MLF, or private donors to village authorities during a fortnightly township departmental meeting organized by the Township General Administrator;
- Carry out library observation trips twice a month (however, due to the lack of funds, only one trip per month is generally made);
- Visit villages when requests are made about a library project.

Ideally, eight IPRD officers are employed at the township level, but in reality four to five employees work in the IPRD office. This includes the senior officer, assistant librarian, telecommunication technician and photographer. IPRD senior officers participate in monthly meetings led by the General Township Administrator along with representatives of other ministries at the township level. They disseminate news in the township about coming events or ceremonies, for instance. The telecommunication technician and photographer record events by video or photo and send them to district officials and local newspapers.

4.2 Myanmar Library Association

The Myanmar Library Association (MLA) is a non-governmental organization established in 1990 that specializes in library and information services. Its primary task is to assist the library development process in Myanmar. The MLA has 300 members and an office in the National Library building. MLA works to improve the standard of libraries, to increase the capacity of librarians and to create an environment where library professionals can discuss further improvements the Myanmar library system. The association also collaborates with overseas library institutions on information exchanges.⁸

4.3 Myanmar Library Foundation

Since its inception in 2010, the Myanmar Library Foundation (MLF) has not only become one of the major stakeholders in library development in Myanmar, but is also taking part in the country's quest for sustainable development. The foundation members are made up of literary scholars, business executives, voluntary donors and library enthusiasts. It was predominantly established to facilitate the long-term development of community-run rural libraries in Myanmar. For instance, the foundation, in partnership with community leaders, helps facilitate the launch of new libraries and provides assistance in the form of reading materials and librarian training. The foundation also runs public awareness campaigns to instill a love of reading.

From its inception, the foundation raised 700 million kyat from a variety of donors and library enthusiasts. The amount has been invested in a revolving loan fund, and proceeds from the fund are used to implement the tasks of MLF.⁹

⁷ Formal trainings are conducted by IPRD officials that last at least two days and have a standardized program on topics such as registration system, how to reference books and how to manage the library. Informal trainings are also conducted by IPRD officials but they are not scheduled and are structured more like prolonged visits to villages wherein discussions are held.

⁸ From MLA website

⁹ From MBAPF resources

4.4. Myanmar Book Aid and Preservation Foundation

The Myanmar Book Aid and Preservation Foundation (MBAPF) was founded in 2002 by Dr. U Thaw Kaung, a prominent library figure. Its committee consists of senior librarians, businessmen and people of influence. The foundation works in conjunction with local and international non-governmental organizations to assist libraries with training and donations of printed and digital material, and the preservation of Myanmar historical and contemporary print culture. MBAPF has received generous contributions from overseas scholars, as well as from organizations such as Thrift Books, Opportunity Foundation, American President Line, University of Washington Library Gift Program, Cornell University Library Gift Program, Institute of Southeast Asia, National Library of Australia, United Nation Women's Guild of Vienna, Montana Library Association, World Vision, and The Asia Foundation. The foundation was engaged in the reconstruction of over 2,000 libraries damaged or destroyed by Cyclone Nargis in 2008. In addition, it organizes the Library Readers' Program, as well as Teacher Training Workshops.

4.5. Village and Ward Administrators

The role and contribution of village and ward administrators in rural library development in Myanmar cannot be overlooked. They play a facilitating role and are the first local government authority the library committee looks to when they first submit a registration application. Village administrators also coordinate with librarians in raising awareness about the benefits of libraries and co-organize literary talks in rural areas. They are grassroots players in promoting reading and the development of libraries.

5. Main findings

5.1. Profile of respondents

The following sections provide a brief overview of the characteristics of respondents who participated in the survey. The general profile of librarians, users and non-users may be linked to later sections in the analysis to better understand why they responded the way they did.

5.1.1. Librarians

Among the 206 librarians interviewed, 67% were men and 33% were women. The librarians were part of the village/ward library committee; in some cases, library committee members serve as the librarian on a rotating basis. The percentage of male and female workforce in the library sector reflects the general skilled labor force participation rate in the country, based on the 2011 Statistical Yearbook published by the Central Statistical Organization (CSO), Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development (MNPED). The male workforce in Myanmar is typically twice as high as females in skilled labour. This is partly due to the traditional role of men as the main bread winners. Nearly half the librarians (48%) were under 40 years old, while over a third were between 40 to 59 years old (40%). A small group, 12% of librarians were 60 years old or above.

Table 2: Age groups of librarians

Age groups	Percentage of librarians
18-24 years old	15%
25-29 years old	15%
30-34 years old	11%

35-39 years old	8%
40-44 years old	13%
45-49 years old	11%
50-54 years old	9%
55-59 years old	7%
60 and above	12%

83% of the librarians were of Burmese ethnicity and 87% of them spoke Burmese language at home, roughly reflecting the composition of the survey areas: 10 of the 26 surveyed townships (38%) were in areas where ethnic minorities groups were dominant. In these eight townships, librarians were Burmese as well as Chin, Shan, Mon, Kayah and Kayin.

In Myanmar, the education system is divided into primary school (grades 1-5), middle school (grades 6-9), high school (grades 10-11) and university. Some children also receive education in the Buddhist monasteries, which cater to the primary level. All the librarians were at least primary-school educated. Librarians in general are educated: 39% have finished high school and 31% graduated or are attending university.

Table 3: Highest level of education attained by librarians

Education	Percentage of librarians
Primary school	5%
Middle school	15%
High school	39%
University student	8%
Graduated from university	31%
Monastery student	2%

5.1.2. Library Users and non-users

In total, 412 users and 412 non-users of libraries were interviewed with the sample equally divided between male and female as part of the research design. There was no major difference between male and female perceptions of libraries in the initial tabulations of the data, and therefore the analysis will not be disaggregated by gender.

Those interviewed represented all age groups. Non-users were nearly equally distributed in age: 32% were youth between sixteen to twenty-five years old, 36% were twenty-six to forty years old and the rest were between forty-one and sixty years old. Library users were more concentrated in the younger generations with almost half (48%) between sixteen to twenty-five years old. The FGDs showed that when the village school has no library, many students turn to the community library and are its predominant users. 85% and 82% of the users and non-users, respectively, were of Burmese ethnicity – the ethnic composition was similar to surveyed librarians – and reflects the ethnic make-up of the townships surveyed rather than the general composition of library users and non-users. About 87% of the people interviewed spoke Burmese at home. The Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Shan, Lisu and Pa-O and Kayaw ethnic minorities were also represented among users and non-users.

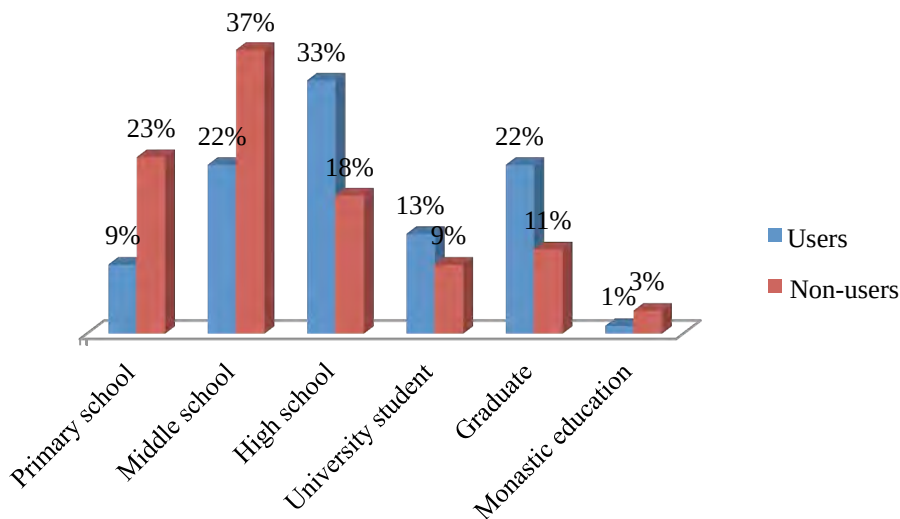
Interviews of users and non-users



Education

All the users and non-users interviewed had attained education until at least the primary level. Users tended to be slightly more educated than non-users: 33% of the users completed high school and 35% of them attended university. Only 18% of non-users completed high school and 20% attended university.

Figure 2: Highest level of education attained by users and non-users

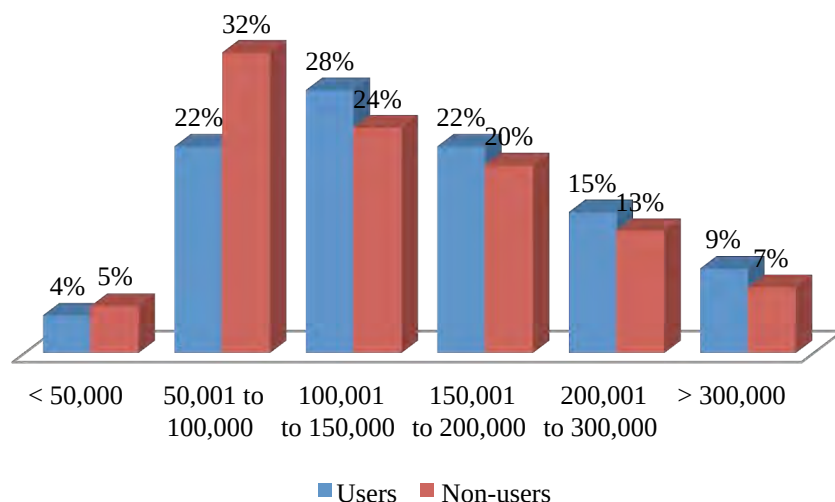


Monthly income

The data shows that the household monthly income of users is higher than that of non-users. 90% of users and non-users earn between \$50 and \$300 per month.¹⁰ The income category predominated by users is between \$100 and \$150 per month (28%), while 32% of non-users earn between \$50 and \$100 per month.

¹⁰ The exchange rate used is 1,000 Myanmar kyats to 1 U.S. dollar.

Figure 3: Monthly income of users and non-users' households (in Myanmar Kyats)



Occupation

Most users and non-users alike run their own business, for example, as small-scale vendors, farmers or micro-entrepreneurs. The difference in income between users and non-users can be explained by the reported primary occupation. Among users, more of the family breadwinners work as government and private-sector employees than among non-users. The latter group is comprised of more casual occupations, such as seasonal labourers who assist in harvesting agricultural products. In general, a casual worker earns less than a government or a private-sector employee.

5.1.3 Communities

Most of the communities the field teams visited were located in rural areas, and the most common occupation of the village residents was farming and agricultural-related work. Some villages had specific economic opportunities linked to the surrounding areas; for example, weaving was the main occupation in a village in Loikaw and a village in Pyin Oo Lwin was dominated by gold mining. In the main town of the township, inhabitants were found to work in factories, drive buses and motorbikes or run their own businesses. In nearly half of the interviews with IPRD township officers, they reported that many villages lacked skilled job opportunities, especially for youth who had graduated from high school or university.

The FGDs and KIIs showed that almost all the villagers watch television, listen to the radio, read books or newspapers, visit friends, play sports or patronize teashops in their leisure time. In 12 of the FGDs, participants mentioned television as a tool for gathering information as well as a pleasurable way to spend their spare time. Listening to the radio and reading newspapers was also been mentioned in 11 and 12 FGDs, respectively. Reading books or newspapers seemed to be a deeply enrooted habit among villagers, as 11 of the FGDs highlighted this activity. In contrast, 10 IPRD township officers (out of the 25 surveyed) pointed to a lack of interest in books or reading as an issue in their township. This lack of interest was attributed to illiteracy or low literacy but it also highlighted a difference between rural (village) and urban (township or ward) areas. In urban areas, more and more people were reported to use the Internet for gathering information. In rural areas, telecommunications and infrastructure are much less developed and therefore books and newspapers are still

the main source of information for villagers. This is based on qualitative data and represents people's perceptions rather than statistics.

Nearly all those surveyed expressed concern about the poor quality of the roads and available transportation in and around their village. The development of road infrastructure was highlighted as a significant need in half of the FGDs and nearly all the KIIs, especially during the rainy season when many villages become inaccessible. Paved roads are important for the communities because they impact access to education, health care facilities, information and trade. For example, in half of the FGDs, people said that students who want to continue their studies need to travel to the closest town or to the capital of the state. Some villages only have a primary school in their boundaries.

Inadequate electricity supply and mobile phone network coverage was also highlighted.¹¹ Over a third of the communities said that very few villages had Internet cafés, and people mostly connect to the internet through mobile phones. Yet even when they had internet, the connection was weak and unreliable.

5.2. Library infrastructure and operations

The majority of the libraries visited were located in the center of the village or on the main road. 59% of librarians said the library had a good location and was easily accessible to the community, while the remainder said the library was not centrally located. 91% of the libraries visited were located in a village where there were no other libraries.

5.2.1. Budget and donors

Township libraries

IPRD township officers said their main role is to support libraries by providing books, not a budget. IPRD township libraries purchase and distribute reading materials with \$20 per month, which was reported to be insufficient to cover all the village libraries the township library needs to support. Furthermore, no assistance is provided for other expenses like electricity, furniture, equipment, or a salary for librarians. Libraries must seek other sources of funding to be able to cover these costs.

Some IPRD township libraries receive an additional \$40 per month to fund Mini Book Corners, or *Sar Pay Yae Chan Sin*. These are small book corners placed in busy public areas such as railway stations, bus stations, hospitals or markets. To serve a more diverse audience than might normally be found in a library, small books and booklets in a variety of genres – such as religion, health, livestock, civic education, and politics – are made available to raise people's interest in reading while they await a service. The material is chosen by the township library and is managed by their office. In the survey, the IPRD township libraries in Chaungzone (Mon State) and in Hpa-An (Kayin State) received funding for Mini Book Corners.

Village libraries

Over half of the village libraries (56%) reported not receiving funds from any source for acquiring books and journals. Of the 44% of libraries that do get funding, half of them receive less than \$50 a year – an average of \$24 a year or \$2 a month. Trainings make up a very small part of the annual budgets of libraries: nearly all libraries surveyed (98%) reported never having paid for formal librarian trainings and none reported having had informal training.

¹¹ For electricity and mobile coverage, 10 and 11 FGDs respectively out of 14 FGDs mentioned the issues. This was corroborated by approximately half of the KIIs which also specifically mentioned these problems.

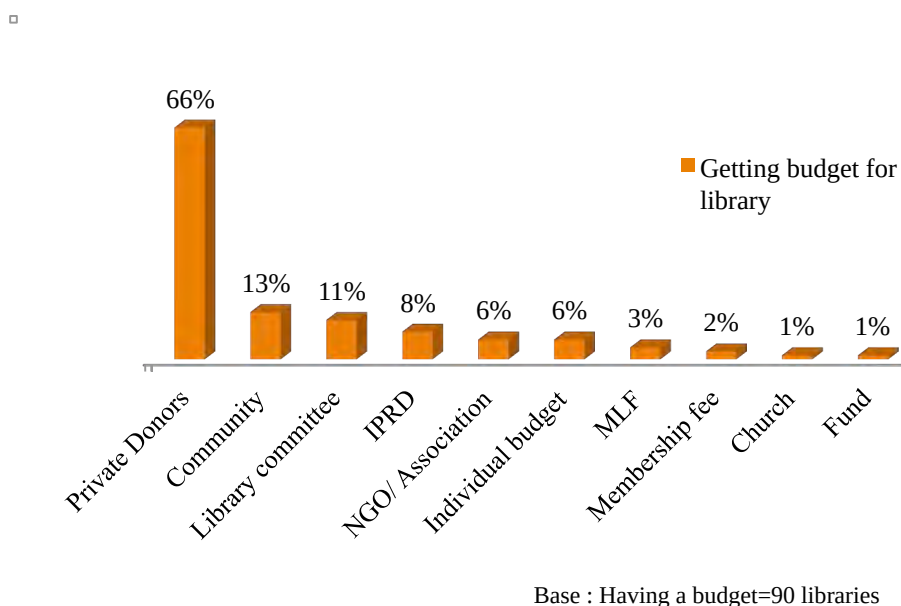
Even fewer libraries received funds for equipment, furniture or repairs: 90% of the librarians answered that they did not have any money for equipment or furniture, and 96% answered they have not spent funds on repairs. For the 10% of libraries that spent money to renovate their building, the average amount per year was \$31.

The FGDs show that communities rely on support from their members or private donors more than from IPRD or MLF.

Source of funds

When asked where their funding for books came from, 66% of libraries said it came from private donors. 8% of the librarians, reported receiving a modest budget to buy books and journals from IPRD, 13% and 11% said they received financial support from the community or from the library committee, respectively. Private donors are typically well-off businessmen who have moved to another area (usually a town) but want to contribute to their home communities. They tend to give larger lump sum amounts. Community funding comes from smaller, pooled donations from the villagers. The main issue with these sources of funding is that they are irregular.

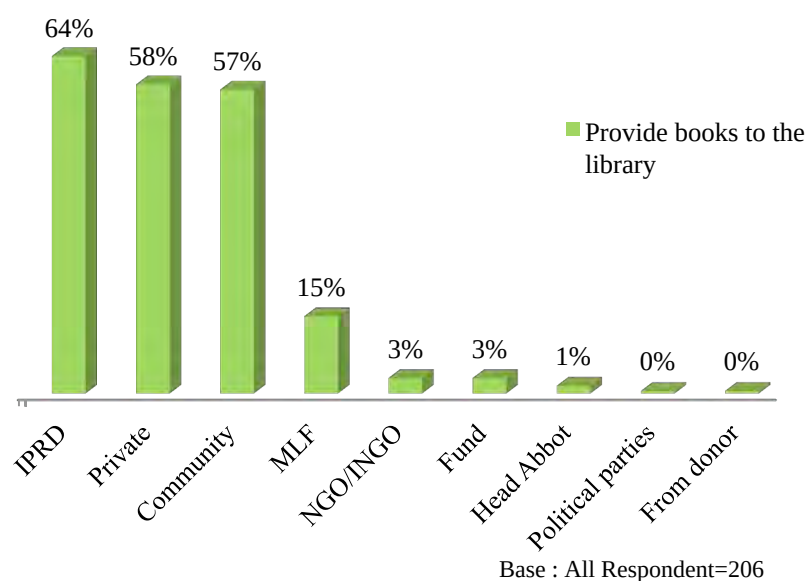
Figure 4: Funding sources for books reported by libraries (multiple answers possible)



5.2.2. Books and support

On average, libraries receive 81 books and 178 periodicals a year. Regardless of the sources of funding, the IPRD is the main provider of books to libraries: 64% of all librarians say part of their library's collection comes from IPRD. Private donors and the community are important as well, with 58% of librarians reporting that they received books from the former and 57% reporting receiving book funds from the latter. 15% of libraries reported receiving books from MLF. Around 30 libraries did not report receiving any new books for the year.

Figure 5: Main providers of books according to librarians (multiple answers possible)



The average number of books a library owned in its collection was 900. The range was vast, from the smallest collection at 20 books and the largest collection having nearly 10,000 books. About a third of libraries had between 20 and 500 books, another third of libraries had 501 to 2,000 books and the last third had 2,000 to 10,000 books¹². The books mainly were housed in open shelves, though 11% of libraries reported also having closed-type shelves, either cupboards, glass cases or a trunk.

Shelving



Overall, the most prevalent types of books librarians reported having in their collection were religious (90%), general knowledge (88%), health (70%) and education (75%) books. Books on social sciences (50%), politics (50%) and economics (37%) were also popular subjects. Children books were reported to be in stock by 45% of the libraries. 80% of libraries carry periodicals.

¹²The range of books is too large to make a meaningful grouping of the number of libraries with a range of books. Therefore, only range and average are presented.

There are very few ethnic language books in libraries. Shan-language books were the largest number of ethnic language books found in libraries, yet only 12 libraries carried them—9 in Shan State, one in the Mandalay region and two in the Bago region. Five libraries had Kayin books, disseminated in different regions (Naypyitaw, Kayah and Kayin). Four libraries had Chin language books (all in Chin state). In the Yangon and Tanintharyi regions, libraries had no books in ethnic languages, only Myanmar and English books. In fact, books in English were reported to be carried by 59% of libraries, but how they are used or how frequently was not disclosed by the librarians. Language learning books, such as English textbooks for primary and secondary school students, were present in two libraries in Bago and Mandalay regions.

Books



5.2.3. Library buildings

Nearly all the libraries visited were one-story buildings (91%), and 18 out of the 206 libraries visited (9%) had 2 or more floors. Some libraries are attached to the village authority office, clinic or even the fire department. Most of the libraries had premises built especially for it (79%), and less than a quarter of libraries (21%) had premises adapted for it. The majority of libraries were located on public property, and only seven libraries out of the 206 libraries surveyed (3%) were renting their premises. 43% of the librarians said their library needed minor renovations, such as an extension to the library building, fencing and/or an outhouse for the toilet (82% of libraries do not have a toilet). 18% of librarians reported that the building needed major renovations such as a new building while 37% of the libraries were in satisfactory or excellent condition. Two-thirds of users reported being satisfied with the building of the library, as well.

Library buildings





For roofing, 93% of the libraries were made of corrugated iron. Only two libraries had a brick roof, five had a bamboo roof and eight libraries had a roof constructed of palm fronds. 67% of the buildings had bricks walls, 14% bamboo and 14% raw wood. Three-quarters of the libraries had a floor made of concrete, tile or bricks, while the remaining quarter of libraries had flooring constructed of raw wood, finished wood or bare ground. Almost 80% of the libraries were smaller than 600 square feet. Half of them were between 201 and 400 square feet and 15% below 200 square feet.

9% of librarians said their library was not equipped with enough chairs and tables and only 18% of librarians said they had enough furniture. 23% said their library was partially furnished.

Library furniture

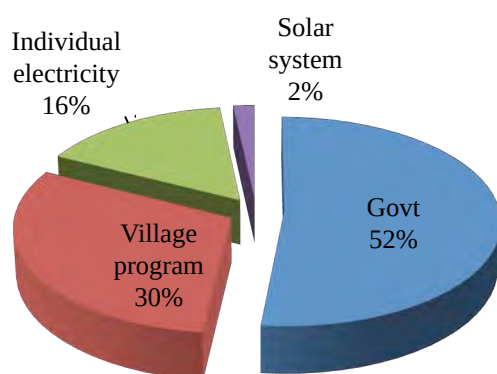


5.2.4. Electricity and utilities

Libraries in rural Myanmar have sporadic and unreliable electricity supply. Only 55% of the libraries surveyed had electricity. Half of the libraries with electricity received it from a government-run public utility, 31% from a generator-powered village supply and 16% from a private source, such as a generator system set up by a village entrepreneur to fuel several households. Only two libraries out of the 206 visited use a solar system.

Nearly all librarians (92%) reported that they do not pay a utility bill; of the 8% who do pay utility bills, the average amount is \$7 per month. Libraries are charged by the public utility but usually do not have to pay for electricity if it comes from the village supply or a private donor.

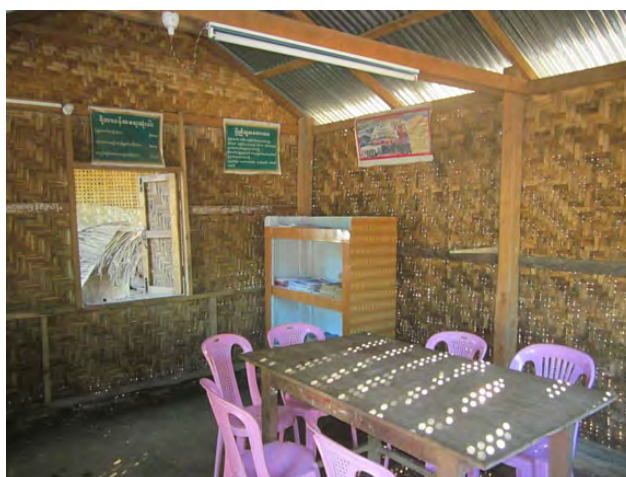
Figure 6: Providers of electricity



Base : Have had electricity in library=114

58% of the libraries used electricity between one to six hours per day. The rest used it more than seven hours a day. Most of the libraries use electricity for lighting and, if available, for a TV or HiFi system. TV and HiFi are used to entertain special visitors but in most cases they are kept for display. 86% of the libraries do not have any alternative source should there be an interruption in electricity supply.

Library interior



Electricity does not seem to be the biggest concern for users as only 18% agreed that there was “need of a reliable electricity supply” for their library. However, it was one of the most important needs named by the communities in the FGDs. Nearly all librarians (92%) reported that they do not have a utility budget, and of the 8% of libraries who did pay utility bills, the average amount was \$7 per month.

□

Case Study: Impact of Electricity on Library Usage

A Lin Yaung library is located in Yae Lel Kwayt Village in Naypyitaw District. The village has 2,500 people, many of whom reported that they had relocated from other regions to work on the Naypyitaw airport construction and current airport operations. Furnishings are simple with a few tables and chairs. Though the library is small in terms of book collection and building size, users single it out for having electricity. As a result, it has a TV and stereo, which are available to visitors and used actively by the librarian to attract new users. Furthermore, electricity allows the library to stay open in the evenings, which users noted is convenient for them. The library reports 40 people use its facilities daily.

5.2.5. Computers, telecommunications and internet

In 98% of the libraries visited, there were no computers on the premises or in any part of the facilities. One library in the Naypyitaw region and one in the Sagaing region had one computer each. The Mandalay and Tanintharyi regions each had a library with three computers. Another library in the Sagaing region had five computers. The computers were used mostly to provide users with basic computer training and to access the Internet.

96% of the libraries did not have a fixed landline phone. Of the 4% of libraries with phones, four libraries had fixed phones and another four libraries had mobile phones. No libraries had a fax machine though two libraries (Sagaing and Mandalay) had a printer available to users and a scanner not available to users. Clearly, equipment for telecommunications are lacking in libraries.

Only two village libraries among the 206 surveyed had Internet access, again in Mandalay and Sagaing. Both of the libraries fund the connection through private donations. Despite the low numbers of computers in libraries, 29% of librarians say there is a plan to install internet access in their libraries.

Computer used in a library



5.3. Library management and operations

5.3.1. Roles of the librarians

83% of the libraries had fewer than four persons on the library committee and staff team. 10% of libraries had between five and ten persons on the library committee. Members of the library committee can act as the librarian or hire a librarian. Ideally, the librarian opens and closes the village libraries each day. He or she maintains the collection, issues member cards, assists or guides the users and keeps records of the loans. Librarians need to have an interest in reading and be sociable. If they have the motivation and means, they can also make maintenance upgrades to the library facilities, fundraise and encourage reading in the community through campaigns and literary talks. Computers are not a large factor in a librarian's job as 87% of the librarians say they have no computer skills. Only one librarian out of the 206 interviewed said he or she had an advanced level of computers skill, 11 librarians said they had an intermediate knowledge of computers and 15 librarians said they knew the basics about using a computer.

In village libraries, librarians usually work as volunteers. Should they receive compensation, it is about \$20 to \$30 per month and either pooled from villager donations, paid for by the library committee members, or provided by individual donors. Due to the lack of training opportunities, most librarians are unable to perform tasks such as helping users locate the books and information they are looking for or recording and maintaining reading materials. Most librarians reported never having had training. In addition, as their salary is very small or nonexistent, there are no financial incentives to organize campaigns or events, or to look for more funds. All the IPRD township officers interviewed highlighted the essential role of a librarian. Further, the field team's observations revealed that the librarian's commitment and level of productivity directly correlated with the success of the library.

64% of the librarians say they interact with colleagues to exchange experiences and discuss professional issues less than one time per month. Only a quarter says they have such meetings at least once per month. Most of the librarians (80%) hold regular meetings with the library committee to get feedback from the committee, users or entire community.

Case Study: Impact of a Strong Library Committee

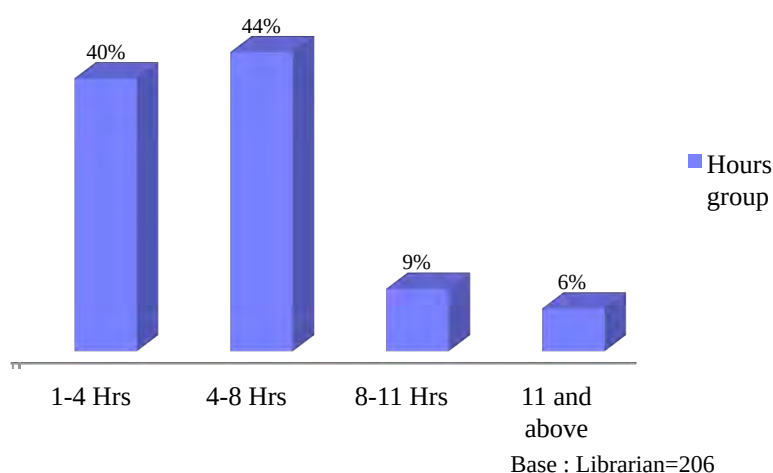
Shwe Zin Win Library is located in Tint Tei Village, which has a population of 1,722 people. Most residents are farmers or work in the weaving industry. The library opened in 2012 through the initiative of nine local college graduates, who now form the library committee. The founders take turns serving as the librarian and have secured sponsorship from Shwe Zin Win Weaving Enterprise, the library's sole private donor. Under the strong leadership of the library committee, user fees also help support the library. Even though the library is open only two and a half hours daily, an average of 80 users visit the library monthly, yielding \$35 in borrowers' fees. Some users remarked that the wide selection of books and enthusiastic customer service by the librarians have contributed to its success. The library is fully furnished and currently has a diverse and up-to-date collection of 1,000 books and 6,000 journals and magazines. The librarian reported that 300 new books and 700 current journals and magazines arrive monthly.

5.3.2. Operational hours

Libraries reported opening between one and four hours a day (40%), or between four and eight hours a day (44%). Very few libraries were open more than this. The operating hours of libraries varied as well. Some libraries were open during the daytime and some were open in the evenings to enable workers to come after work. Furthermore, 24% of the libraries were open two days per week, 11% were open three days per week, 19% were open five days per week and 28% were open every day of the week.

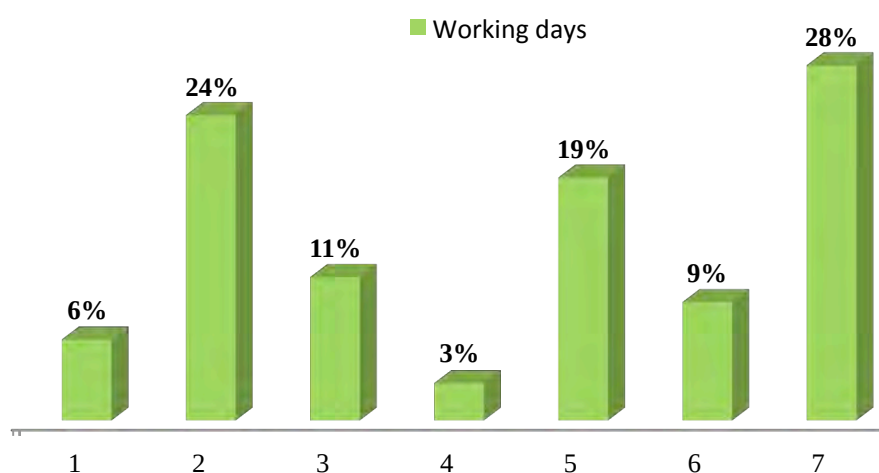
In contrast, the operational hours and days of IPRD township libraries are regular and consistent. Most of the township libraries visited were open on weekends – Saturday or Sunday, or both – and were closed during evenings.

Figure 7: Number of operational hours per day



81% of users were satisfied or very satisfied with the opening times of the libraries in their village. Considering the few users and non-users who cited opening times in their recommendations, it does not seem to be a main concern. However, in FGDs, some users said the opening times were not regular enough and not always convenient for their work schedule. Only four IPRD township officers said this was an issue and that regular hours would enable libraries to attract more visitors.

Figure 8: Number of days open per week



Base : Librarian=206

5.3.3. Member fees

There is no consistent fee structure for libraries. Some libraries do not charge membership or borrowing fees, others libraries charge one or the other, and some charge both. Generally, fees were low and usually not more than \$0.50. Indeed, more than 90% of users rated that they felt satisfied or very satisfied with these two fees. The collected fees are used to buy updated reading materials and to provide allowances to librarians. The library committee members set the rates and manage the funds.

Over a third of libraries lend the books for a period of three days. 24% of libraries lend books for seven days. It was uncommon for libraries to lend books for more than seven days, possibly because librarians are afraid books would not be returned if taken out for longer periods. However, it is usually possible to renew a book loan. The terms of the borrower's card varies by library and is set by the committee. For example, in Hinthada Township, a user pays the equivalent of \$0.20 to borrow 20 books. In Lewe Township, 500 kyats (\$0.51) allows the reader to borrow 10 books at a time.

Borrowers



In general, libraries in rural Myanmar run on informal systems that lack systematic coordination and management. For example, as highlighted above, there are no set rules for library fees. 81% of libraries surveyed have a lending system while 11% do not. The qualitative interviews do not reveal specific reasons for this but, based on field observations, this can be attributed to poor librarian training, fear of losing the books, small book collections, or not having a book registration system.

5.4. Library usage

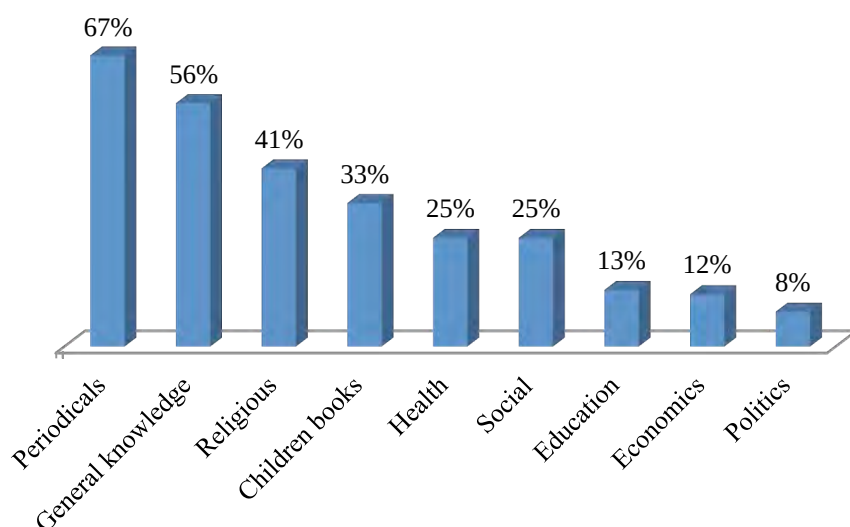
5.4.1. Number of members

A member is defined as someone who has paid for membership or borrowing privileges. Most of the libraries visited had between one and 100 members (86%). Very few libraries had more members than this, with only 7% with between 101 and 200 members. The average number of members per library was 57. Some libraries had no members because they do not require registration for borrowing books or to use the library.

5.4.2. Most popular books in libraries cited by librarians

According to librarians, the most popular to the least popular material in their libraries were periodicals, general knowledge, religion, children books, health, social, education, economics and politics. General knowledge books can cover a range of topics but are characterized by their accessibility to a wide audience, especially those with no more than a primary school level education. In some cases, the books address topics applicable to daily lives, such as agricultural and farming techniques, traditional medicine, good health practices, geography and biographies of famous people.

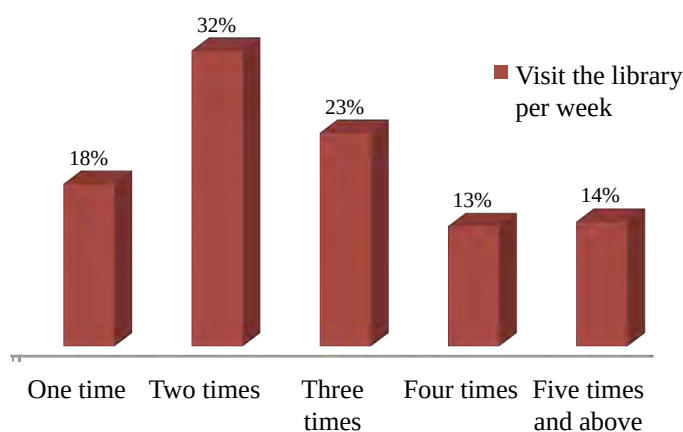
Figure 9: The most popular books in village libraries cited by librarians



5.4.3. Number of user visits per week

Most of the users go to the library between one and three times a week (18% go once a week, 32% go twice a week and 23% go three times a week). The frequency of the visits was influenced by the distance between the houses of users and the library.

Figure 10: Weekly visits of users to the library



Base : All users=412

5.4.4. Improved services would gain more users

100% of users and 90% of non-users stated that they would go to the public library in their locality more if it were free to borrow books and journals. Under the current system, people must pay a fee if they want to borrow books, or in some cases, register as a member. While a third of users would intend to go daily, only 9% non-users would go every day. Nevertheless, half of the non-users say they would go to the public library one or three times per week.

According to KIIs, installing a TV with satellite connection or providing current newspapers that are not a few days late are services that would attract more people to libraries. Half of the IPRD officers said that newspapers are delivered late to village libraries. Nearly three-quarters of IPRD officers recommended broadcasting SkyNet.¹³

5.4.5. Village libraries as community centers

In the village, there are several places where people have meetings to discuss issues in the community: communal halls, schools, monasteries and churches, the residence of the village administrator and the public library. When asked if they use the library for other purposes, about a third of users and non-users say they use it as a meeting room, and nearly a fifth say they use it as a community center to hold meetings. 69% of the users responded they were satisfied with the availability of the public library as a community center. Non-users said they entered the library at least once to attend a meeting about community development.

5.4.6. Hindrances for non-users

From the FGDs and supported by the KIIs, the perception was that non-users do not go to the library firstly due to their work schedule and because they do not perceive libraries as providing services worthy of their limited time. Participants in the FGDs also mentioned the location of the library as an important factor for users. Those who live close to the library will come more often. Non-users may not come also because the variety and number of books is not large enough, or because books are outdated. These issues were highlighted in all the FGDs as the main barriers libraries face in attracting more users.

5.5. Expectations towards the library

According to the FGDs and answers to the user questionnaires, when people go to a library, their main goal is to gain knowledge and information. A few people reported that they go for leisure only. Myanmar people see reading as a way to “better themselves.” 78% of the users answered that reading helped them to gain knowledge and 25% said that reading enables them to distinguish good from bad. Some of the users saw the library as a “knowledge bank” or “information hub.”

¹³SkyNet is the most well-known paid satellite cable channel in Myanmar. Since its inception in 2011, it has become a dominant force in media landscape. Its coverage includes entertainment shows, news, sports, educational and documentary channels, local and international. Charges vary depending on two subscription types: the cheapest rate is \$12 per month for a basic plan.

Table 4: What knowledge do you get from reading books in the library?

	Users	
	Count	%
Gain general knowledge	320	78%
Distinguish good or bad	108	26%
Mixing with people from all backgrounds	46	11%
Better moral and mental behaviour	17	4%
Being able to pass knowledge to younger ones	15	4%
Aspirations to work	1	0%

5.5.1. What users and non-users want to read

The reading material users and non-users alike most want are books on general knowledge and religion, and new periodicals. Fewer people want to read about education, economics, social science and politics (between 17% and 11%). English-language material is the least preferred for users (1%), whereas non-users did not mention English as a desired subject. This can be partly explained by the fact that the majority of people interviewed could not speak English. The FGDs confirm these figures. Overall, people reported that they want to read books in the Myanmar language. Participants in FGDs also pointed out that biographies and encyclopaedias were books they would like to encounter in the library.

Figure 11: Types of books users want to read

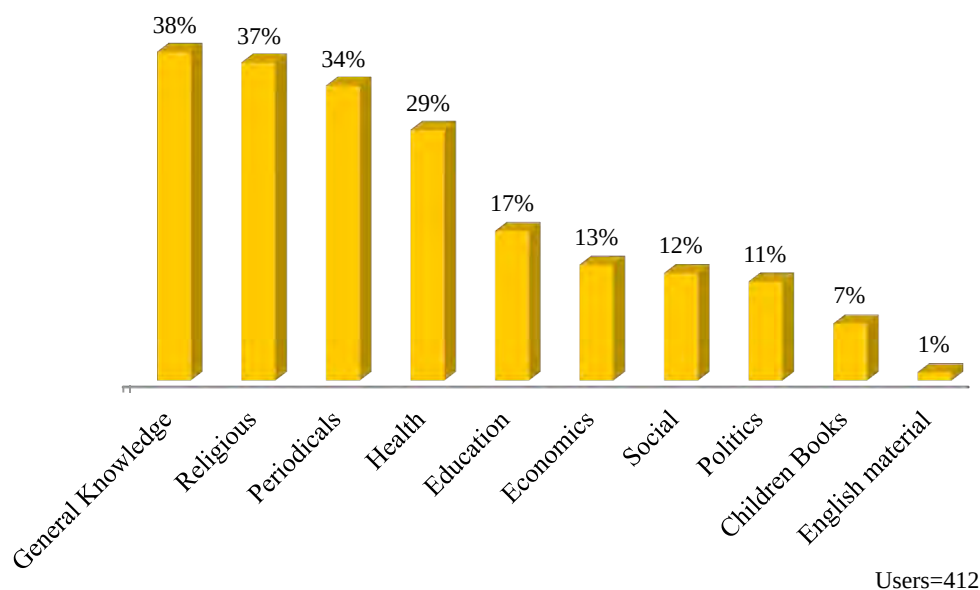
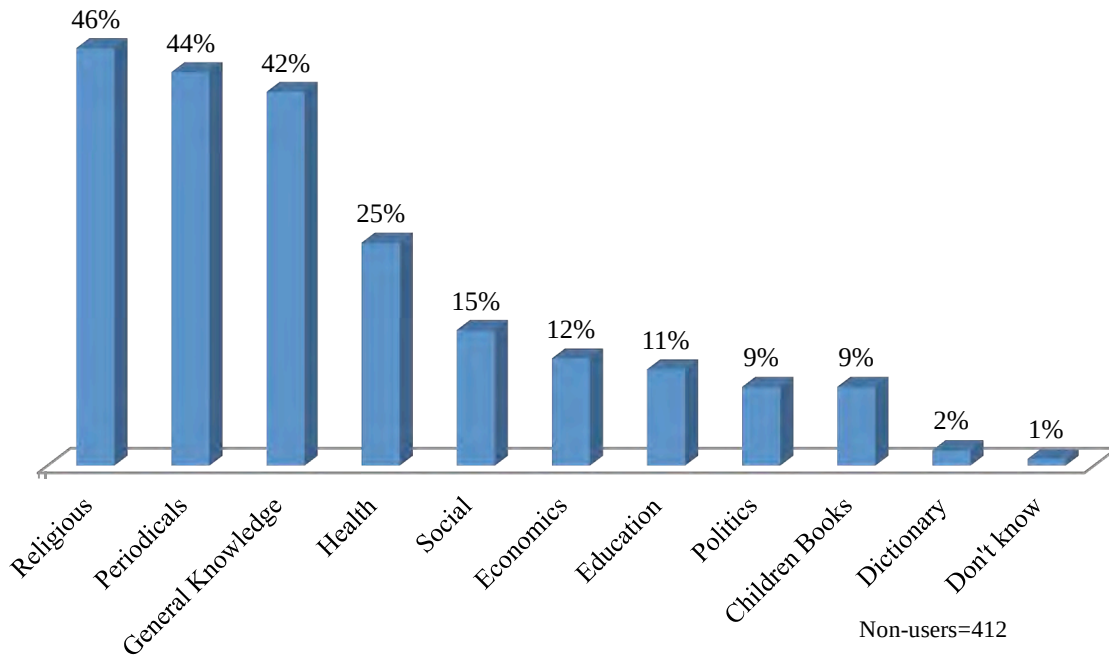


Figure 12: Types of books non-users want to read



5.5.2. Availability and variety of reading materials

Users and non-users pointed to the lack of varied books and journals as the main reason for not going to the library. Indeed, 66% of users were unsatisfied by the variety of books provided in their library. 22% of the respondents expressed doubt that they could gain knowledge from the library. 98% of the libraries receive less than 400 new books and periodicals each year; only 2% of libraries receive more than 400 new books a year. The limited availability of books in libraries was corroborated by the FGDs and KIIs.

Very few libraries had multimedia materials. Only 12% had CDs, which were mostly on *Dhamma* Buddhist teachings by famous monks. At libraries where CDs are not available, 74% of the users said they would be the most interested in listening to intellectual talks, while 62% of users want *Dhamma* recordings and 52% health talks.

5.5.3. Information users and non-users seek

When users go to the library, they are mostly looking for information about health (29%), religion (37%) and education (17%). News on celebrities, job opportunities and farming are also of interest, but less significant (between 15% and 16% each). IPRD township officers say young people living in urban areas go to Internet cafes first to find the information they seek, but young people living in rural areas are more concerned with information on job opportunities, which are currently scarce in libraries. Very few village libraries provide job advertisements.

5.5.4 Sources of information for users and non-users

According to the FGDs, information and daily news are acquired by word-of-mouth (face-to-face or by phone), radio, TV and newspapers. When asked how they would approach a problem, the initial response of the large

majority of users and non-users has been overwhelmingly the same: family members and relatives are their first points of reference.

Table 5: How do people solve their current issues?

The first answer of users and non-users when asked where they find the answer to a daily problem?	Users		Non-users	
	Count	%	Count	%
Family and relatives	253	61%	296	72%
Books	64	16%	39	9%
Friends or elders of the village	49	12%	46	11%
Teachers	10	2%	7	2%
Television	6	1%	9	2%
Radio	1	0%	5	1%
Public library	21	5%	2	0%
Internet	1	0%	/	/

However, 16% of users and 9% of non-users said that they turn to books for guidance and advice in order to solve daily problems. They did not qualify whether the books were from libraries or private collections, however. They look to books from various sources, but not necessarily a library. But this does not mean libraries are not significant for communities as it was reiterated in FGDs that people felt libraries play a pivotal role. Further, respondents persistently mentioned that they appreciate having a library in their community.

Concerning economy or business-related issues, users look for information mostly in books (their own or those of the public library) and ask friends/relatives. The public library is not the first option for a lot of users when they look for information on these topics; only 8% of them would go to the public library to learn about economics or solve their business issues. For non-users, however, books are usually not their first answer (11%). Rather, they first ask their friends or relatives.

Figure 13: Sources of information about economics or business for users

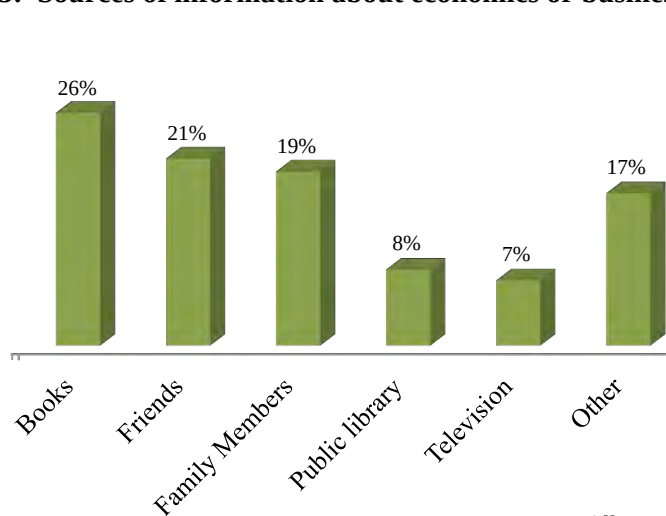
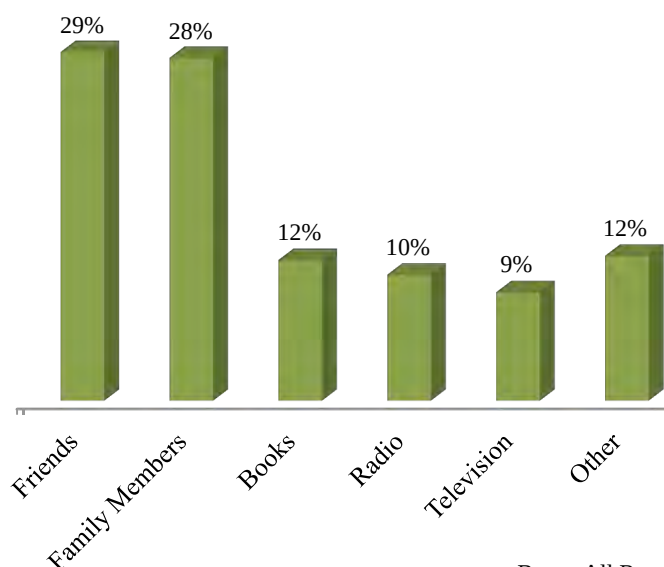


Figure 14: Sources of information on economics or business for non-users

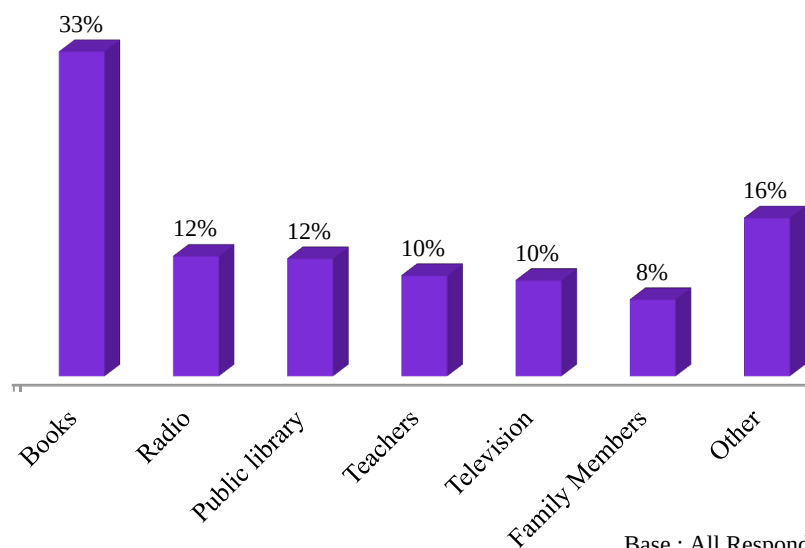


Base : All Respondent=412

Regarding culture, users seek information from books, television, family members and teachers, while non-users look mostly to television and family members and relatives.

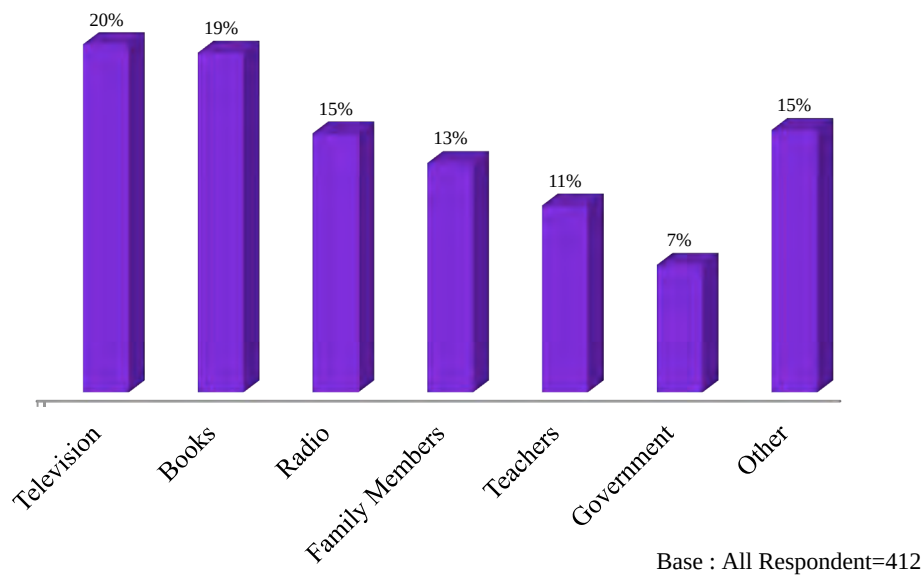
Likewise, with health, books are by far the most common way to find information for users – 49 users (12%) said their first source of information is the public library. For non-users, television and books are the first places they go to when looking for health information, but the public library is not cited. In general, the reading habits of non-users appear to be less enrooted.

Figure 15: Sources of health information for users



Base : All Respondent=412

Figure 16: Sources of health information for non-users



For education, users and non-users mainly refer to teachers and books. The public library is the first answer of 49 users (12%); however, non-users do not cite it.

Even if the public library is not the most significant way to find information for users, it has a role. The most important feature of this data is that books are important for users and non-users when looking for information. In some areas such as culture, education and health, books are the main way in which they obtain information. Public libraries are maybe less significant a source because their collections are limited and a high number of books are outdated.

5.5.5. Can users find desired information in libraries?

Table 6: Users and non-users' tastes and the books available in libraries

	What kinds of books are available in the library?		What kinds of books do users read most in the library?		What kinds of books do users and non-users want to read?			
	USERS		USERS		USERS		NON-USERS	
Types of books	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
General knowledge	293	71%	172	42%	156	38%	171	42%
Religious	330	80%	160	39%	151	37%	191	46%
Periodicals	344	83%	189	46%	140	34%	180	44%
Health	312	76%	102	25%	119	29%	102	25%
Education	260	63%	65	16%	71	17%	44	11%
Economics	153	37%	35	8%	55	13%	49	12%
Social	194	47%	56	14%	51	12%	62	15%
Politics	165	40%	31	8%	47	11%	36	9%
Children books	180	44%	53	13%	27	7%	36	9%
English, dictionary, other languages	0	0%	0	0%	4	1%	7	2%

The top four types of reading material available in libraries were consistent with what users reported reading in libraries: periodicals (46%) and books on general knowledge (42%), religion (39%) and health (25%). The most-read periodicals are newspapers, journals and magazines. There are seven major Myanmar-language daily newspapers in the country. Of these, *Yadanabon*, *Myanma Alin*, *The Mirror*, *Thurira*, *Santawchain* and *Thantawsint* are the top six, as observed by the research team in the field. Likewise, amid a large collection of journals available in the library, *Eleven (Sport)*, *Weekly Eleven*, *7Day Shopping Guide*, *7Days News* and *The Voice* are highly demanded by users and non-users alike. The most-read magazines in the library are *Ahpyosin*, *Ngwetaryi*, *Nathhattayaungchi*, *Myin Kwin Kyal* and *The Myanmar People*, among others. On the same note, motivational books by Phae Myint, Mya Than Tint and Aung Thin; biographies and novels translated from English to Myanmar language; and philosophy books by Nanda Thein Zan are some of the general interest books highly demanded by library users. Politics and economics books are at the bottom of those available and preferred.

There are gaps in the information libraries provide. 30% of the users say there are no books about health in their libraries; almost the same amount cite the absence of weather forecast information and one quarter of users point out that information on job opportunities is unavailable. 10% to 20% of users said resources for education, farming, cultural activities, language, religion and politics are missing.

Most of the users (59%) are unsatisfied with the books and periodicals available, saying they are outdated. 66% say that the variety of books available is insufficient. Most of the users are also unsatisfied (56%) and completely unsatisfied (15%) with the availability of CDs. However, at the same time, they do not think that having audio or video materials available would make their library more useful.

All the people interviewed during the FGDs pointed out that much of the information provided by libraries is outdated compared to the information from radio, TV or Internet. Most of the time, newspapers arrive one to five days late).

The improvements users recommend for their library are: more diverse reading material (64% of users) and better furniture (36%). In different proportions, non-users made the same recommendations.

Moreover, 69% of users said that oftentimes the books they want to read have already been borrowed and 63% point out the fact that there is little choice.

Our analysis shows that even though libraries are an important source of information, they lack updated materials. Only 36% of users and 22% of non-users think their library is currently a place where one can get useful information. Most think that TV and radio can deliver better and more timely news and information. The most well-known radio stations are Cherry FM, Mandalay FM, Badamya FM, Padauk Myae and Yangon City FM.

5.6. Internet usage and potential

5.6.1. Computer skills

The FGDs revealed that young people in towns often connect to the Internet with their mobile phones or in Internet cafes. It is very different in villages, where connecting to the Internet via computers is out of the reach.

Overall, among the 412 users and 412 non-users interviewed, only 4% had a computer at home and just above half of the respondents had a mobile phone. The rest of them did not possess these two devices in their households. Most of the people interviewed did not have any computer skills. During the survey, the only people who knew how to use a computer were users who had a specific interest or used Internet cafes.

The majority of the IPRD township officers used computers daily for work or had had training, and most of them connected to the Internet via mobile phones. The rest of the IPRD township officers did not know how to use computers. Almost all the librarians did not know how to use a computer.

5.6.2. Frequency of internet usage and connection

9% and 16% of the non-users and users respectively say they have access to the Internet. However, of those who had access, 52% of users connected in the last seven days and 30% in the last 30 days (the proportion is even higher for non-users – 78% connected in the last 7 days). Among users and non-users with Internet access, nearly all (between 82% and 95%, respectively) found a way to connect to Internet in the last 30 days at the time of questioning despite low electricity penetration in their home communities. Among the people who are able to connect, 70% connect between one to seven days a week.

5.6.3. Internet connection through mobile phones

The most common way by far to connect to the Internet is via mobile phones and, second, Internet cafes. 72% of non-users and 58% of users who use the Internet did so through their mobile phones, while 28% and 27%, respectively, go to Internet cafes.

Table 7: Means of users and non-user to connect to Internet

Using Internet	Users	Non-users
On mobile phones	58%	72%
In Internet cafes	27%	28%
At home	13%	11%
At school	3%	11%
At work	1%	3%

Note: Users and non-users could give more than one answer.

Even IPRD township officers who connect to the Internet use mobile phones. According to the KIIs, only 7 IPRD township libraries provide free Internet access out of the 25 that were visited. There were two libraries with free access in the Tanintharyi region (one in Thayetchaung and one in Myeik Townships), two in the Ayeyarwady region (one in Hinthada and one in Maubin Townships), and one each in Bago, Lashio and Pha-An in Kayin state.

Our assessment shows that mobile phones are emerging as a major force in access to news and information in rural Myanmar and appears to have bypassed computers. This trend is expected to continue as mobile devices and service become more affordable.

5.6.4. Why people connect to Internet

Of those who use mobile phones to access Internet, the overwhelming majority browse the Internet for news (80%), and secondly to socialize (34%). Instant messaging, online research, watching videos and emailing are not prevalent yet. Only 4% of library users and non-users say they go online to read or write emails.

Table 8: Reasons why people connect to Internet through their mobile phones

Why?	Users	Non-users
Read news	82%	77%
Social websites	33%	35%
Instant messaging	10%	15%
Google search	10%	15%
Watching videos	0%	8%
Emails	3%	4%

Note: Users and non-users could give more than one answers

5.6.5. Importance of Internet in village libraries

Using computers is beyond the reach of the majority of the people interviewed and having Internet access in libraries is not considered important. When asked for ways in which their library could improve, only 11% of users and 7% of non-users mentioned Internet access. Likewise, just 11% of both groups of respondents recommended a computer be installed.

Moreover, nearly all the users and non-users interviewed responded that they would not go to the public library to connect to the Internet. When asked which improvements would make their library more useful to them, 99% of users answered that Internet access and computer training would not make it more useful.

For the majority of village inhabitants, their very low or non-existent computer literacy, coupled with the reality of poor electricity supply, prevent them from envisioning how the Internet could be useful in their daily lives. Community members placed a reliable electricity supply, good roads, drinking water, clinics and hospitals at the top of their community's priorities.

FGDs show that having computers in libraries would be useless if no one was trained beforehand to use them. Currently, the Internet is not relevant to their day-to-day lives, although IPRD township officers pointed out the fact that businessmen would need real-time information for their jobs. Nevertheless, approximately all the IPRD township officers interviewed said that computers with an Internet connection or Wi-Fi would attract more visitors to libraries. Some but very few IPRD township libraries provided free access to Internet and the township officers said this feature encouraged more people to visit the library. But IPRD township officers emphasized the distinction that young people living in urban areas want Internet cafes and mobile phones for online access but that people living in rural areas want better roads or jobs opportunities.

Thus, our analysis reveals that the installation of ICT infrastructure in rural areas in Myanmar is a lower priority compared to the immediate needs of libraries and their communities. However, computer and Internet access in rural areas should be revisited in the near future as connecting these isolated communities to the rest of the world will be important for Myanmar's long-term development.

5.7. Impact of libraries on the community

5.7.1. Perception according to librarians, users and non-users

When asked if the library is used for other purposes, a third of the users and non-users say they use it as a meeting room and nearly a fifth say they use it as a community center. During FGDs, many non-users said they had been in the library at least once for a meeting. Some villages have communal halls but, when they do not have one, villagers gather in a school, the house of the village administrator or the library.

Users and the non-users largely agree that the public library has had a positive impact on their community: 97% of them expressed that their community library has "some impact" or "a very big impact." Village inhabitants stated that the opening of a library creates a better atmosphere and that people gain moral values, improve their thinking skills and behave better thanks to reading. Moreover, 78% of users and 73% of non-users think the library is useful for children, and 60% and 63% of them, respectively, think it is a good place to spend free time.

IPRD township officers also think that libraries have a very good impact on communities and that it improves the behaviour of children.

These perceptions towards libraries are quite significant. Users and non-users are united in their belief that the library plays a rich central role in community life. For them, as highlighted above, a library is more than just a building where one can come to read and borrow books; it is a symbol of prestige. They perceive libraries as community centers and institutions where they can engage with community members to deal with collective issues. Hence, attempts to further develop libraries in rural Myanmar could have benefits beyond the libraries' walls to the communities themselves.

5.7.2. Activities or services useful in the library

The library is not seen as a place to provide computers and Internet training – 87% of users say that skills training would not make the library more useful. However, 79% of the users think that the library could be useful in encouraging children to read more books and journals. During user interviews, they emphasized the fact that village libraries should have books for children and young students. Two of them even said that it would be a very good thing to build a children's playground next to the library.

58% of users interviewed also think that the possibility to have up-to-date newspapers, books and journals would make the library more useful. Finally, 96% of users feel that the library's ability to facilitate social interaction to share experiences and information makes the library useful.

According to these results, libraries have to be places where people can sit comfortably and chat. The librarian must be able to provide information or to help visitors find what they are looking for, as well. Children must also be able to read in a friendly setting. Skills training for users, on the other hand, is not a feature that would make the library more useful according to the perception of users.

5.7.3. Mobile libraries

Among users and non-users, a third had heard of a mobile library system in Myanmar and almost all of them said it would be useful for their community (93% of users and 99% of non-users). Books and journals would become very accessible ("at their doorstep"), especially for people who do not have the time to go to the library. They also cite others reasons such as the fact that it would be widely accessible, informative and helpful, especially for villages without libraries, and that the variety of books available to users would increase.

Some participants pointed out the fact that if a mobile library could make evening visits, when people have finished work, this would be particularly useful. However, for a lot of participants, mobile libraries cannot completely replace the fixed, stationary library. They felt a mobile library should be supplementary to the village library.

Our analysis shows that even though the respondents like the idea of a mobile library and the easy access to books and journals it can provide, they still prefer to have a library that can provide them not only with reading material but also with a place for congregation. Libraries, as previously discussed, are seen as part of community life. The respondents see mobile libraries as a niche library with a customized set of recourses, but not as a library that can facilitate community needs and cohesiveness.

□

Case Study: Mobile Library

The Daw Khin Kyi Foundation mobile library was launched in 2013 by Nobel Peace Prize-winner Aung San Suu Kyi, who won the parliamentary seat for Kawhmu Township. The small fleet is comprised of a minivan for navigating rugged areas and a larger coach bus for better roads. The library visits 21 villages in the township in two weeks and stops at a school, communal hall or village library for three hours at a time. The library is managed by the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation, named after Aung San Suu Kyi's late mother, and has 9 permanent staff members and 5 volunteers. The library has a collection of over 15,000 reading materials, ranging from books on cultivation and livestock breeding techniques to comics, essays, physical fitness and general interest books. Membership is free; currently, the mobile library has over 4,000 members. Interviews with residents in Kyon Da Yei, one of the library's stops, revealed that community members feel that their reading abilities are improving because of the mobile library. In Kyon Dai Yei, the mobile library has around 200 members and is especially popular with students and teachers.

Conclusion

Myanmar's libraries are highly valued institutions that are seen as indispensable to community life. Their central role in rural communities throughout the country suggests that they have the potential to be a significant catalyst for community development. Currently the only public support provided to these libraries is through the Ministry of Information's Information and Public Relations Department. With the right resources, however, libraries could be points of engagement for other ministries or NGOs with community development initiatives in areas such as health, agriculture and civic education.

However, as shown by this study, they do not yet have the adequate infrastructure or secure funding needed to fulfill their role as community information hubs. Some of the highest priorities for library development include the upgrading of book and periodical collections with current material in high-demand subject areas, the provision of electricity, the availability of key equipment, such as TV and satellite connection, and basic training to support the work of library staff. The identification of these priorities should assist the government, development partners, businesses, NGOs and philanthropists to provide assistance that can make a significant impact on how these libraries operate and the services they provide to the communities.

In the long term, further study is needed on the different needs and challenges of urban versus rural libraries. In addition, an examination of the most appropriate ways to bring up-to-date information and services to rural libraries, where the absence of reliable electricity is a real constraint, would aid efforts to improve access to information. Approaches to Internet access, for example, should take into account the importance of mobile phones, but a more detailed analysis should be made to better ascertain the types of information best delivered through either computers or mobile phones. Finally, given the high standing of libraries in community life and the large number of libraries operating on voluntary staffing and donations, examples of innovative and dynamic approaches to attracting funders, volunteers and users by successful libraries should be documented and disseminated widely.

Appendix 1

Registered Libraries by State/Region

Sr.	State/Region	Registered Library	Library with 5B's	Active 5B's Library
1	Naypyitaw (capital)	749	712	97
2	Kachin (excluded)	1635	521	169
3	Kayah	367	98	27
4	Kayin	1480	224	37
5	Chin	780	401	66
6	Sagaing	5887	3031	692
7	Tanintharyi	1116	618	205
8	Bago	6602	3180	382
9	Magway	4773	3842	655
10	Mandalay	4796	4343	580
11	Mon	1198	900	191
12	Rakhine (excluded)	4185	2612	382
13	Yangon	2056	870	232
14	Shan	8293	3255	466
15	Ayeyarwaddy	11838	8466	387
Total		55,755	33,073	4,568

Note: The data in this table was reported by the IPRD in 2013. Although the IPRD's official number for active libraries nationally is 4,868, the total number reported from each state and region in 2013 was 2,568.

Appendix 2

Library Sample Allocation by Township

Sr.	State/Region	Townships	Active 5B's Libraries	Sampled Libraries (25%)
1	Naypyitaw	Pyinmana	66	17
		Lewe	16	4
2	Kayah	Loikaw	12	3
		Demoso	6	2
3	Kayin	Hpa-An	10	3
		Kawkareik	9	2
4	Chin	Falam	14	4
		Mindat	9	2
5	Sagaing	Pale	80	20
		Shwebo	58	15
6	Tanintharyi	Myeik	25	6
		Thayetchaung	21	5
7	Bago	Htantabin	38	10
		Bago	27	7
8	Magway	Myaing	92	23
		Gangaw	51	13
9	Mandalay	Pyinoolwin	55	14
		Thabeikkyin	53	13
10	Mon	Chaungzon	10	3
		Thanbyuzayat	9	2
11	Yangon	Taikkyi	39	10
		Kawhmu	27	7
12	Shan	Lashio	22	6
		Kyaukme	21	5
13	Ayeyarwaddy	Hinthada	21	5
		Maubin	21	5
Total		26	812	206

Source: IPRD, MOI 2013



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