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Community engagement programme under NEP: A catalyst for social change through youth action and generator of library resources for college library

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Abstract

The NEP 2020 seeks to revolutionize higher education in India by emphasizing thorough, multidisciplinary learning, social responsibility, and engagement with the community. The contributions libraries can offer under NEP 2020 have been examined: fostering lifelong learning, supporting research and innovation, reaching out beyond campuses, promoting a reading culture, and assisting social-development initiatives. It proposes a structure for community-involvement projects (like youth programs and library outreach services) that are connected to college coursework and institutional strategies. Furthermore, It specifies particular tools (like involvement of older adults, evaluations of financial literacy, interaction with slum dwellers) and approaches for creating reports to aid in the enhancement of library resources. The text reviews obstacles, limitations, and recommendations for implementation in the coming decade as well.

Keywords: Community Engagement, NEP 2020, Social Change, Higher Education

1. Introduction

The landscape of higher education in India is evolving under the aegis of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), which emphasizes not only academic and disciplinary learning but also a holistic approach integrating multidisciplinary studies, creativity, critical thinking, social responsibility, and lifelong learning (Pusadkar & Fating, 2023; Vagdal & Acharya, 2023) [7].

In semi-urban and rural regions (such as Pālghar, Maharashtra), where access to quality educational resources and information remains constrained, the repositioning of college libraries as community hubs can bridge significant gaps. This paper proposes a model whereby college libraries integrate community-engagement programmes -involving youth, senior citizens, marginalized groups and generate library resources (reports, data, studies) that reflect local social realities.

2. Literature Review

Vagdal & Acharya (2023) -In their article "*The role of academic libraries in the context of NEP 2020*", the authors emphasize that academic libraries are to support lifelong learning, provide diverse and quality resources (textbooks, reference, multimedia), facilitate research and innovation, promote digital literacy, and foster collaboration and networking.

Pusadkar & Fating (2023) [7] examine how NEP 2020 requires libraries to function as centres of learning and information access -combining traditional and digital resources; enhancing equity by providing access across socio-economic backgrounds; promoting multidisciplinary learning and critical thinking; and recommending digital education initiatives and continuing education strategies.

Sharma & Abbas (2024) [10] explore the role of libraries in preserving and integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) under NEP 2020. They argue that libraries can act as custodians of traditional knowledge, using digital tools to archive, disseminate, and integrate IKS into mainstream curricula reinforcing cultural heritage and promoting inclusivity.

Vedak (2025) -In "College Libraries as Catalyst of Change", the author highlights how college libraries should offer socially relevant resources, skill-based materials, and support outreach and community programmes, aligning with NEP's broader vision.

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3. Objectives of the Study

- To use the college library as an available knowledge hub for the community: serving not only students and faculty but also a broader spectrum of community members (youth, adults, seniors, dropouts, and marginalized groups).
- To promote youth-led social change efforts enabling students to identify local social issues (education, health, environment, digital literacy) and carry out community-engagement projects (awareness initiatives, adult-education programs, skill-development workshops).
- To encourage ongoing education and adult learning - using library resources and outreach to support adult learners, those who have dropped out, and community members in seeking additional education or vocational training.

4. Research Methodology

This research is based on

- Review of secondary literature (reports, NAP guidelines, academic papers).
- Observation of community engagement programmes in selected colleges.
- Analysis of student-generated documents and library resource data.

5. Theoretical & Policy Foundations

5.1 NEP 2020 and the Mandate for Community Engagement & Public/Community Library Infrastructure

The NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of improving libraries (school, college, public, community) by increasing access to books, multilingual materials, digital resources, adult-education programs, public libraries, mobile libraries, social reading clubs, and community reading spaces. Moreover, NEP 2020 promotes interdisciplinary education, lifelong learning, social responsibility, and equity, all of which align with the concept of academic libraries playing broader social and community roles beyond mere curriculum support.

5.2 Libraries as Catalysts of Social Change: Academic and Community Dimension

In the context of preserving and disseminating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), libraries are identified as pivotal offering a bridge between traditional/indigenous knowledge and modern curricula, especially through digital tools and institutional collaboration. Beyond purely academic aims, global literature underscores libraries' broader social role: in fostering community cohesion, promoting literacy and lifelong learning, empowering marginalized groups, and contributing to social justice. For example, public libraries internationally are recognized as sustainable community-building institutions, facilitating social capital, collective wellbeing, and access to information.

Hence, there is both a theoretical and practical basis for re-envisioning college libraries as community-engagement hubs, social-change catalysts, and resource generators under NEP 2020.

Role of Digital Library in Higher Education System: Special Reference NEP 2020

Kapade & Dhepe discuss the role of digital libraries in modern education, especially under NEP 2020. They underline that digital libraries enable 24x7 access to online resources (e-books, e-journals), facilitate research, and help institutions adapt to changing demands of users.

College Libraries as Drivers of Socio-Cultural Sustainability

Narsis & Dayana, in IJMH) -This quantitative study (using Structural Equation Modeling) finds that library service quality (LSQ), community engagement & outreach (CERO), and institutional support policy (ISPS) significantly impact the socio-cultural sustainability of students in self-financing arts & science colleges. The findings strengthen the argument that library outreach and institutional support are key for social and cultural empowerment through higher education institutions.

Public Libraries as Community Engagement Hubs

(Ramya & Majeed, 2025, Kerala) -This study documents community participation in various outreach programmes and services offered by public libraries, highlighting their potential as "people's spaces" that engage different user groups (children, youth, women, senior citizens) via reading clubs, cultural programmes, and other outreach activities.

Public Libraries to Promote Public Health and Wellbeing

(Karki *et al.*, 2024) ^[5] Though in a non-Indian context (UK), this cross-sectional study shows how libraries are used as community hubs to promote mental and physical health, wellbeing, social cohesion among adults; indicating that libraries' social role extends beyond education to community health and welfare.

These studies collectively underscore the evolving and multifaceted role of libraries in academic and community contexts -paving the way for libraries to serve as instruments of social change, lifelong learning, cultural preservation, and community empowerment. The current paper builds on this foundation to propose an integrated model oriented toward youth action, community engagement, outreach, and resource generation.

6. Proposed Model: Community Engagement & Library-Driven Social Change Programme

Here it propose a conceptual model that colleges can adopt to align with NEP 2025's vision, using their libraries as central nodes for community engagement, youth action, and resource generation.

6.1. Programme Components and Tools

| Component | Description / Activities | Tools / Methods |
|---|---|---|
| Library Infrastructure Expansion & Digitalization | Expand physical library space; establish community reading rooms; ensure ICT facilities; develop multilingual collections (regional, national, international); procure print and e-resources; provide accessible formats for differently-abled users. | Digital library platforms; e-journal and database subscriptions; multilingual cataloguing; barrier-free and inclusive design. |
| Library Outreach & Community Engagement Services | Organize book clubs, reading groups, cultural events, and open-house days; conduct workshops on digital, adult, and financial literacy; operate mobile libraries for underserved areas; engage senior citizens and vulnerable communities. | Mobile library vans or pop-up events; collaboration with NGOs, schools, and community centers; social media outreach; reading rooms; outreach |
| Youth Action & Social Projects | Integrate community engagement or service-learning into curricula; enable students to design and implement small-scale community projects such as surveys, awareness drives, and adult education initiatives | Student-led projects; surveys and questionnaires; participatory action research; documentation and reporting; stakeholder engagement |
| Intergenerational Engagement Programs | Encourage interaction between senior citizens and youth for mentoring, knowledge sharing, oral history documentation, and life-skills development. | Oral history clubs; human-library sessions; intergenerational reading and writing activities; community dialogues. |
| Community Surveys & Data Collection (Socio-economic & Financial Literacy) | Conduct surveys among marginalized populations to assess financial literacy, digital skills, health awareness, adult education needs, and resource access. | Structured questionnaires; focus group discussions; NGO collaboration; data analysis; periodic community-needs reports. |
| Report Generation, Documentation & Resource Creation | Develop reports, research papers, and case studies from community engagement activities; integrate outputs into library collections and digital archives | Institutional repositories; open-access publications; metadata creation, cataloguing, and indexing; newsletters and case documentation. |
| Research Support & Innovation | Support community-based research by students and faculty on local socio-economic, health, literacy, and environmental issues. | Access to journals and databases; research methodology workshops; NGO and government collaboration; digital analysis tools. |

This multi-pronged model aims to transform the college library into a community-embedded, socially responsive, resource-generating institution aligned with NEP 2020 ideals.

6.2 Senior Citizens Engagement & Intergenerational Programs

- Senior citizens, especially retired teachers or community elders, carry a wealth of experiential knowledge local history, traditional skills, cultural heritage which is often undocumented. Engaging them through libraries allows capturing oral histories, indigenous knowledge, community narratives, which can be archived and made accessible. This aligns with the role of libraries in preserving traditional or local knowledge, as argued in literature on integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) under NEP 2020.
- Intergenerational engagement can foster empathy, social cohesion, and mutual learning. Younger students gain life-skills, cultural context, and a sense of community; elders get social inclusion and purpose.
- Through structured programs (e.g. "human-library" sessions, mentorship, oral-history clubs), colleges can document and digitize local heritage, folklore, regional languages enriching library resources, promoting cultural preservation, and supporting research.

6.3 Financial-Literacy, Digital-Literacy Surveys & Socio-economic Outreach

Many groups such as slum residents, low-income households, adults outside formal education lack adequate access to financial literacy, digital tools, knowledge of rights, and socio-economic information. By conducting financial literacy surveys, evaluating digital access, assessing educational quality, examining health factors, and analyzing resource needs, colleges can pinpoint community

demands, determine baseline statuses, identify gaps, and create targeted interventions.

- Information gathered from these surveys, once arranged into clear reports (printed/digital), convert into essential library resources: datasets, community profiles, research papers, baseline studies advantageous for future researchers, policymakers, NGOs, and community developers.
- This documentation supports the creation of institutional memory, enables long-term research, tracks impact over time, and reinforces evidence-based practices.

6.4 Slum / Marginalized Community Outreach & Adult Education

- Outreach to slum dwellers and marginalized communities allows inclusion of socially and economically disadvantaged populations into the knowledge ecosystem. Colleges can extend beyond campus boundaries, fulfilling a social responsibility integral to NEP 2020's vision.
- Adult education, vocational training, digital-literacy classes, basic literacy, life-skills training offered via library outreach can empower community members, improve employability, civic awareness, and quality of life.

6.5 Report Generation and Library Resource Creation

- Community engagement, youth-action projects, outreach programs, surveys, and intergenerational activities produce rich qualitative and quantitative data, case studies, narratives, research outputs which, when

- documented, represent unique, local-context resources.
- By archiving these as part of the college library collection in print, as digital reports, e-archives, institutional repositories HEIs create community-rooted knowledge resources that are often missing in conventional academic literature.
- These resources can be reused by future students, researchers, NGOs, government bodies, serving as local knowledge repositories; they contribute to institutional memory, regional documentation thereby expanding the traditional role of “library as textbook storehouse.”

7. Institutional & Implementation Strategy

To translate the proposed model into practice, the following strategic and structural steps are recommended:

- Institutional Policy & Vision:** College administrations should incorporate community-engagement and library-expansion as part of their Institutional Development Plan (IDP) or strategic vision aligning with NEP 2020's mandate for lifelong learning, equity, community service.
- Resourcing:** Allocate dedicated budget for library infrastructure upgrade, digital subscriptions, outreach activities, mobile-library/reading-room vans (if applicable), staffing (including librarians with community-engagement skill sets), training for library staff in ICT and outreach methods.
- Partnerships & Collaborations:** Collaborate with local NGOs, panchayats, community organizations, public libraries, schools to reach marginalized populations, slum dwellers, senior citizens, and coordinate outreach programmes.
- Curricular Integration & Student Engagement:** Embed community-service / social-action / outreach modules into curricula (as mandatory or elective credits), or as extra-curricular/co-curricular activities, ensuring sustained student participation rather than ad-hoc volunteering.
- Digital Infrastructure & Institutional Repository:** Build or subscribe to digital library platforms; set up institutional repositories for storing community reports, research outputs, surveys, oral history archives; ensure metadata, cataloguing, digital preservation standards.
- Monitoring, Documentation & Impact Assessment:** Create a monitoring evaluation framework; collect data on outreach, participation, community impact; prepare periodic reports; capture feedback; document success stories, challenges enabling continuous improvement and evidence-based scaling up.
- Sustainability Planning:** Establish long-term plans for sustaining outreach and library services including staffing, funding, updating resources, technology upgrades, community partnerships; plan for scalability to larger regions or deeper community outreach.

8. Challenges & Risk Factors

Implementing such a model will inevitably face multiple challenges. It is important to anticipate these to design realistic and sustainable programmes.

- Resource Constraints:** Many colleges (especially in rural or semi-urban areas) may lack sufficient funding, space, ICT infrastructure, or trained staff to expand library services or conduct outreach.
- Lack of Awareness / Motivation:** Students, faculty, or

community members may not immediately appreciate or engage with library-based community programmes; participation may be low or sporadic.

- Sustainability Issues:** Without institutional commitment and long-term planning, library outreach or community programmes may fizz out after initial enthusiasm. Long-term funding, staff retention, updating resources, maintaining digital infrastructure - all pose serious challenges.
- Digital Divide & Access Barriers:** While digital libraries and online resources are powerful, not all community members may have access to internet, smartphones, or digital literacy -especially in marginalized or rural communities. This may limit outreach effectiveness or create inequities.
- Data Quality, Ethical and Privacy Concerns:** Surveys, oral histories, community data collection need ethical protocols (consent, privacy), skill in data collection and analysis. Poor design can lead to biased or unreliable data.
- Institutional Inertia and Priorities:** College administrations may prioritize traditional academic programmes over community engagement; integrating social-action modules into curricula may face resistance; balancing academic workload, resources, and community programmes might be difficult.
- Monitoring & Impact Measurement:** Assessing social impact, community benefit, long-term changes is complex. Without robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks, it may be difficult to demonstrate value or justify resource allocation.

9. Discussion & Implications for the Next Decade

As India moves forward under NEP 2020 in the next decade, the higher education landscape will likely witness significant transformation with more multidisciplinary institutions, flexible curricula, emphasis on social responsibility, community engagement, digital learning, and inclusion. In this context, the model proposed in this paper offers a way for colleges especially in semi-urban or rural regions to align with national vision while serving local community needs.

- Scaling Community-based Libraries:** With increasing adoption of digital tools, mobile libraries, community outreach can scale to reach remote or underserved regions; college libraries can act as nodes in a network linking HEIs, public libraries, NGOs, community organizations building a robust ecosystem of knowledge and social inclusion.
- Youth as Agents of Change:** Embedding social-action modules in curricula will produce a generation of socially aware, community-oriented graduates contributing to social development, rural upliftment, adult education, digital literacy, financial empowerment, health awareness, environmental sustainability, etc.
- Institutional Data and Local Knowledge Creation:** Through surveys, oral-history projects, community research, libraries can accumulate valuable data reflecting local socio-economic realities, cultural heritage, challenges which can inform policy, local governance, NGOs, and scholarly research. Over time, this will build a rich repository of grassroots knowledge

- often absent in mainstream academic literature.
- **Bridging Inequality & Digital Divide:** Outreach and adult-education via libraries can help mitigate inequalities in access to knowledge, digital resources, literacy, financial awareness, and skill development supporting social justice and inclusive development aligned with NEP's ethos.
- **Sustainability & Institutional Responsiveness:** For the model to sustain, institutions must adopt strategic planning, budget allocation, partnerships, monitoring, and adaptation. Over the next decade, progressive colleges may evolve as social-education institutions rather than mere academic credential-granters.

In sum, re-imagined libraries under NEP 2020 have the potential to transform HEIs into socially responsive, community-embedded institutions contributing significantly to nation-building, social equity, and knowledge democratization.

10. Conclusion & Recommendations

This paper argues that college libraries, when re-envisioned under NEP 2020 as hubs for community engagement and resource generation, hold significant potential to act as engines for youth-driven social change, community development, cultural conservation, and lifelong education. To achieve this vision in the coming decade, colleges particularly in underserved or rural/semi-urban regions must actively implement a “library-as-community hub, social-engagement and youth action” approach. Commitment from institutions, allocation of resources, collaborations, and support through policies are essential.

Key Recommendations

- Colleges ought to update their Institutional Development Plans (IDPs) to incorporate library growth and community involvement as essential objectives.
- Designate specific resources for library facilities, personnel, online subscriptions, community engagement, and adult learning initiatives.
- Utilize library areas not only for students but also for community initiatives such as reading spaces, adult learning, book clubs, mobile libraries for distant outreach.
- Promote student involvement by incorporating curricular or co-curricular social-engagement programs, youth-action initiatives, community assessments, and outreach efforts.
- Collaborate with nearby schools, NGOs, community groups, public libraries, and panchayats to enhance outreach, share resources, and foster community integration.
- Utilize digital libraries (e-books, e-journals, national portals) to address resource and accessibility challenges -aligning with NEP 2020's focus on digital access.
- Create systems for monitoring and evaluation to track usage, community advantages, social effects to gather proof, validate expansion or duplication.

In this way, higher education institutions can fulfill NEP 2020's vision not merely as academic centers but as socially aware, community-based agents of change.

By doing so, higher-education institutions can live up to NEP 2020's vision not just as academic centers, but as socially conscious, community-rooted catalysts of change.

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