

## Public Librarians in Sri Lanka in Demand for Career Networks

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### FORMAT

Poster.

### ABSTRACT

As per the official records, Sri Lanka has 170 public libraries across the Western Province of Sri Lanka (*Statistical Handbook on Libraries in Sri Lanka*, 2018), which is one of the nine provinces and the most socio-economically developed part in the country. Out of these, 13 libraries are in Grade I, the second highest level, next to the Supra Grade (There are only 2 Supra Grade libraries in the province). A group of three (03) LIS professionals led by the author visited 13 Grade I libraries and produced a report to the Western Provincial Council – the governing authority of the province. This talk highlights the results of the evaluation report on Grade I Public Libraries in the Western Province of Sri Lanka (Gamage et al., 2021) submitted in December 2021, and proposes a strategy involving career networks to overcome issues identified.

All public libraries in Sri Lanka are operating under the direct supervision of local government authorities which are overseen by the respective Provincial Councils. In addition, the National Library of Sri Lanka (NLSL), holds the responsibility to provide professional advice and training to libraries under the National Library and Documentation Services Board Act No. 51 of 1998. However, it was identified that the capacity of these institutions had not been sufficient to achieve the maximum performance of public libraries in concern.

Library staff get their professional education at Diploma/Higher Diploma, and Graduate/Postgraduate levels. After obtaining qualifications, they are recruited as Grade III Librarians and are promoted thereupon to Gr. II, I, and Supra. All the Grade I libraries inspected during these visits had at least one professional Librarian. Yet, the team had observed various shortcomings in library practices. Some of the issues highlighted in the report (Gamage et al., 2021) include flaws in acquisition and collection development, organizing, provision of services, library administration etc. Some ill practices were happening due to the lack of knowledge of proper systems. Most of these issues can be solved by informal discussion, mentoring and networking. Importance of career networks in developing professional know how has been highlighted by Hall (2002), Holleman (2005) etc.

In Sri Lanka there exists several informal professional networks already (Gamage, 2012; Amarakoon & Amarakoon, 2014). However, the author's personal observation by moderating one of these networks is that the library staff is reluctant to openly communicate with other professionals on matters relating to their career and tasks related to their professions. Therefore, it is proposed to establish a virtual network of mentors. Then the public library staff can reserve a time to discuss with them on issues they want to solve on one-on-one basis. The discussions may happen virtually. The author presents a strategy for formal and informal mentoring among public librarians in Sri Lanka through hierarchical, peer, and co-mentoring relationships.

### KEYWORDS

Sri Lanka; public libraries; librarians; career networks

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