

Bangla Sahayata Kendra (BSK): An Initiative of Community Engagement by Information Services through Public Libraries and Allied in West Bengal

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Abstract

Community engagement through public libraries is a collaborative process between library members, residents, faculty, students, and partner organizations to address issues that improve the community. Libraries can act as knowledge centres and community hubs by providing easy ways to reach out to the community through initiatives like information literacy. Bangla Sahayata Kendra (BSK) is an innovative initiative in West Bengal dedicated to enhance community engagement and empowerment through various avenues including Government-aided libraries, GP, BDO, SDO, and DM offices, as well as health centres and urban local bodies (ULBs). 3561 operational BSKs across 23 districts offer 323 public services through a single window, facilitating easy access to essential resources and information for local residents, ensuring equitable, free of cost access for all members of the community. The initiative has engaged 630 numbers of (25.40%) of total 2480 public libraries from 23 districts, resulting in increased footfall and utilization of library services. Majority of BSK services, encompassing 541 public libraries or approximately 85.87% of the total, are located in rural areas. Conversely, a smaller proportion of BSK services, constituting 89 public libraries or roughly 14.13% of the total, are situated in urban areas. Significant increase in footfall over the years, indicating the growing utilization and impact of BSK services on community engagement within public libraries in West Bengal is observed in the present study. This has been poised to motivate other libraries and library professionals regarding community engagement initiatives.

Keywords: Bangla Sahayata Kendra (BSK), Community Engagement, Information Services, Public Libraries, West Bengal

1. Introduction

Authors and Public libraries have been integral to the fabric of society, serving as bastions of knowledge, culture, and community engagement for centuries. These institutions have played a pivotal role in democratizing access to information, promoting literacy, and fostering lifelong learning among individuals from all walks of life (Goulding, A, 2009). In West Bengal, the BSK stands as a testament to the enduring relevance and transformative potential through public libraries in advancing social development and inclusivity.



Amidst the evolving landscape of library services, the BSK emerges as a groundbreaking initiative in West Bengal. Founded on the principles of community engagement and empowerment, BSK seeks to revitalize the role of public libraries as catalysts for social change and inclusive development. By leveraging existing infrastructures and forging strategic partnerships with local stakeholders, BSK aims to reimagine the traditional concept of public libraries and tailor their services to meet the evolving needs of 21st-century communities.

2. Review of the Literature

Public libraries have historically served as vital institutions for fostering community engagement, promoting literacy, and facilitating lifelong learning. Over the years, scholars and practitioners have explored the multifaceted role of public libraries in engaging communities and empowering individuals. This literature review examines key themes and findings from existing research on community engagement through public libraries.

Public libraries play a pivotal role in community development by providing access to information, resources, and educational programs. According to Sung et al., (2011), public libraries serve as community hubs that facilitate social interaction, knowledge sharing, and cultural enrichment. Through collaborative partnerships with local organizations and stakeholders, libraries contribute to the social, economic, and cultural vitality of their communities (Jaeger et al., 2012).

Community engagement in public libraries encompasses a range of activities aimed at involving diverse stakeholders and meeting the unique needs of local residents. According to Zou et al., (2015), effective strategies for community engagement include participatory programming, outreach initiatives, and co-creation of library services with community input. By actively involving community members in decision-making processes, libraries can ensure relevance and responsiveness to community needs (New Library Functions for Co-Creation and Community, 2019). By tailoring services to meet the specific needs and interests of local residents, libraries can enhance their relevance and effectiveness as community resources (Jaeger et al., 2012).

Despite the benefits of community engagement, public libraries face various challenges in effectively involving diverse communities. However, researchers emphasize the importance of adopting inclusive approaches and leveraging technology to overcome barriers and reach diverse audiences (Kranich, 2003). Moving forward, scholars and practitioners advocate for exploring new models of partnership-building, leveraging digital technologies for virtual engagement, and enhancing cultural competency to better serve diverse communities (Mersand et al., 2019). There is a growing recognition of the need to prioritize equity, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of library programming and service delivery (Abu et al., 2011).

Community engagement is a fundamental aspect of public library practice, enabling libraries to fulfil their mission as inclusive, accessible, and responsive community resources. By actively involving local residents in decision-making processes and co-creating library services, public libraries can enhance their impact and relevance in an ever-changing society.

3. Objective of the study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- 3.1.** To investigate the relationship between community engagement services and public library footfall.
- 3.2.** To examine the impact of Bangla Sahayata Kendra (BSK) Community Engagement on community participation within public libraries.
- 3.3.** To assess the support provided by BSK services for community engagement in public libraries across West Bengal.
- 3.4.** To provide an overview of BSK services implemented in public libraries throughout West Bengal.
- 3.5.** To analyse how public libraries fulfil their goals by integrating community information services facilitated by initiatives like BSK.

4. Methodology

The methodology employed for this study on community engagement involved a comprehensive literature survey to understand key concepts, methodologies, and best practices. This step provided a theoretical framework for the research.

Data collection for BSK related information was conducted by accessing the official website, <https://bsk.wb.gov.in/>. Information such as citizen footfall, services offered, and operational details were extracted from the website. Additionally, data related to public library services was collected from the website <https://meels.wb.gov.in/directorate-of-library-services/>.

Upon gathering the relevant data, analysis was carried out using Microsoft Excel. The data was organized, cleaned, and analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and insights.

To validate the collected data, multiple methods were employed. Observation played a crucial role, allowing the researcher to directly observe the functioning of BSKs and public libraries, as well as the interactions between citizens and service providers. Additionally, surveys were conducted to gather feedback and opinions from users regarding their experiences with BSKs and public libraries. In some cases, phone interviews were conducted.

The data collection and analysis process took place over a period from April 1st to 15th April 2024. This timeframe was chosen to ensure access to recent and relevant data, allowing for an accurate representation of the current state of community engagement with BSKs and public libraries in West Bengal.

5. BSK

The Bangla Sahayata Kendra, initiated by the government of West Bengal in October 2020 under the National e-Governance Plan, serves as a vital grassroots aggregator. Operating from government facilities across 23 districts in West Bengal, these centres offer a comprehensive array of online public services via

an unified digital platform. With 3561 operational centres, they facilitate access to information on state government schemes, programs, and initiatives. Through their interface, accessible at <https://bsk.wb.gov.in/> These centres deliver 280 services spanning 38 administrative departments. Among these, 177 are transactional services, while 101 provide information. The portal, developed internally, efficiently manages all transactions and service provisions. Additional services are continually integrated via APIs to streamline application processes, status updates, grievance redressal, and issuance of final certificates or receipts.

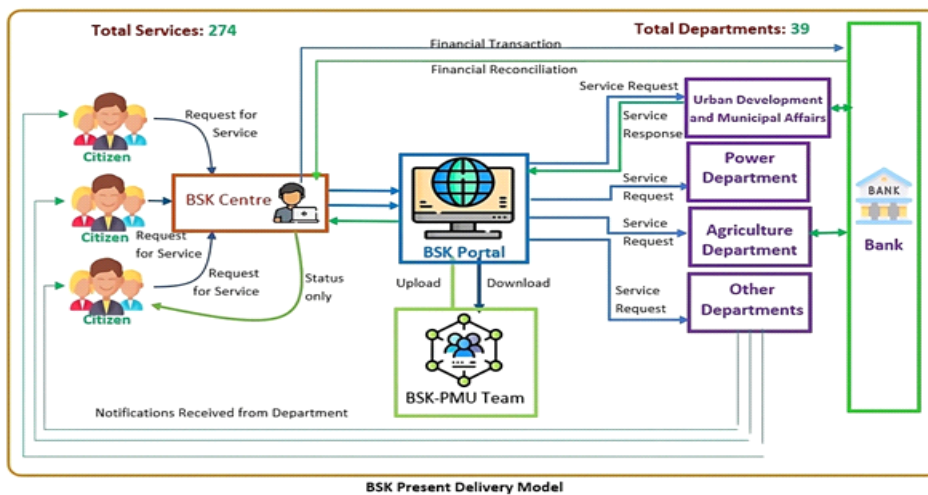


Fig.1 Source: <https://bsk.wb.gov.in/graphicorganizer>

5.1. Services provided through BSK for community information

BSK provides a variety of services, including:

5.1.1. Agricultural Services

Application for seed and fertilizer licenses, registration of farmers, and downloading insurance certificates;

5.1.2. Financial Services

Application for Krishak Bandhu Scheme and Kisan Credit Card;

5.1.3. Citizens Services

Provides information regarding Govt. schemes, scholarships, etc.

5.1.4. Other Services

Application for caste certificates, fire safety, fire licenses, digital ration cards, birth and death certificates, etc.

For details service list visit

https://north24parganas.gov.in/sites/default/files/all_service_list_bsk.pdf

6. Community Engagement through BSK

The table provides an overview of the distribution of (BSKs) across various districts in West Bengal. North 24 Parganas has the highest number of BSKs, totalling 260 Centres, followed by South 24 Parganas and Murshidabad, which have 255 and 254 Centres respectively. In contrast, Kalimpong has the fewest BSKs, with only 24 Centres. This distribution indicates a varying level of community engagement and resource allocation through BSKs in different regions of the state.

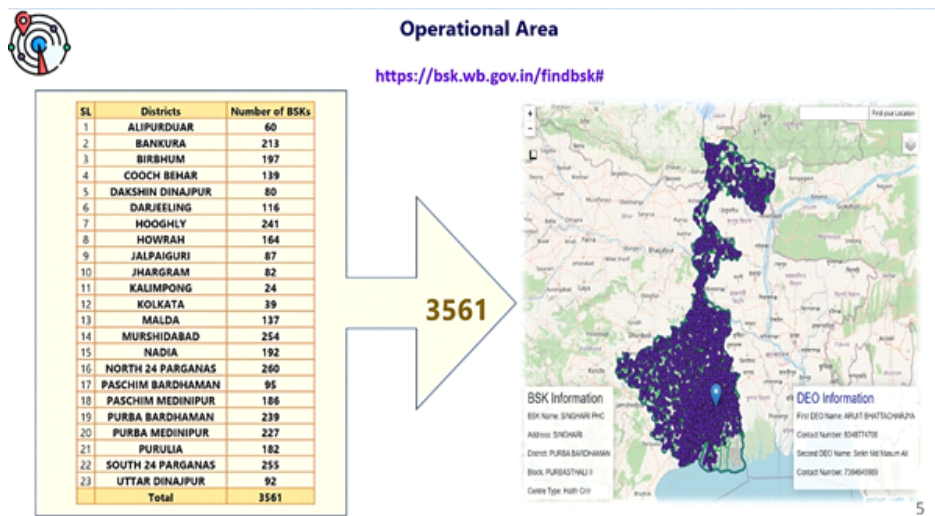


Fig..2 Source: <https://bsk.wb.gov.in/graphicorganizer>

6.1. Bar graph showing Citizen Footfall in BSK April, 2023 to March, 2024

Bar graph shows the number of individuals engaged with the services and community-related activities offered by the BSKs during April 2023 to March 2024.

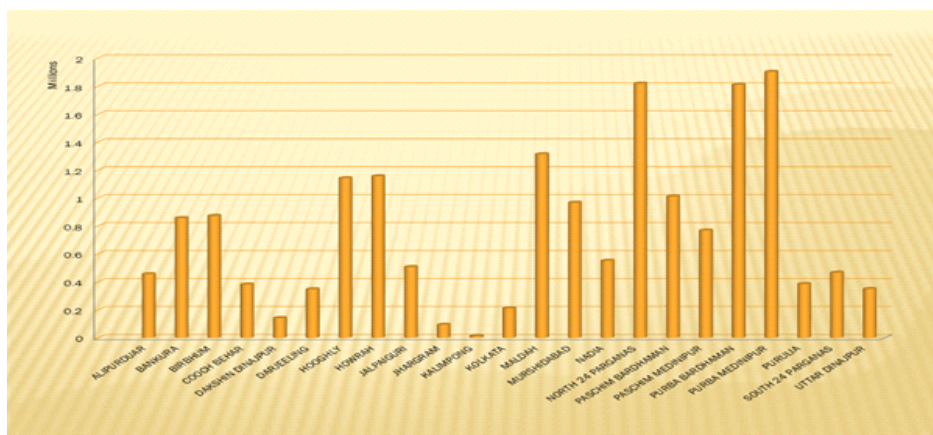


Fig. 3 Citizen Footfall in BSK April, 2023 to March, 2024

In districts like Hooghly and Howrah high footfalls signifies robust utilization and engagement with BSK facilities. Conversely, districts like Kalimpong and Jhargram, lower footfalls, indicate comparatively lesser community interaction with BSK services. Overall, the cumulative footfall of 17,561,908 citizens across all districts underscores the significant role of BSKs in facilitating citizen-government interaction and community engagement.

6.2. Table 1 shows the year-wise, month-wise, and day-wise total footfall of communities in BSKs

The table presents the yearly, monthly, and daily footfall data for (BSKs) in West Bengal from the financial years 2020-2021 to 2023-2024.

Time span: Financial Year 1st April - 31st March	Total Footfall Yearly(TFY)	Total Footfall of 3561 BSK in West Bengal	
		Total Footfall Monthly (TFM)/TFY/12	Total Footfall Daily (TFD)/TFM/30
2020-2021	647280	53940	1798
2021-2022	31384490	2615374	87179
2022-2023	17485338	1457111	48570
2023-2024	17561908	1463492	48783

In 2020-2021, the footfall trends in BSKs over multiple financial years, reflecting the increasing engagement and utilization of these community resources by the residents of West Bengal.

7. Public Libraries in West Bengal

The status of public libraries in West Bengal is delineated across various categories based on their governance and sponsorship. Firstly, the dataset reveals a total of 2480 government libraries, indicating the extensive network of libraries directly managed and funded by government authorities at different administrative levels. Additionally, government-sponsored libraries further contribute to the state's library network infrastructure, comprising 19 district libraries, 232 town/sub-divisional/upgraded town libraries, and a substantial 2209 rural/primary unit/area libraries. Moreover, the presence of 7 government-aided libraries emphasizes the collaborative effort between government and other stakeholders in providing library services, potentially catering to specific community needs.

Public Library Status in West Bengal

Govt. Libraries		13
Govt. Sponsored Libraries-Dist. Library (19)	Total- Govt. Sponsored Libraries	2460
Govt. Sponsored Libraries-Town / Sub-divisional / Upgraded Town Library (232)		
Govt. Sponsored Libraries-Rural / Primary Unit / Area Library(2209)		
Govt. Aided Libraries		7
	Total	2480

Table 2 shows the status of public libraries in West Bengal

7.1. BSK Service through Public Libraries for Community Engagement

Out of the total 2480 public libraries in West Bengal, 630 are being utilized for BSK services, representing approximately 25.40% of the total. This indicates a substantial proportion of public libraries actively contributing to the BSK initiative, facilitating community engagement and access to essential resources and information across the state. However, it's important to note that some libraries may not be operational or closed due to various reasons, such as lack of staff. Despite this, the utilization of over a quarter of public libraries for BSK services underscores a concerted effort to leverage existing infrastructure and resources to enhance community empowerment and development through the BSK initiative in West Bengal.

Table 3 shows BSK services provided through public libraries in West Bengal, with respect to the total number of public libraries.

Total Public Libraries in West Bengal	Total Public Libraries using for BSK Service	Total Percentage
2480	630	25.40%

7.2. District-wise BSK service offered from public libraries in West Bengal

Table-4 provides a glimpse of the district-wise distribution of BSK services offered through public libraries across the State of WB. The data reveals significant variations in the implementation of BSK services across different districts, indicating diverse levels of community engagement and utilization of BSK facilities. Districts such as Hooghly, Murshidabad, and Nadia exhibit a high presence of BSK services, with a notable number of public libraries offering these services, ranging from 45 to 63 libraries. Conversely, districts like Jhargram and Dakshin Dinajpur demonstrate a lower presence of BSK services, with only 6 and 12 public libraries respectively offering these services.

Table 4 shows the district-wise BSK services offered through public libraries in West Bengal.

Name of the District	Number of public libraries where BSK is developed	Percentage (%)
Alipurduar	10	1.58%
Bankura	25	3.96%
Birbhum	34	5.39%
Coochbehar	26	4.12%
DakshinDinajpur	12	1.90%
Darjeeling	38	6.03%
Hooghly	62	9.84%
Howrah	36	5.71%
Japaiguri	11	1.74%
Jhargram	6	0.95%
Maldah	19	3.01%
Murshidabad	63	10%
Nadia	45	7.14%
North 24 Pgs	52	8.25%
PaschimBardhaman	16	2.53%
PaschimMedinipur	9	1.42%
PurbaBardhman	51	8.09%
PurbaMedinipur	28	4.44%
Purulia	21	3.33%
South 24 Parganas	47	7.46%
Uttar Dinajpur	19	3.01%
Total	630	100%

7.3. Area Distribution

Table-5 illustrates that a significant majority of BSK services, encompassing 541 public libraries or approximately 85.87% of the total, are located in rural areas. Conversely, a smaller proportion of BSK services, constituting 89 public libraries or roughly 14.13% of the total, are situated in urban areas. This distribution underscores a notable focus on extending BSK initiatives to rural communities, underscoring the commitment to ensuring equitable access to essential resources and information across diverse geographical regions in West Bengal.

Table 5 shows the number of public libraries where BSK is developed in rural and urban areas

Centre Type	Number of public libraries where BSK is developed	Percentage(%)
Rural Area	541	85.87%
Urban Area	89	14.13%
Total	630	100%

7.4. Average foot fall of each BSK Yearly

Table-6 showcases the yearly average footfall per BSK in West Bengal, calculated by dividing the total footfall for each financial year by the number of operational BSKs. In 2020-2021, the average footfall per BSK was about 181.77, totalling 647,280 across 3561 BSKs. The subsequent financial year, 2021-2022, saw a remarkable surge in engagement, with the average footfall per BSK soaring to approximately 8813.39, driven by 31,384,490 footfalls across 8813 operational BSKs. However, in 2022-2023, the average footfall slightly dropped to around 4910.23, despite a total footfall of 17,485,338 across the same number of operational BSKs, hinting at a potential decline in engagement levels. Nonetheless, 2023-2024 witnessed a modest increase in the average footfall per BSK to about 4931.73, indicating stabilization or recovery in community engagement compared to the previous year. This data shows fluctuating trends of community engagement and BSK service utilization over the specified financial years in West Bengal.

Table 6 shows the average yearly footfall of each BSK.

Financial Year	Total Footfall Yearly (TFY)	Total Number of BSK (TNB)	Average foot fall of Each BSK Yearly (TFY/TNB)
2020-2021	647280	3561	181.769166
2021-2022	31384490		8813.392306
2022-2023	17485338		4910.232519
2023-2024	17561908		4931.734906

7.5. Footfall through BSK services in Public Libraries

Table-7 provides an overview of the total footfall through Bangla Sahayata Kendra (BSK) services in public libraries on a yearly basis in West Bengal. The data showcases the synergy between BSKs and public libraries in facilitating community engagement and resource utilization. In the financial year 2020-2021, with an average footfall of 181 per BSK and a total of 630 BSKs in public libraries, the total footfall through BSK services in public libraries amounted to 114,030. Subsequently, in the following financial year 2021-2022, there was a substantial surge in community engagement, evidenced by an average footfall of 8813 per BSK and a total footfall of 5,552,190 despite the consistent number of BSKs in public libraries. Although the average footfall per BSK decreased to 4910 in the financial year 2022-2023, the total footfall through BSK

services in public libraries remained significant at 3,093,300. Similarly, in the financial year 2023-2024, with an average footfall of 4931 per BSK, the total footfall through BSK services in public libraries totalled 3,106,530.

Table 7 shows the total yearly footfall through BSK services in public libraries

Financial Year	Average Foot fall of each BSK (AFB)	Total Number of BSK in Public Libraries (TNBPL)	Total footfall through BSK in Public Libraries Yearly(AFB*TNBPL)
2020-2021	181	630	114030
2021-2022	8813	630	5552190
2022-2023	4910	630	3093300
2023-2024	4931	630	3106530

8. Findings

The research findings indicate that approximately 25.40% of the total 2,480 public libraries in West Bengal are actively engaged in Bangla Sahayata Kendra (BSK) services, highlighting a significant proportion of libraries contributing to community engagement. This extensive utilization of public libraries for BSK initiatives underscores the substantial reach and impact of BSK services in fostering community participation and access to resources across the state.

A detailed district-wise analysis reveals varying levels of BSK service implementation, with districts like Murshidabad and Nadia demonstrating higher presence and engagement, accounting for 10% and 7.14% of BSK services respectively. Conversely, districts such as Jhargram and Dakshin Dinajpur exhibit lower levels of BSK service development, representing only 0.95% and 1.90% respectively. This district-wise distribution reflects diverse levels of community engagement and resource utilization across different regions of West Bengal.

The study finds a significant majority of BSK services; approximately 85.87%, are located in rural areas, indicating a focused effort to extend BSK initiatives to underserved communities.

The fluctuating trend of community engagement through BSK services over the financial years is observed. While there is a substantial increase in average footfall per BSK in the financial year 2021-2022, reaching 8,813, subsequent years witnessed fluctuations, with the average footfall per BSK decreasing to 4,910 in 2022-2023 and then increasing slightly to 4,931 in 2023-2024.

The research findings unveil the pivotal role of BSK Community Engagement in driving community participation within public libraries across West Bengal. Through a detailed examination, it has been found that BSK services significantly contribute to community engagement, with a substantial proportion of public libraries actively involved in BSK initiatives. The study reveals the extensive reach and impact of BSK services, facilitating access to essential resources and information and fostering citizen-government

interaction. A strong correlation between BSK services and increased footfall in public libraries, indicative of robust community engagement and utilization of BSK facilities is seen.

9. Conclusion

Although the number of public libraries in West Bengal is 2480, currently only 630 libraries have BSK centres initially. Political interest's aside, the BSKs have emerged as an overall successful community engagement service that has been very successful in meeting the library's goals. There were many libraries which were almost unknown to the people of the area, or even if they were known, they might not have been frequented by most people for a long time. With the help of this BSK service, a large number of people have come in contact with the libraries; have been given an opportunity to know about the library. 86% of BSK services have been developed in rural libraries as a result of which a large number of people in rural areas are now in contact with libraries, who know the libraries and realize the need for libraries; and surveys in some libraries have revealed that the use of public libraries is increasing compared to the past. In the future, more such community information services will make it possible to fascinate more people to visit the library and will move towards fulfilling the overall goals of the library.

10. Recommendations

To further strengthen community engagement through BSKs and public libraries in West Bengal, several recommendations can be made:

- ❖ Expand BSK services to more public libraries, particularly in underserved areas.
- ❖ Enhance awareness campaigns to promote BSK services and encourage community participation.
- ❖ Foster partnerships with local organizations and stakeholders to support community engagement initiatives.
- ❖ Invest in digital literacy programs to bridge the digital divide and ensure equitable access to BSK services.
- ❖ Conduct regular evaluations and assessments to measure the effectiveness of BSK initiatives and identify areas for improvement.

BSK initiative stands as a beacon of community engagement through public libraries in West Bengal, inspiring similar endeavours worldwide. Through collaborative efforts and innovative approaches, BSKs have the potential to transform public libraries into vibrant hubs of community empowerment and social inclusion.

Appendix

1. List of BSK in West Bengal https://matirkatha.net/rails/active_storage/blobs/redirect/eyJfcmFpbHMiOnsibWVzc2FnZSI6IkJBaHBBYnc9IiwiaXhwIjpudWxsLCJwdXkiOiJibG9iX2lkIn19---88598ac8bd82ed3458ae45807319dcfed52a4ba1/BSK_List.pdf?disposition=attachment
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