

Re-imagining Community Engagement in University Libraries toward Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

The research examines the role of university libraries in North-Eastern India as community hubs for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on their potential to foster social advancement through innovative community engagement. This study primarily investigates the dissemination of services by libraries regarding SDGs and the methods employed for dissemination. It also provides an overview of the challenges faced by libraries in this process. The study observes that universities in the North-Eastern Region emphasize the importance of fulfilling the SDGs. It notes that SDGs 4, 5, and 6 are more frequently practiced by libraries through community engagement initiatives. University libraries also prioritize partnerships with schools, colleges, rural, and small libraries as major strategies for enhancing community engagement services. Both offline and online methods are utilized for disseminating community engagement services, with newsletters and social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp) being the most prominent in each respective category. Additionally, the study identifies the lack of funds as one of the key challenges faced by libraries, which hampers their ability to provide community engagement services to users within the community.

Keywords: Community Engagement Practices, Sustainable Development Goal, IFLA, North-East India, University Libraries

1. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 interconnected global goals established by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2015. Building upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SDGs address a broader array of issues, encompassing poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. Achieving the SDGs relies significantly on action at the local level, where communities play a pivotal role in their effectiveness. Libraries, being central to communities, offer a wide range of products and services that contribute to accomplishing all SDGs. The 2030 SDGs serve as a blueprint for creating a better and more sustainable future for all individuals, with libraries serving as crucial contributors by educating and engaging communities through their services, often in collaboration with professionals from various fields. Omona (2020) highlights the necessity of a comprehensive strategy involving libraries to achieve the SDGs. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) asserts



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that library services are already contributing to fulfilling the 17 SDGs, emphasizing the importance of access to information in attaining these goals.

Community Engagement Practices (CEP) in libraries encompass initiatives and programs aimed at connecting libraries with their local communities, addressing community needs, and fostering collaboration and participation. Community Engagement (CE) in university libraries refers to the establishment of ongoing networks, collaborations, and relationships utilized to collectively address social issues within the communities they serve (Bangani & Dube, 2023). Within university libraries, CE may also be referred to as public programming (Howell et al., 2023) or outreach (Buchansky, 2021). IFLA has noted that libraries promote information literacy (IL) programs, serve as spaces for teaching, learning, and research support, among other activities, while mapping their contribution to the SDGs. Participation in CE has been identified as one method to achieve this (Ma & Ko, 2022).

This study explores the role of university libraries in North-East India in advancing SDGs through CEP. By assessing the contributions of university libraries to the 17 SDGs, this research aims to understand the extent of their impact on sustainable development within the region.

2. Objectives of the Study

Following are the objectives of the study:

- a) To understand the community engagement practices in university libraries that contribute to the realization of the SDGs.
- b) To identify the strategies employed by university libraries in delivering community engagement practices.
- c) To explore the challenges encountered by university libraries in implementing community engagement initiatives.

3. Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of the study is limited to the 38 Central and State University Libraries of North-East India, as listed on the University Grants Commission, New Delhi official website (<https://www.ugc.gov.in/>). Four university libraries were excluded either due to the unavailability of contact details or non-functioning status. Additionally, private and deemed universities were not considered. Therefore, the study focuses on the 34 Central & State university libraries listed in Table 1.

The four universities excluded from the study are: Arunachal Pradesh University, Dhanamanjuri University, Manipur University of Culture, and Sikkim National Law University.

Table 1: List of Central and State Universities in North-East India

SN	Name of the University	University Type	State
1	Rajiv Gandhi University	Central	Arunachal Pradesh
2	Assam University	Central	Assam
3	Tezpur University	Central	
4	Assam Agricultural University	State	
5	Assam Rajiv Gandhi University of Co-operative Management	State	
6	Assam Science & Technology University	State	
7	Assam Women's University	State	
8	Bhattadev University	State	
9	Birangana Sati Sadhani Rajyik Vishwavidyalaya	State	
10	Bodoland University	State	
11	Cotton University	State	
12	Dibrugarh University	State	
13	Gauhati University	State	
14	Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University	State	
15	Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit & Ancient Studies University	State	
16	Madhabdev University	State	
17	Majuli University of Culture	State	
18	National Law University and Judicial Academy	State	
19	Rabindranath Tagore University	State	
20	Sri Sri Aniruddhdeva Sports University	State	
21	Srimanta Sankaradeva University of Health Sciences	State	
22	Central Agricultural University	Central	
23	Manipur University	Central	
24	National Sports University	Central	
25	Manipur Technical University	State	Meghalaya
26	North Eastern Hill University	Central	
27	The National Law University of Meghalaya	State	Mizoram
28	Mizoram University	Central	
29	Nagaland University	Central	Nagaland
30	Sikkim University	Central	Sikkim
31	Khangchendzonga State University	State	
32	Tripura University	Central	Tripura
33	Maharaja Bir Bikram University	State	
34	National Law University Tripura	State	

(Source: <https://www.ugc.gov.in/>, accessed on 12 March 2024)

4. Review of Literature

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, delineates 17 SDGs for global cooperation, emphasizing poverty reduction, climate change mitigation, environmental protection, and economic growth through policies enhancing health, education, and inequality reduction (The 17 Goals | Sustainable Development, n.d.). IFLA (2018) highlights in its manual that global libraries provide services and products supporting SDGs, promoting digital inclusion, and offering safe spaces for communities, along with free information, literacy, and access to global knowledge, innovation, and creativity. Similar studies by Hijji & Al Hinaai (2023) and Bangani & Dube (2023) advocate that libraries are crucial for societal development, supporting UN-established SDGs for 2030 by promoting access to information, protecting cultural heritage, fostering global literacy, and ICT. Magnus et al. (2023) suggest in their study that libraries can promote collaboration, streamline services, and increase stakeholder participation to support SDGs, while Abu et al. (2023) assert that public libraries play a crucial role in achieving the SDGs by providing equitable digital access, staff training, and enhancing collaborations.

Mojapelo & Modiba (2021) advocate for university libraries to expand their traditional roles and explore innovative approaches to supporting the SDGs. This study assesses the contribution of South African academic libraries to SDG 4 through community engagement, emphasizing their unique capacity to enhance educational quality through modern technology and skilled staff. Mbagwu et al. (2020) emphasized that Sub-Saharan Africa faces significant challenges in disease burden and food insecurity, suggesting that libraries can contribute to achieving sustainable health development and zero hunger by 2030. This can be achieved through partnerships with stakeholders, effective communication of health and agricultural messages, utilization of mobile technologies, campus radio stations, student clubs, and community support. Additionally, Bangani (2023) examined community engagement initiatives in South African academic libraries and highlighted their role in addressing SDG 4 on quality education and lifelong learning.

Xiaobin & Jing (2009) explore the concept of the innovation community, and propose that libraries offer a platform for collaboration, communication, interdisciplinary study, innovative research, and knowledge discovery. In contrast, Hang Tat Leong (2013) examines how university libraries prioritize community engagement and outreach to attract students and scholars. Despite facing challenges such as resource diversion and staff disruption, which may outweigh the benefits, they persist in their efforts to engage with the community.

5. Methodology of the Study

A survey questionnaire was developed and administered online to the respective librarians or individuals in charge of all 34 Central and State universities, resulting in the receipt of 24 completed questionnaires, representing a response rate of 70.58%. Among the 24 respondents, 7 responses were from the Central University libraries, and 17 responses were from the State University libraries. Subsequently, the completed questionnaires were scrutinized, tabulated, and analyzed to draw conclusions.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1: SDG 1 – End poverty in all its forms everywhere

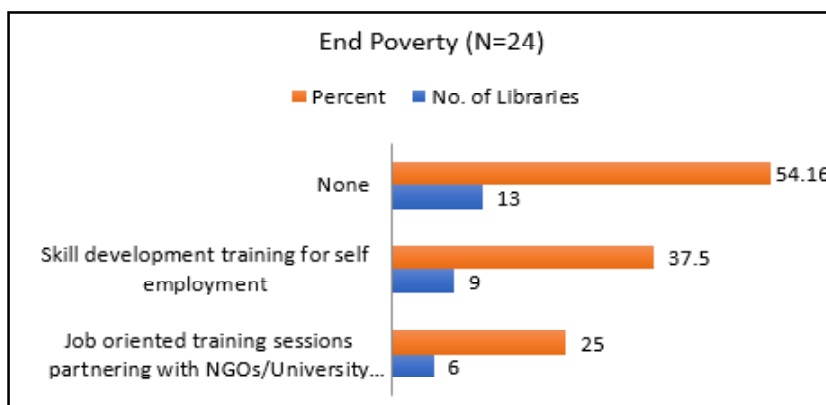


Figure 1: End Poverty

From the study, it is observed that 37.5% of university libraries have provided skill development training to support self-employment, while 25% have offered job-oriented training sessions through partnerships with NGOs and university departments. However, the majority of university libraries (54.16%) have yet to take any initiative to support SDG 1.

6.2: SDG 2 – End hunger, provide food security, enhance nutrition, and advance sustainable agriculture

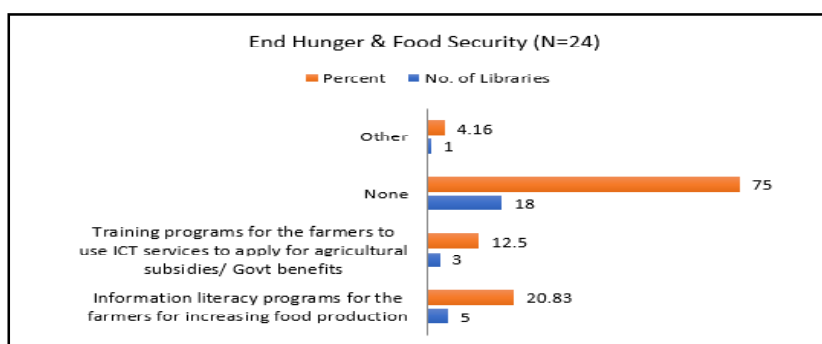


Figure 2: End Hunger & Food Security

From the analysis, it is found that the majority of university libraries (75%) have not undertaken any community engagement initiatives to address hunger and food security-related issues. Out of the total respondents, 20.83% of university libraries have provided information literacy programs for farmers regarding food production, while 12.5% have offered training programs for farmers to utilize ICT services for applying for agricultural subsidies or government benefits. Additionally, 4.16% of university libraries have organized awareness programs among consumers to reduce food wastage.

6.3: SDG 3 – Assure the health and well-being of everyone, regardless of age

From the analysis, it is found that 37.5% of university libraries have organized health camps for the community to promote good health and well-being, while 50% have initiated health literacy programs for the community. However, 41.66% of university libraries have not taken any initiatives to contribute towards SDG 3.

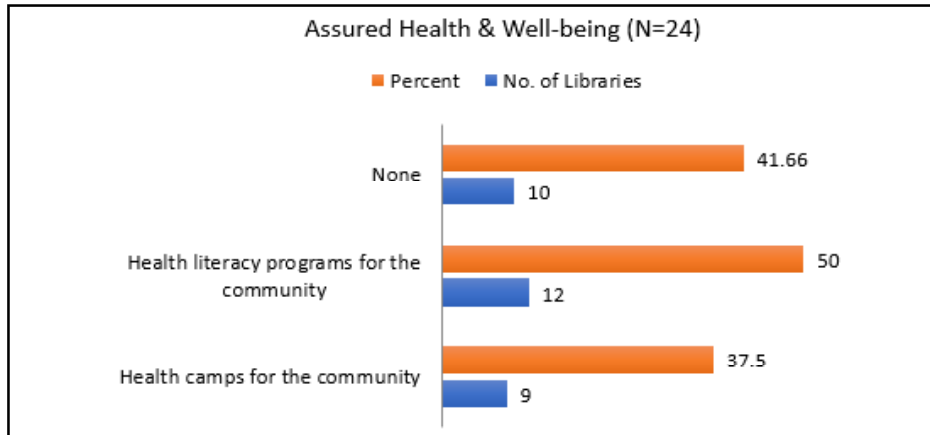


Figure 3: Assured Health & Well-being

6.4: SDG 4 – Assure equitable access to high-quality, inclusive education and encourage possibilities for lifelong learning for all

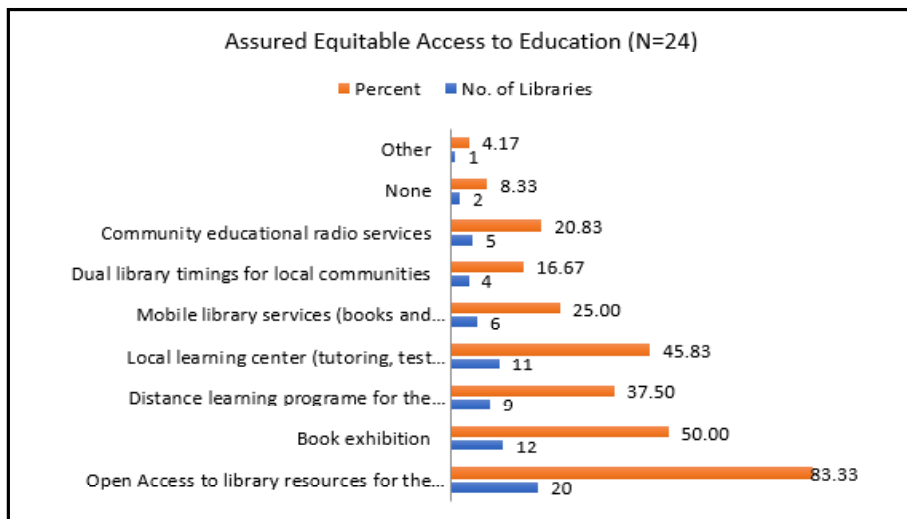


Figure 4: Assured Equitable Access to Education

The analysis reveals that a significant portion of university libraries (83.33%) prioritize achieving SDG 4 – quality education, with a focus on providing open access resources. Additionally, 50% of university libraries

organize book exhibitions to promote literacy. Furthermore, 45.83% of university libraries operate local learning centers, offering various educational services such as tutoring, test preparation, enrichment programs, skill development workshops, and occasionally vocational training or adult education classes. Additionally, 37.5% offer distance learning programs, 25% have initiated mobile library services aimed at providing books and resources directly to communities to promote literacy and enhance access, and 20.83% provide community radio services. However, only 16.67% of university libraries offer dual library timings, while 8.33% have not engaged in any community engagement activities. Some libraries (4.17%) also organize outreach programs for adopted villages and school children, demonstrating a broader commitment to community engagement and education.

6.5: SDG 5 – Achieve gender equality

With a focus on establishing safe spaces for female users in libraries, 83.33% of university libraries are providing such environments, while women’s empowerment programs are offered by 41.67% of libraries, indicating a potential area for improvement. Awareness programs on third-gender equality and rights are relatively less common, with only 8.33% of libraries offering them, while 12.5% of university libraries do not engage in any community engagement practices towards gender equality.

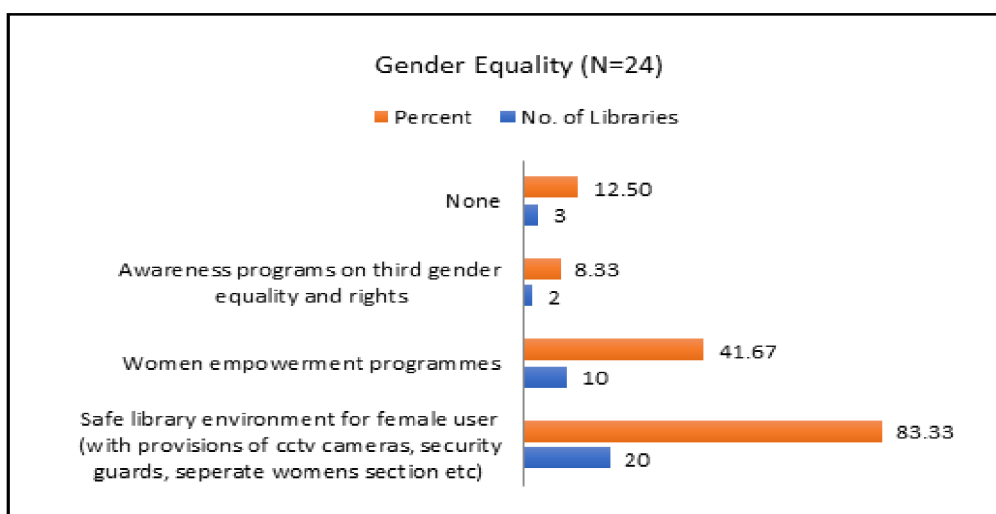


Figure 5: Gender Equality

6.6: SDG 6 – Ensure that everyone has access to water and sanitary facilities that are managed sustainably

Among the university libraries’ community engagement practices supporting SDG 6, 91.67% of libraries provide safe drinking water facilities, prioritizing access to clean water. Additionally, 29.17% of libraries offer information on water usage and sanitization practices, aiming to raise awareness and encourage responsible consumption. However, 8.33% of university libraries have reported no specific contribution to SDG 6, highlighting potential areas for improvement.

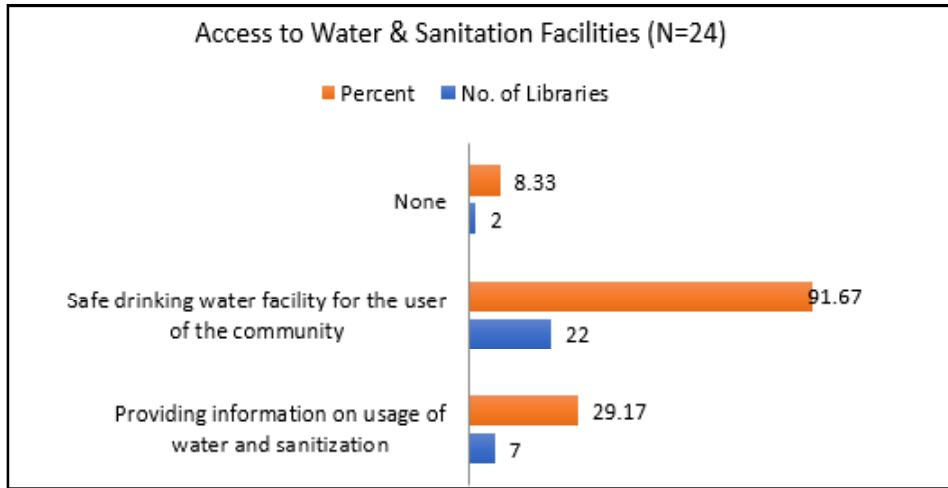


Figure 6: Access to Water & Sanitation Facilities

6.7: SDG 7 – Provide everyone access to modern, affordable, dependable, and sustainable energy

University libraries in North-East India are actively supporting SDG 7, with 79.17% of them offering facilities for lighting and electricity, as well as sustainable community spaces for knowledge creation and dissemination. Additionally, 29.17% of university libraries provide information on sustainable energy use, promoting awareness and adoption of eco-friendly practices. However, 20.83% of libraries report no specific contribution to SDG 7, suggesting potential areas for enhancement.

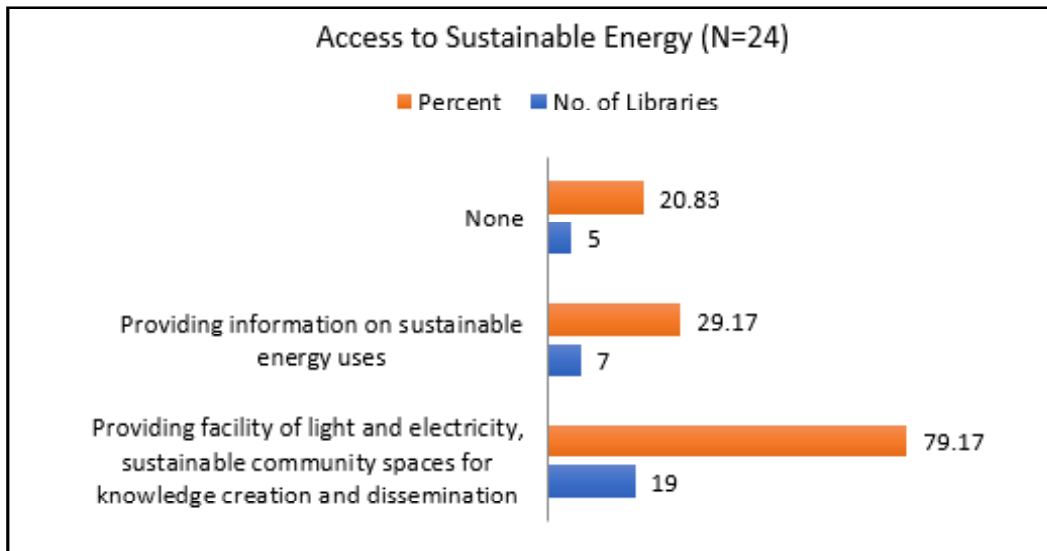


Figure 7: Access to Sustainable Energy

6.8: SDG 8 – Promote full and productive employment, steady, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, and decent work for all

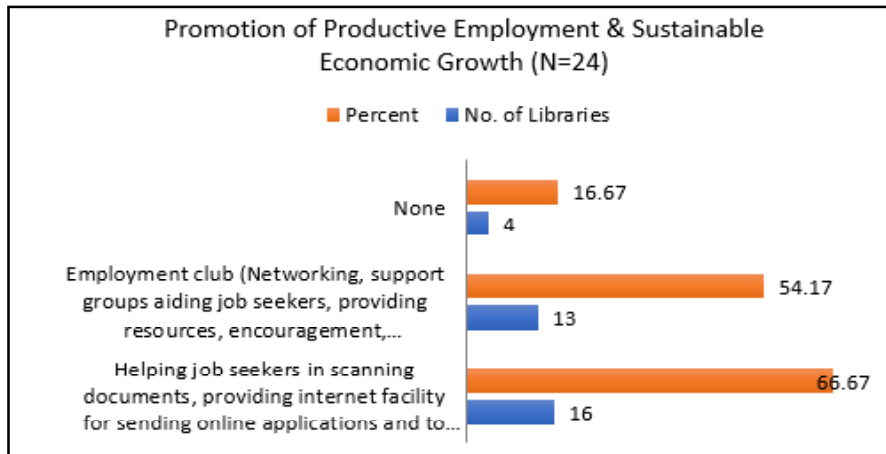


Figure 8: Promotion of Productive Employment & Sustainable Economic Growth

Analysis shows that 66.67% of university libraries are assisting job seekers with document scanning and internet access, while 54.17% of university libraries support employment clubs by providing networking facilities and resources, as well as encouragement and opportunities. However, 16.67% of libraries have reported that they have not provided any specific support programs for SDG 8.

6.9: SDG 9 – Encourage innovation, advance sustainable industrialization, and construct reliable infrastructure

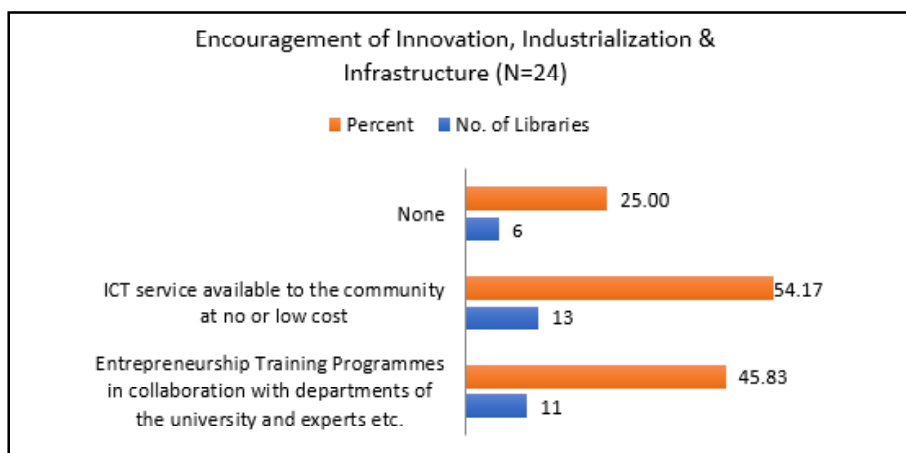


Figure 9: Encouragement of Innovation, Industrialization & Infrastructure

University libraries significantly contribute to SDG 9 by offering collaborative entrepreneurship training and ICT services to the community, with 45.83% actively involved in this aspect, while 54.17% offer ICT

services at minimal to no cost, promoting technological access and innovation. However, 25% of libraries have not reported any specific contributions.

6.10: SDG 10 – Reduce inequalities both within and across nations

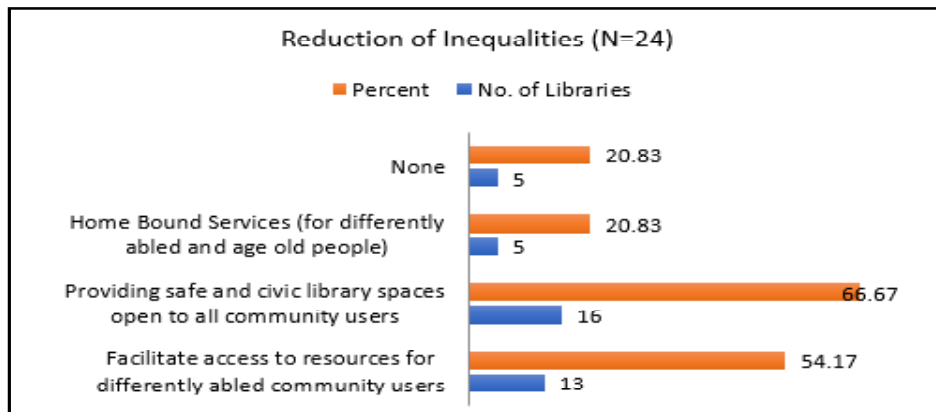


Figure 10: Reduction of Inequalities

From the analysis, it is found that 54.17% of university libraries have contributed to SDG 10 by facilitating access to resources for community members with different abilities, and 66.67% of libraries are creating safe and inclusive environments for all community users, while 20.83% of libraries have implemented home-bound services for differently abled and elderly individuals. However, 20.83% of libraries have not specified their contributions towards SDG 10.

6.11: SDG 11 – Make communities and cities inclusive, secure, resilient, and sustainable

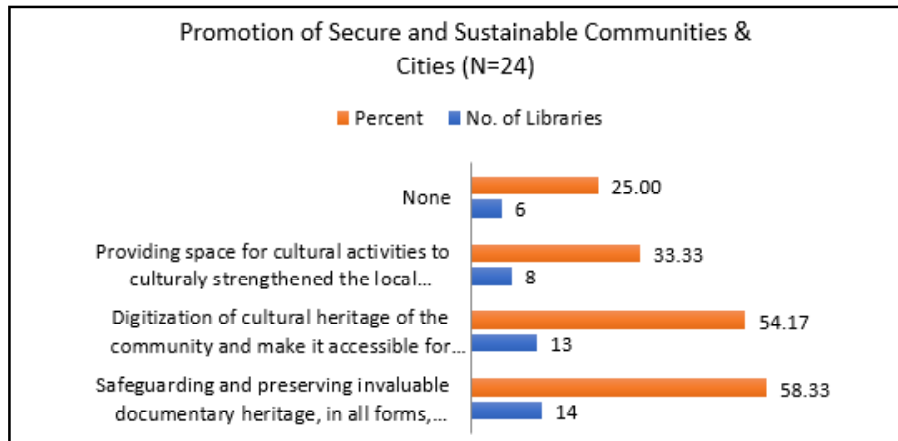


Figure 11: Promotion of Secure and Sustainable Communities & Cities

University libraries support SDG 11 by safeguarding invaluable documentary heritage in 58.33% of libraries and digitizing the cultural heritage of communities in 54.17% of libraries, fostering preservation and

accessibility. Additionally, 33.33% of libraries provide spaces for cultural activities, promoting diversity and inclusion. However, 25% of libraries report no specific community engagement.

6.12: SDG 12 – Establish trends of sustainable production and consumption

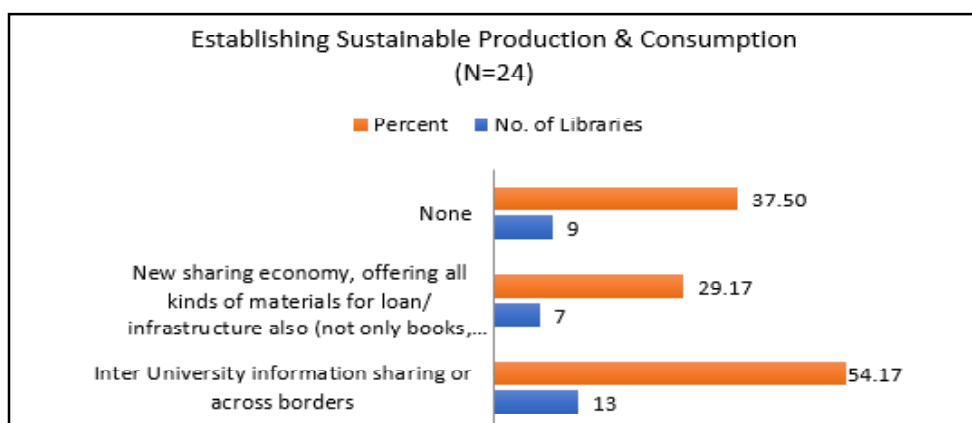


Figure 12: Establishing Sustainable Production & Consumption

Analysis shows that 54.17% of university libraries contribute to SDG 12 by enabling inter-university information sharing, whereas 29.17% of libraries are promoting a new sharing economy by offering a wide range of materials for loan and infrastructure, including not only books, music, and movies but also various other information resources, tools, musical instruments, and appliances. However, it is worth noting that 37.5% of libraries have reported no specific community engagement in these areas.

6.13: SDG 13 – Take action to mitigate the effects of climate change

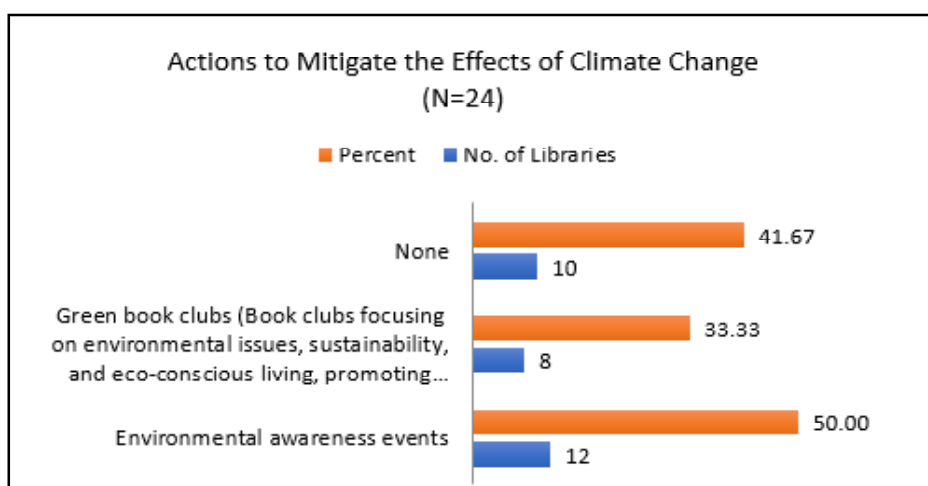


Fig. 13: Actions to Mitigate the Effects of Climate Change

It is observed from the study that 50% of university libraries are contributing to SDG 13 by organizing environmental awareness events, while 33.33% of libraries host “Green Book Clubs” that focus on environmental issues, sustainability, and eco-conscious living. However, there are 41.67% of libraries where no specific community engagement practices related to SDG 13 have been seen.

6.14: SDG 14 – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development

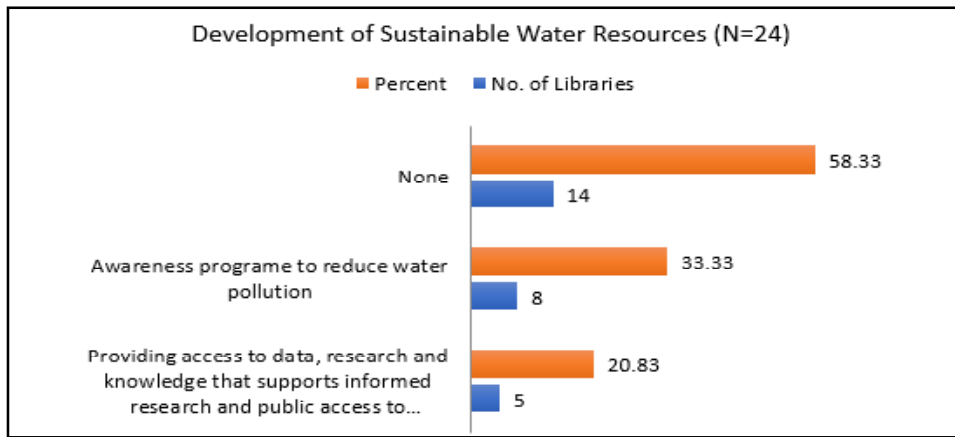


Fig. 14: Development of Sustainable Water Resources

The study reveals that 20.83% of university libraries provide access to data and knowledge for marine conservation, while 33.33% of libraries conduct awareness programs to reduce water pollution. However, the majority of libraries (58.33%) have no specific community engagement practices with SDG 14, suggesting potential for improvement in marine life preservation initiatives.

6.15: SDG 15 – Protect earth’s ecosystems, and forests, combat desertification, prevent land degradation, and preserve biodiversity

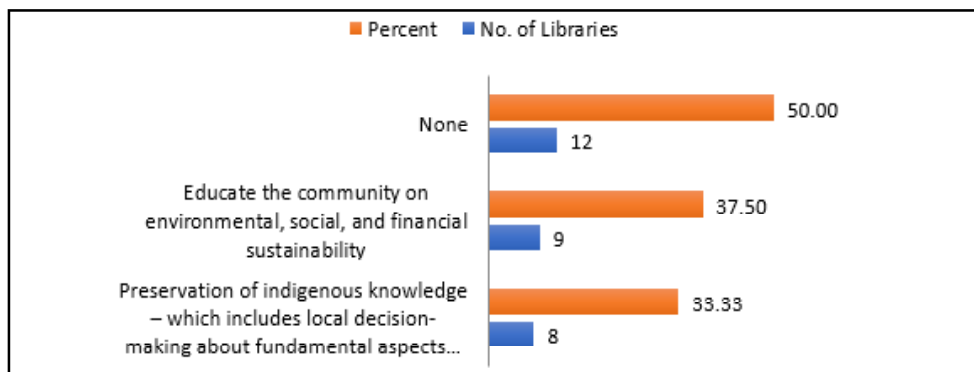


Figure 15: Protection of Earth’s Ecosystem

From the analysis, it has been observed that 33.33% of university libraries contribute to SDG 15 by preserving indigenous knowledge and safeguarding cultural diversity and ecosystems, while 37.5% of libraries educate the community on environmental conservation, promoting biodiversity awareness. However, 50% of libraries report no specific community engagement practices, indicating potential areas for enhancing initiatives aimed at protecting terrestrial ecosystems and promoting sustainable land use within communities.

6.16: SDG 16 – Promote transparent institutions, access to justice, and inclusive societies for development

Analysis of the study reveals that 62.5% of university libraries contribute to SDG 16 by developing collections of laws and legislations fostering legal literacy and access to justice, while 29.17% of libraries are making partnerships between law and public libraries to enhance legal resources dissemination and community outreach. However, a significant portion of 33.33% of libraries report no specific community engagement, suggesting potential areas for enhancing initiatives supporting peace, justice, and strong institutions.

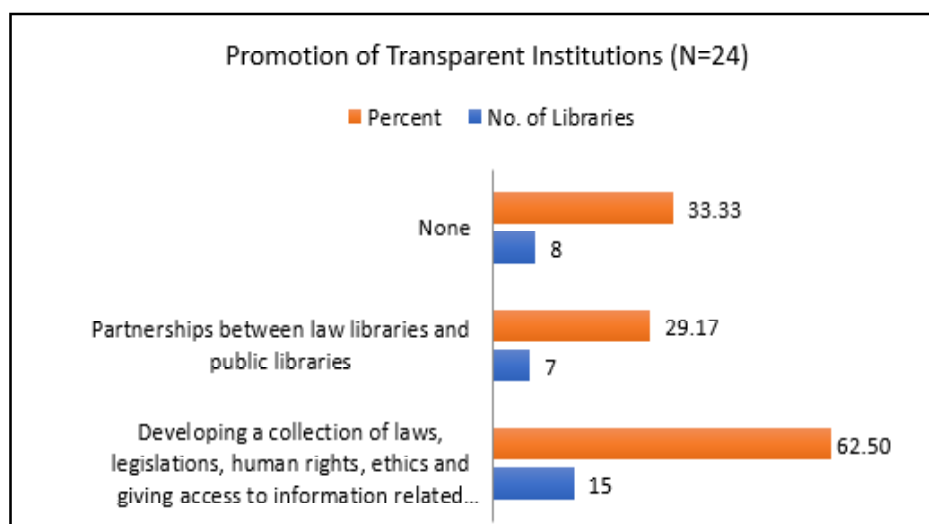


Figure 16: Promotion of Transparent Institutions

16.17: SDG 17 – Enhance implementation strategies and revive the international alliance for sustainable development

Analysis of the study reveals that 37.5% of university libraries contribute to SDG 17 by partnering with governments and others to facilitate collaboration for legal and societal advancements. Similarly, 37.5% of libraries provide information and updates about the SDGs, fostering awareness and advocacy for sustainable development goals. However, 41.67% of libraries report no specific community engagement.

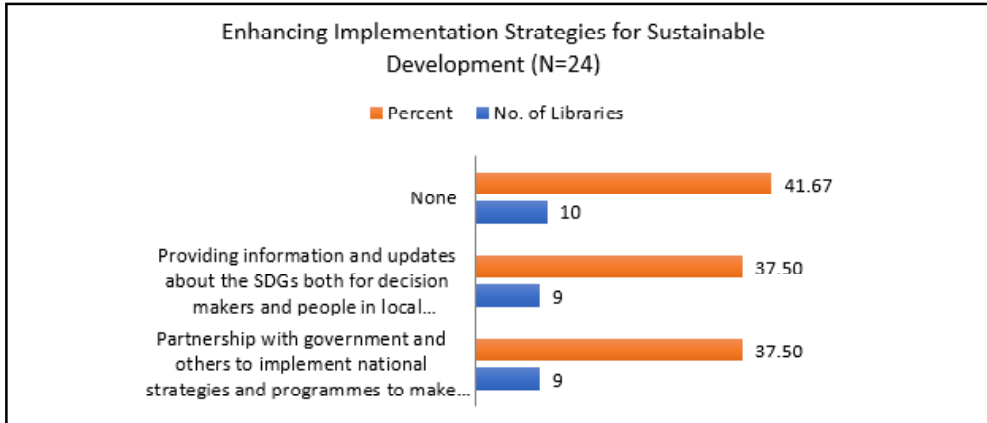


Figure 17: Enhancing Implementation Strategies for Sustainable Development

6.18: Strategies used for Community Engagement Practices

In response to the question, 33.33% of surveyed libraries prioritize outreach programs, while 12.5% focus on identification and collaboration in different projects. Additionally, 25% of libraries form partnerships with local organizations and external stakeholders, while 66.67% prioritize collaborations with educational institutions and rural libraries, emphasizing intra-institutional cooperation. Furthermore, 16.67% of libraries have no specific community engagement initiatives.

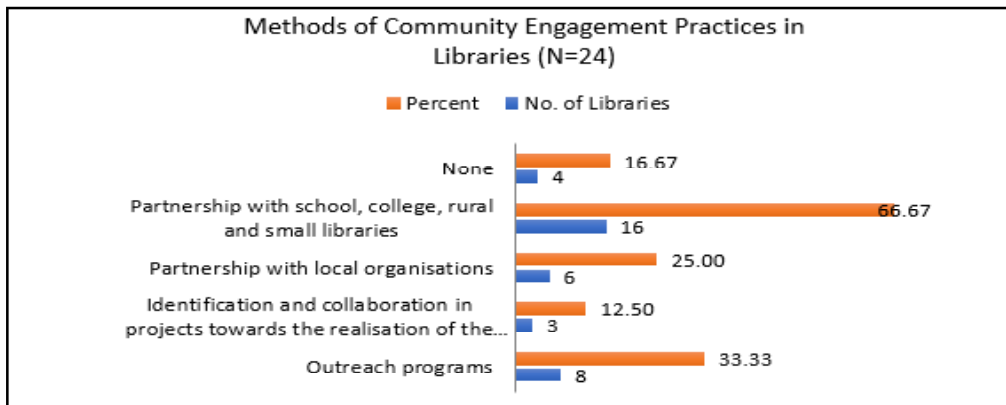


Figure 18: Methods of Community Engagement Practices in Libraries

6.19: Ways of Community Engagement Practices

In response to the question, 37.5% of university libraries offer community engagement practices in offline mode, and similarly, 37.5% offer such practices through online mode, while 25% of libraries utilize both online and offline platforms.

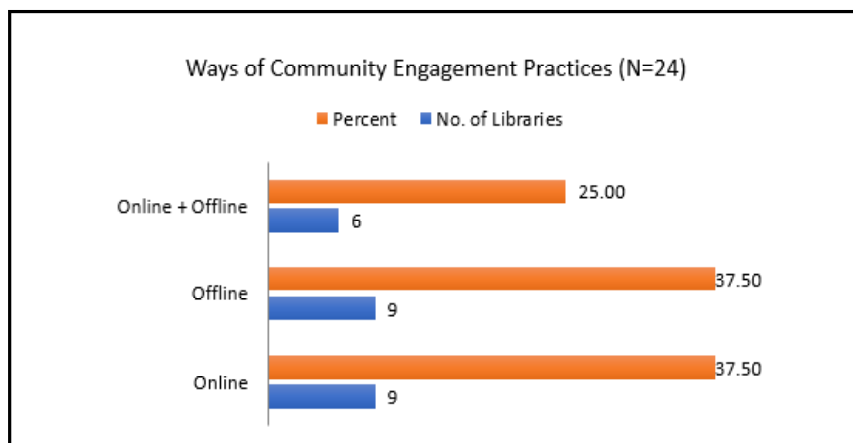


Figure 19: Ways of Providing Community Engagement Practices

6.19.1 Offline Tools for Community Engagement Practices

In response to the question, university libraries employ various offline tools for providing community engagement practices, including newsletters (40%), pamphlets (26.67%), and newspapers (33.33%). However, 33.33% of libraries report no specific offline tools for CEP.

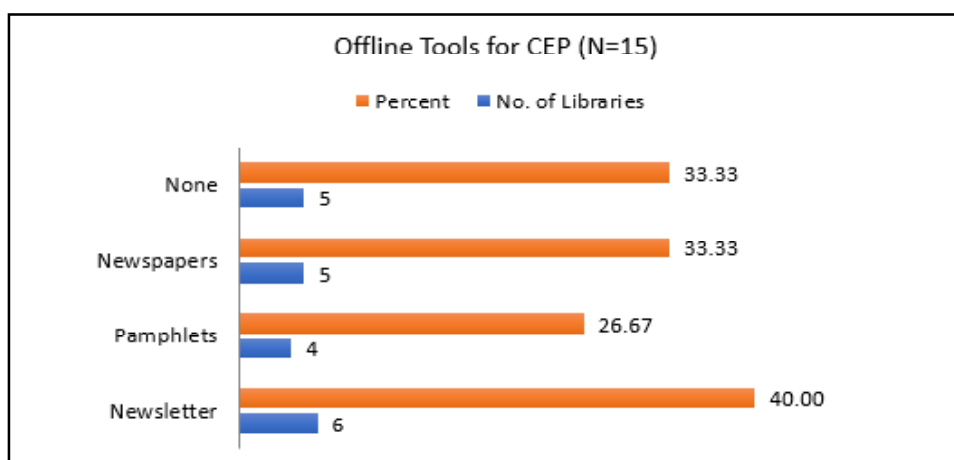


Figure 20: Offline Tools for CEP

6.19.2 Online Tools for Community Engagement Practices

Social media is a prominent platform utilized by 80% of university libraries, while websites/blogs are utilized by 66.67% of libraries. In addition to social media and websites/blogs, online discussion forums are used by 20% of libraries to enhance digital discourse. It has been observed that 13.33% of libraries employ alternative methods such as email for community engagement practices.

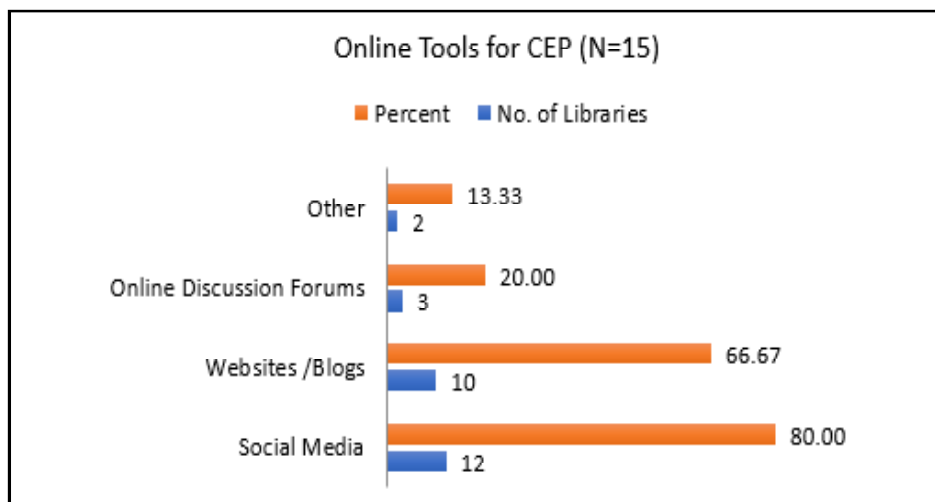


Figure 21: Online Tools for CEP

6.19.2.1 Social Media Tools used for Community Engagement Practices

The data reveals varied social media usage among university libraries for community engagement practices. Facebook and WhatsApp stand out as popular choices, with 91.67% and 83.33% responses respectively, whereas 25% of libraries use Instagram, and 16.67% of libraries use Twitter and Telegram each.

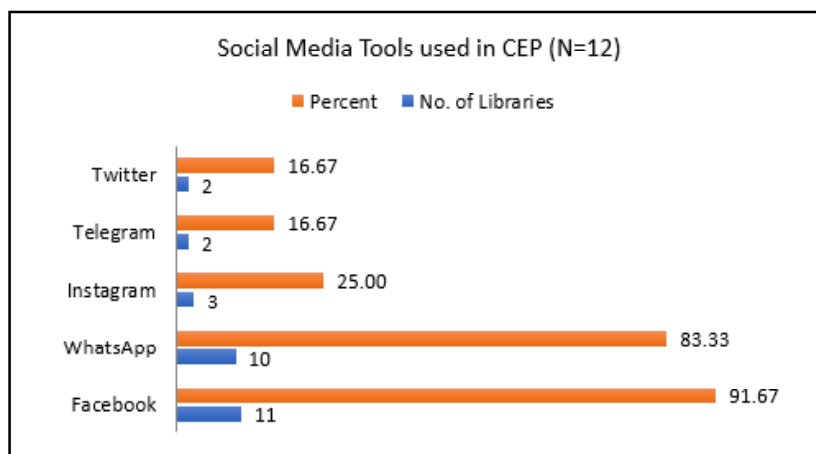


Figure 22: Social Media Tools used in CEP

6.20 Challenges faced by Libraries in Community Engagement Practices

University libraries in North-East India face challenges in providing community engagement practices, including a lack of funds for 83.33% of libraries, inadequate human resources for 75% of libraries, and inadequate facilities for 54.17% of libraries. Lack of sustainable education and inconsistent policies complicate

planning processes in 33.33% and 29.17% of libraries, respectively. Concerns about the community awareness gap are noted by 45.83% of libraries, and challenges in community participation are noted by 41.67% of libraries. However, 4.17% of libraries have not faced any challenges towards the implementation of CEP. To address these challenges effectively, strategic investment in funding, staffing, infrastructure, policy coherence, community needs assessment, and educational sustainability is essential.

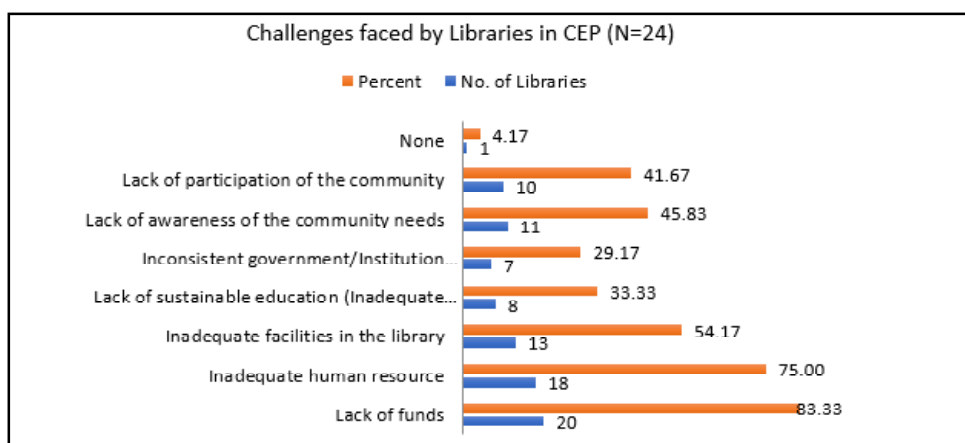


Figure 23: Challenges faced by Libraries in CEP

7. Conclusion

University libraries in North-East India are actively involved in contributing to the SDGs through various innovative community engagement practices. These libraries play crucial roles in addressing poverty, hunger, promoting education, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, making them catalysts for positive change in their communities. Libraries are achieving this through initiatives such as job training programs, health literacy campaigns, and entrepreneurship training, which empower individuals and promote inclusive growth. This demonstrates the significant impact libraries can have in supporting SDGs through community engagement in the North-East region. However, these libraries face challenges such as limited funding, inadequate facilities, and low awareness among communities. To address these challenges, collaborative efforts involving governments, local organizations, and the community itself are essential. By leveraging partnerships, embracing innovative strategies, and advocating for sustainable policies, university libraries can continue to drive progress toward achieving the SDGs and creating a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

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