

Report of DCM5

The Reconstructed Minutes of DCM4 were read and various corrections and additions were made. Corrections and additions made in the technical aspects, have been incorporated in the formats part of the reports.

Comments on the other part of the minutes were more in the form of discussions and overlapped with the sessions. As normally happens in such discussions, there are many gaps, and the discussions moves between different issues. In order to make the report read well and continuous, the reporter has reordered the points made and filled in some gaps.

Documentation was defined (in Ramani's paper), as the art of collection, classifying and making available information to the specialist, especially in the Sciences, in Ramani's paper. She had argued that the producers of information were also the users of documentation, as they needed to keep in touch with work taking place in their field.

Our users are mainly action groups.

There is a gap between action groups as producers and as users. The Documentation Centres (DCs) are supposed to fill in the gap. They are perceived in the voluntary sector as more than mere collectors, and classifiers and disseminators of information. They are expected to be processors, filters and even creators of information of a particular kind - namely that which leads to action or educates or develops the consciousness of the people.

Some DCs are part of Action groups (AGs) and have very specific jobs to do vis a vis action work of their group. But very often they get more involved with general documentation work. This is because we have some standard stereotyped understanding of DCs namely clippings, report files, classification system. True there is a minimum need for general information on development issues, but, such centres can't afford the time & energy required for general documentation work.

At the other extreme, whatever regular system there is for ongoing information inputs, gets disrupted everytime a specific project comes up or an issue hots up. Quite often the DC person is recruited to do other work in organisations.

Documentation work is confused with the normal report writing process for donors or annual reports and statements, minutes or worse still seminar papers, or bibliographies for the leaders within an organisation.

It is therefore apparent that objectives & programmes of DCs who are part of AGs need to be clearly defined or analysed for each centre. This is because the aim of setting up the documentation centre is not exclusively the day to day needs of action groups. It has a certain autonomy of purpose, which arise out the the nature of information, its roles and uses and misuses. This autonomy of purpose covers the wider context within which action groups are working. This includes the larger ideological and social issues, including issues like the development debate, ecology & environment, social problems, gender issues, economic develop-

ment, caste communalism etc. There is also the objective of projecting the AGs views on the issues & the work being done by them on a larger level, to the public in general & policy makers & opinion leaders in particular.

The field level worker does not seem to be in the habit of reading, and study. At the same time it is they, most DCs want to reach. The field level worker may ask for specific information and certain laws relating to issues they are taking up at that moment or on some government programme which is being implemented in that area. Or they would want a study on a particular local problem say a case of pollution of a water source, or information on a particular politician who has considerable influence in that area. This is difficult to provide off the shelf. A generalised documentation centre basically cannot provide such specific information. Such work is more ideally on an ad hoc basis, and for such inquiry the local people themselves, maybe with the help of documentation people, may have to make separate or special efforts.

The needs of different AGs are so varied, that the time and effort involved to work out and continuously manage systems such that information is always available on each possible need, is immense. It involves probably more resources, (money, people and materials) than most can afford or muster. Besides the usage of each individual centre is not sufficient enough to justify such large and continuing resources.

It is when a particular type of request or issue is common, that generalised DCs can contribute. Firstly by documenting information collected on specific issue and other more general information, like news follow-up, policy, statistics, laws, case studies etc. In fact our classification system should be slowly developed so that such issue are constantly monitored. It is these kind of files that are most often used not only by activists, but also journalists, students, campaign persons, analysts etc.

The current situation is that different documentation centres operate at different levels. Each have a different kind of relationship with Action groups or with larger audience

As far as the particular documentation centres are concerned, as already mentioned, they often need general information to round off their documentation, but then, often most of their time is spent on this aspect. It is here that joint effort between documentation centres can help. If the particular documentation centre, can have quick and easy access to general Documentation centres, and in the more important areas ready made documentation, they could easily concentrate on particular documentation needs of the action groups they are attached to. Services, CED's DCCPOST, or DCMs joint index plan or Green file of CSE, are some examples of how this can be done.

For the particular Documentation Centres, there is also need for finding good systems for documenting field level information, as well as data and other notes of activists. Field workers have a wealth of experience, which is not in a form which can easily be documented or reorganised or reprocessed.

Expertise on Process documentation is also needed. But process documentation also means being in the field. Thus this is ideally done by the AGs. Interpretation of experience is also best done by the AGs. Analysing this experience and local situation and making larger connections also is a job for journals like the EPW.

So what are DCs left with: Mainly archival kind of role?

Just collecting information on such issues, and particular information, is not enough. Information without processing is useless. DCs will have to take the lead in reprocessing, analysing, summarising as well as repackaging information in such a way that they can be used by the field level worker.

But who is going to do the job of processing came up. Can DC take this task up? As it is they seem alienated from the field worker and are looked upon as urbanised intellectual elite group. Field workers seem to resent DC taking the lead in this as inevitably this is linked with larger visibility for the DC or the person concerned. This problem, some felt was more with DC who have separated themselves from field level work. If they were working together, as a colleague, DCs are expected to extract from field experiences, and operate as a feedback, like how Unnayan newsletter was before it became more of a clearing house with the advent of NCHR.

DCs can definitely go a little beyond being mere documentation Centres, depending on the kind of people that it has, its involvement with the action group or field level, its location, whether it has a few people who are capable of taking up analysis or interpretation work or repackaging etc. Surely, DCs have to find a way of getting into this kind of work. In fact every DC has brought out some publication, produced some films, or done some study at the field level. And since each DC cannot get involved with too wide a spectrum of such activities, each DC has to choose some particular areas that they are going to work in. The problem usually is that this aspect is normally ad hoc. The involvement has to be planned and a long term consistency needs to be brought in. Then only can work of different DCs, can through forum such as DCM, be inter-related.

The common format, joint indexes & the non-formal formats are only one part of the effort in this direction. We also need to strengthen our collection of non-print media.

Most of the above ~~material~~ discussion was not merely discussed within the context of relationship between different kinds of documentation centres. It was ~~more of~~ ^{an} a debate on the relationship & problems, between DCs & AGs

The main issues were :

1. Activists are not in a habit of reading.
2. DCs role is ^{not} merely to supply source material. Information that we have must be reprocessed, analysed, & repackaged for easier use of Action groups.
3. While DCs should primarily serve the immediate needs of AGs, there there is an autonomy of purpose

DCM should define its objectives.

- mainly to make available and share resources ?
- Discussion on preservation of news clippings

Plans:

Mini DCM

A Mini DCM to be held on January 26th, 27th, 28th & 29th, which will be a workshop on : 1. Developing the thesaurus. ISI Delhi to send out the invitations. 2. Documentation programmes.

Regional meetings

Regional meetings of DCM to be held along with action groups,
1. To get feedback of information needs from the grass roots, &
2. To develop possible programmes and plans.

1. To get feedback of information needs, namely to find out the nature of queries, the timing, form, and topic that may arise from the field. And if this can be determined, Can DCs ever be able to keep a track of such information as is needed? Can we develop systems of documentation, classification, storage and retrieval, possibly on a cooperative basis?

Some felt that DCs are destined to take up some topics, mainly according to what they themselves find useful (which may be in consultation with AGs or keeping their needs in mind), and not an open one when anything that comes up is catered to as and when it comes up. Most DCs see themselves relating to middle level workers in action groups and development organisations, at the most.

2. To develop possible programmes, plans regarding Translation and documentation/inventory of existing material in the local language. Is there sufficient material in the local language ?

Re-packaging of information to bring it in a form that people can relate to or understand

Networking among group doing similar work, translation etc.

Three such regional meetings are to be held

1. Hindi: VHAI & ISI to consider ?
2. Marathi: to be convened by Asha Kendra
3. Andhra: Project Laya to call with help from CED

Training

Basic Documentation Training must be organised.

VHAI will be doing basic documentation

ISI Delhi to explore possibilities to holding one training, especially relating to computer usage.

CED's offer for any group to do in-service/self training at CED still stands.

Evaluation of DCM5

(Most of this discussion was held at CYSD premises in the afternoon of the last day when many participants had already left.)

The meeting was too long and too many things joined together. Since most people in any way participated in pre-DCM it became a repetition. Therefore pre-DCM should be only one day and papers regarding earlier meeting should be circulated to new comers in advance.

Computer related problems in documentation should not be brought up in the general session. For this a separate two day session may be organised.

Should discuss more in detail regarding practical problems of work sharing and joint projects. Discussions should emphasis practical aspects and problems. Must also cover what work has been done or not done in between meetings

Should have separate person taking down minutes. Responsibility of the sessions should be taken by different people. The coordination should be done by the group hosting, and delegate responsibility. The chairing should be done by the host organisation. And the leadership should be slightly formalised.

The meeting was too informal and a degree of formality is required.

Agenda for DCM6

Sharing of work/ Joint projects.

What are the problems that people have been facing regarding this.

Report of the sub-group on Thesaurus: (See Appendix 2) →
Thesaurus development, critique

Report of the Regional meetings:

Feedback on Information needs, implementation problems

Discussion and planning for language documentation

Information needs of grass roots workers, action groups:

Besides indicating the correct keyword, the first part of the thesaurus will also indicate whether the word is a Broader term (BT), Narrower Term (NT), Related term (RT) or Other term (OT). If it is so, the entry will also give the corresponding keyword in bold. for example

...
Arab countries (RT) see **Middle East**

...
Gulf use Middle East

...
Middle East

West Asia (OT) see **Middle East**
...

Part II of the thesaurus gives a list of a thousand odd root-keywords, and then the various BTs, NTs, RTs & OTs, that are related to each root-keyword. This is followed by the classification number of each of the Centres which contains that particular subject. To give an example the entry on Middle east will be:

Middle East: Asia (BT), Arab countries (RT), OPEC (RT), West Asia (OT); CED: X18, UYN: T010 (B), AIC: 531 (R) etc.

The above means that as far as the topic Middle East is concerned, at CED there is a file covering exactly Middle East, whereas Unnayan has it covered only in a broader file namely Asia, AICUF on the other hand either has it in a file called Arab countries or the subject is contained in their OPEC file. This much of ambiguity cannot be helped. In any case, from the above entry it is clear that for middle east you must refer to file number X18 in CED, T010 in Unnayan, 531 in Aicuf etc.

Please note that in the above mentioned example OPEC could also be a rootkeyword by itself and its entry may look something like this:

OPEC: International Economic Organisation (BT), Middle East (RT), Oil prices (RT); CED: U14; UYN: T010(R); AIC: 531.

(The numbers given above are arbitrary and fictitious).