

## Grey literature for development: Some case studies

**Bharati Sen**

*SHPT School of Library Science, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, India*

Grey literature refers to publications issued by government, academia, business, and industry, in both print and electronic formats, but not controlled by commercial publishing interests, and where publishing is not the primary business activity of the organization. Newsletters, reports, working papers, theses, government documents, bulletins, fact sheets, conference proceedings and other publications distributed free, available by subscription, or for sale comprises grey literature (Weintraub 2000) Non-profit organizations and interest groups keep their members informed via a myriad of newsletters and special publications that help shape public opinion. At the turn of the century, documents evolving out of research and development, particularly from the aircraft and aeronautics industries were a very important means of communicating the results of research testing. However, it was the onslaught of World War II, which had the greatest impact on report literature, transforming it into "a major means of communication" (Augur 1989).

The hallmark of that war was the development of technologically-advanced weaponry, from sophisticated tanks to the atomic bomb. These breakthroughs in science made accurate and speedy communications a necessity. The technical report was widely used to disseminate information (White 1984). The decades that followed saw the continuation of staggering amounts of scientific and technological research, which was amassed to improve both military and communication systems.

Generally grey literature has been a major source of information for scientific and technical research and studies. Today however, the importance of grey literature in social sciences and their role in national development is being recognized all over the world. The rise of evidence based policy making in social fields has led to growing 'what works' from existing documented knowledge.

According to Grayson and Gomersall (2003), evidence based policy making (EBP), is a relatively new term. In the policy arena the evidence informed approach embodies several strands of activity, for example the piloting of initiatives, combined with *ex post* or real time evaluation to test their value and effectiveness. However, in recent years there has been increasing emphasis on the review of documented past experience, generally as a guide to 'what works'.

The rationale behind this amassing and assessing of evidence is because:

- There is little that is truly new in this world, either problems or solutions.
- A lot of time and effort is wasted on reinventing wheels.
- Too little is invested in making full use of research findings by placing them into context with other similar studies, and identifying strong messages.
- It is sensible to take advantage of past experience and knowledge, not just for lessons about 'what works' and 'what doesn't work', but 'why and in what contexts'.

A citation study by Ramadevi, Takalkar & Faras (2000) found that the number of citations relating to grey literature and the number of citations of grey references are increasing. Analysis of the articles published in the Journal of Rural Development (India) indicated the importance of and demand for grey literature.

As primary sources grey literature provides un-interpreted, first hand accounts or evidence of an event or experience. These sources contain information or data and are usually written at the time of the event or research. They are usually the original source of information and allow the researcher to analyze a topic without another person's interpretation

The present study is an outcome of the researcher's participation in number of projects that very clearly showed the importance of grey literature in development and the need to organize and create access for future researchers, grass root workers and activists.

### **Case Study I: Generation of grey literature *Earthquake in Kutch***

In the year 2001 an earthquake measuring 6.9 to 7.9 on the Richter scale struck the district of Kutch in the state of Gujarat, India. The day was 26<sup>th</sup> January, celebrated as Republic Day in India. Damage to life and property was immense. The rescue, relief and rehabilitation work that followed heavily depended on information of various categories and at various levels of functioning

Being a consultant for a documentation team that worked in Kutch, after the devastating earthquake the researcher found a number of NGOs working .to collect and disseminate information to the stakeholders – information regarding health, housing, education etc. - stakeholders being government agencies and officials at different levels, NGOs and the local community.

Responses to large disaster events are likely to involve a large number of agencies and teams that create severe pressure on requirements for interoperability and cooperation. With numerous agencies wanting to help Kutch, co-ordination became essential. The Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and corporate houses did not know where to work, how to work. Some corporate houses did not know how to deal with local