

# Advancing Sustainable Development through Public Libraries: An Indian Knowledge System Approach

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## Abstract

This research aims to explore how public libraries across India contribute to sustaining development through the Integration of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into the services, activities and community engagement of their members. The focus of this research is on understanding how successfully libraries have been in providing sustainable education, and raising environmental, cultural and heritage awareness and preservation through supporting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The research used a qualitative methodology to examine library and policy records of libraries across India, and other literature pertinent to IKS and libraries. The results of the data collected indicate that many libraries throughout India have initiated programs that are focused on the preservation of cultural traditions, traditional crafts, the awareness of cultural and historical heritage, and, more specifically, environmental education utilizing locally Indigenous knowledge. These initiatives are important because they provide a mechanism for communities to reconnect with their heritage and develop the skills and understanding necessary for a more sustainable lifestyle. The strength of the connection made between traditional wisdom and modern-day needs of the community, through IKS by libraries, creates a system of Local Indigenous Knowledge that facilitates the learning journey for communities, Cultural Awareness and Environmental Responsibility.

**Keywords:** Public Libraries, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Indian Knowledge System (IKS).

## 1. Introduction

Public libraries have an important function to promote sustainable development at the international level, aligning with the UN 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Libraries have been recognised by the IFLA for their contributions in supporting a number of urgent global priorities including equitable access to information, quality education, reducing inequalities and creating sustainable communities through the provision of digital access and opportunities for lifelong learning (Sultan, R., 2024). In India, Public libraries also align with the National Focus on the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) as articulated in stories of the National Education Policy 2020, the National Manuscript Mission

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and the National Digital Library of India (Sultan, R., 2024). Public libraries are essential in promoting sustainable development as they are centres where everyone has free access to all types of information, and through their ability to educate individuals about environmental, social and cultural issues, they preserve our heritage for future generations. Public Libraries have a duty to protect the unique and priceless cultural and indigenous knowledge that exists and have the potential to maintain the continued importance of these resources within current and future development efforts. Public Libraries promote lifelong learning for all individuals, empower individuals and communities to act responsibly and effectively within democratic processes, support the development of social inclusion, and support the development of a thriving economy through job creation and other means.

In the Indian context, Public Libraries are a vital means of linking the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to the history and tradition of a people. "Public Libraries as Sustainable Development Hubs: A Visionary Perspective" (Swamy, P., Vidhya Giri, et.al.;2025) describes how public libraries operate in India within an ecosystem of knowledge formed by the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) which is a combination of indigenous knowledge, science, philosophy, and community knowledge systems. By aligning with the principles associated with Sustainable Development Public Libraries become agents of change by creating an understanding of the environment, education for all, equitable access to education and technology, systems of preserving cultural heritage, and building resilient communities.

Thus, the Indian public library system serves as a vital link between the modern Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the rich knowledge and wisdom of the traditional Indian peoples. By connecting the two, it can create a synergy and balance between innovation and heritage, technology and culture, global and local, and modern and traditional.

## **2. Literature Review**

According to Panda (S) and Sharma (R) (2025), "Sustainable Development Goals and Green Libraries" provides an extensive review of libraries' roles in relation to the evolving responsibility of libraries in supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those using environmentally conscious practices. Through this review, the authors have shown that library collections are shifting away from the traditional notion that libraries are merely places where people go to check out books—now, libraries serve a new role as dynamic institutions both committed to supporting the development of sustainable infrastructure and digital initiatives while also providing community-based programs. Libraries now not only serve as repositories of knowledge but have also developed ways of reducing their ecological footprint through creating programs that increase people's understanding of social equity, equity through sustainability, and sustainable living. In addition, the authors discuss the challenges and opportunities presented to green library initiatives. In order for libraries to engage in transformative activities as partners in global efforts toward creating a more sustainable future, collaboration, technological support, and an environment of policy support are essential.

According to Mali, T. S., & Deshmukh, R. K. (2025) “Role of Library in Preservation of Indian Knowledge System,” libraries will continue to play a vital role in preserving India’s Knowledge System (IKS) through collecting and preserving manuscripts, classical texts, philosophical writings, and scientific literature that highlight the various aspects of India’s IKS. The authors note that libraries continue this role today by participating in national efforts such as the National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM), the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), and the National Digital Library of India (NDLI). Through digitization projects, conservation practices, and the development of user-friendly digital collections, libraries help safeguard these materials while making them more widely accessible to scholars and the public.

Furthermore, Swamy, Vidhya Giri and Rao (2025) examine the expanding role of public libraries as critical nucleation centres of sustainable development in the local communities. Their finding deepens the view that modern public libraries are changing their roles from the tradition to actively taking part in inclusive education, digital literacy, community resilience, and social equity, and thus are closely related to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Public libraries in cities are leading the extent of promoting public engagement and environmental sustainability as they are environmental sustainability activities all around the world, as well as sponsoring through community programs, workshops, and programs engagements with NGOs, educational institutions. They also work with local governments to foster the just and peaceful distribution and management of public goods in the world. In this way, libraries contribute purposely towards developing more sustainable, egalitarian, and resilient societies.

Banerjee, S (2024) boldfaced the existing library network that connects to the larger aim of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in India. The review first begins to get under the skin of the Indian SDG Index set up by NITI Aayog and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) that measures India's performance across the 17 SDGs using over 300 indicators. Within this set of indicators only 62 are "priority indicators." Noteworthy here is the fact that library activity is largely unmeasured at the ancient level, which makes it impossible to concretely appreciate library contributions to the SDGs. Nevertheless, the existing measures cannot adequately epitomize the library contributions because comprehensive nationwide data on library services and societal impacts are lacking across private, public, academic, school, etc., library categories. Afterwards, the discussion then shifted to the global scholarship, with the special focus on the work of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

Upon studying the role of the National Education Policy-2020 (NEP) in the resuscitation and incorporation of the Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) into the education system in India, Kumar and Kumar (2024) found the NEP embrace to the Great Indian knowledge in accord with the contemporary academic curriculums in support of being a holistic cultural approach to schooling. This approach indicates a new way to promote a rich heritage of philosophical, artistic, scientific, ecological traditions of India by considering them as something to draw upon

and learn. The Policy also speaks about the integration of IKS at various educational levels for encouraging other types of learning, inculcating cultural pride, and augmenting students' intellectual development by synthesizing Indigenous Knowledge with contemporary education.

Shesha and Singh (2017), however, discussed that the Indian academic libraries are increasingly involved in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations in their paper titled "Role of Indian Academic Libraries in Advancing SDGs." They proposed that these libraries are instrumental in promoting SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) on the back of both local and international research. It was concluded that academic libraries ought to be recognized as important allies in the broader quest for a sustainable and inclusive development that focuses on fair access to information, the development of digital and information literacy, inclusive learning spaces, cooperation, and knowledge exchange.

According to Mandavkar (2023), Indian Knowledge System (IKS) highlights the trove of traditional knowledge that India has been preserving through the Vedas and Upanishads, as well as through indigenous practices. As a result, the research identifies IKS as existing throughout various human fields, including philosophy, arts, science, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and social ethics, all of which sprout and grow to their present shapes within cultural heritage. Yet it underscores the holistic educational avenues of IKS, insisting that deep understanding and self-directed learning come through instruction that combines listening, reflection, dialogue, and practical training.

Panda and Das (2022) conducted a preliminary study to highlight the role of public libraries in the promotion of social sustainability as defined by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study emphasized the ever-growing recognition of these libraries as crucial social institutions that guarantee source access for equitable information, community participation, and inclusive growth. They claim that public libraries contribute to social sustainability by supporting lifelong learning among members of society, empowering minoritized groups, promoting social inclusion, and offering safe and accessible public spaces. Libraries are a key tool in shaping citizenry and, by extension, shaping informed citizenship since they give access to reliable resources and digital tools, hence enabling active community participation.

IFLA (2021) discusses the specific roles of libraries in terms of progressing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) inasmuch as sufficient evidence suggests that every library contributes incredibly to the SDGs. Therefore, libraries contribute to promoting knowledge and literacy (SDG 4.6), providing good education and reducing inequality (SDG 4.5), and passionately pursuing links that can develop human environment relationships (SDG 4a). Being close partners in any process of policy development, libraries have access to information and can help people and communities understand this information and also promote lifelong learning opportunities for the people and groups who need them even more than others. The same argument suggests that the role libraries play combines elements of sustainable communities, digital and information literacy (SDGs 4.7 and 5.6), inclusiveness (SDGs 5.5 and

10.2), and accountable and effective service delivery (SDGs 16.6 and 16.7). It is only a backdrop, leading the session or conversation, guaranteed.

Ansari, M. S. (2019): According to Role of Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) in Preservation and Protection of Indigenous Medicinal Knowledge of India, TKDL is mentioned as a pioneering effort in the protection of India's vast traditional medicinal knowledge from bio-piracy and undue patenting. We see that TKDL digitizes and has a systematic arrangement of the classical texts of Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Sowa Riga and Yoga. These texts are also translated into five major international languages- English, French, German, Spanish, and Japanese-so as to make prior knowledge accessible and comprehensive to the patent authorities throughout the world.

In 'Traditional Knowledge Digital Library: A Distinctive Approach to Protect and Promote Indian Indigenous Medicinal Treasure', Sen, S and Chakraborty, R. (2014) discuss the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) as a unique and pioneering initiative saving the rich Indian heritage of medicinal knowledge traditional to India. TKDL Digitalizes and catalogues select classical texts available in the systems of Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Sowa Rigpa, and Yoga to facilitate translation to the five major international languages, rendering the classical texts accessible and understandable by patent examiners globally-thus preventing the problems associated with linguistic diversity and formatting that had earlier deviated the potential recognition of knowledge from India.

Rahman, Z., Basak, D. K., (2013), in *Library, Democracy, and Sustainable Development: The Role of Public Libraries in India*, argue that public libraries serve as the foundation of democracy and key players in sustainable development of India. In addition, their article lends credence to research that finds that information is the key to citizen participation-that library, if not by being the only gateway to information, provide it for fair engagement. Socially framed in terms of democracy, the authors present public libraries as the very frontiers of equity, given their principled mission to provide information, especially the marginalized and the rural. The literature further points out that the libraries are the seedbed of sustainable development by promoting education, literacy, and lifelong learning concepts that facilitate further promotion of a society and economic prosperity. In the interim, the review lists the perpetuating challenges like insufficient government aid, financial crisis, and poor physical infrastructure inhibiting the potential working of the libraries to their fullest capability. Authors advocate modernization, digital inclusion, and community involvement as the way to move toward strengthening the transformative energy generated by Indian public libraries for social change and sustainable growth.

Maina, C. K. (2012) provides an insightful examination of the connection between Library and Information Science (LIS) and the management and preservation of traditional knowledge (TK). The review positions traditional knowledge as a vital cultural and epistemological resource that requires approaches different from those applied to conventional knowledge systems. The study highlights various understandings of "knowledge," emphasizing its dynamic, human-centered nature, which encompasses personal beliefs, experiences, and



community practices. This perspective aligns with LIS scholarship that views knowledge not merely as information, but as something deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts, making its organization, preservation, and dissemination more complex.

## 2. Public Libraries and Sustainable Development

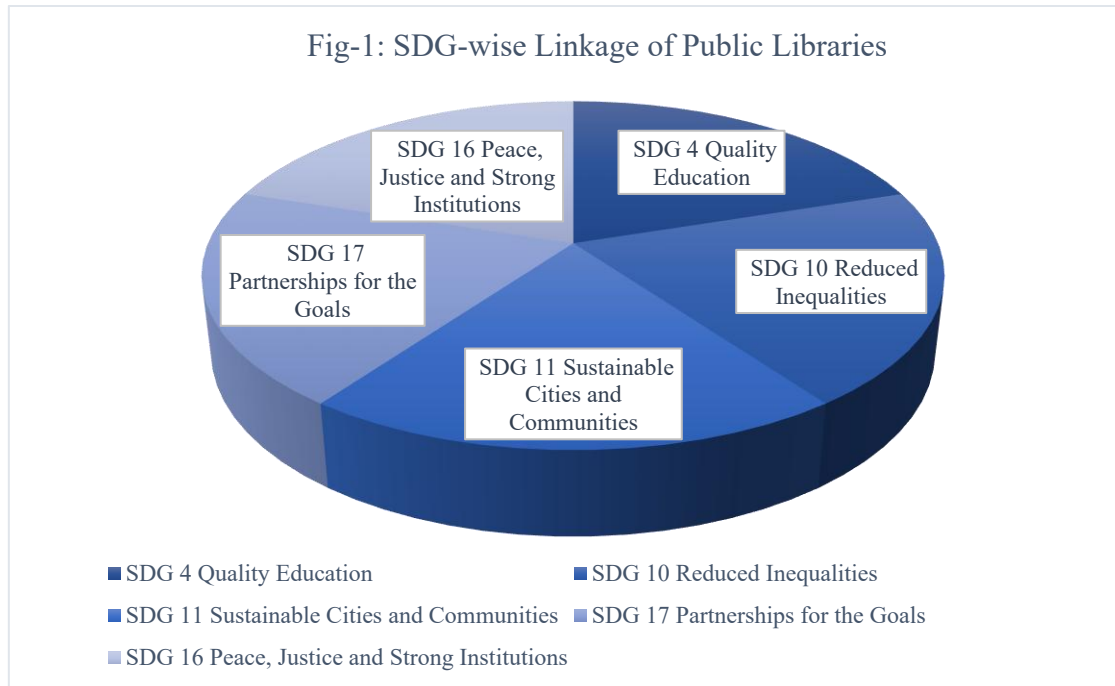


Figure 1: SDG-wise Linkage of Public Libraries

**Source: Author's conceptual framework based on UN SDGs (2015)**

Figure 1 presents the linkage between public libraries and selected Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has 17 goals, many of which closely relate to public libraries' roles and services. Public libraries also directly contribute to SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) and could be supported through library initiatives. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Promoting literacy and lifelong learning under SDG 4: Public libraries offer digital tools, and resources on lifelong learning and skills development options.
- Reducing inequalities: It is these libraries which play a monumental role in reaching those marginalized populations-in particular, rural communities and indigenous groups.

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is the inheritance and practice of a rich variety of customs and traditional knowledge that belongs to Indigenous traditions, which continues to be passed down from one generation to the next to sustain and maintain their existence in dignity and happiness. Our ancestors' keen observations of their environment in combination with

thoughtful reflections enabled them to recognize how different natural elements of the earth came to correlate; the practice of solutions to varied problems within the day-to-day life of the populace embracing a countless number of species; the maintenance-related system of nature created transparency as well as harmony; the system emerged for the renewal of the phenomena to produce cycle again. Any alteration of the usually predictable rhythm would mean havoc with the phenomenon for eternity and nature; a sustainable circulation of rewards would come to a halt forever, gray days would greet his future if the ocean of life was like hell, the creation would cease to amuse itself, and as an unbearable burden of expectation energy would abandon.

1. Ethical and philosophical frameworks: Concepts such as Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world as one family), the balance of the Panchmahabhutas (five elements), and the process of Swaraj (spiritual order of self-governance and responsibility).
2. Cultural and artistic heritage: This encompasses folk literature, performing arts, and oral traditions that perpetuate wisdom from one generation to the next.
3. IKS is largely influenced by the principle of sustainability, which promotes a symbiotic coexistence with nature, community well-being, and basing development on ecological equilibrium. The principles of IKS provide location-specific frameworks that could tackle the challenges of modern times related to health, environmental management, education, and community involvement.

### **2.3 Research Gap**

The research community has seriously addressed the contributions of libraries towards SDGs, and to some extent, particularly emphasized IKS. There still exists a noticeable void when it comes to linking public libraries with regard to the promotion and conservation of IKS for sustainable development in the academic world. This study tries to fill this gap by looking at how the public libraries overlap with the IKS and how they can synergize for the achievement of the sustainable development goals in a culturally meaningful and contextually proper manner.

### **3. Objectives of the Study**

- To examine the role of public libraries in supporting sustainable development.
- Determine from IKS' perspective the sustainability model on which to build.
- Develop ideas on how public libraries can build IKS while being pro-actively engaged in SDGs.
- Propose a model for building libraries as IKS-based sustainable development connectivity points.

### **4. Methodology**

A research method was employed in this particular study which holds a qualitative research perspective and includes the following methods:

- The contents of library policies, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) frameworks and the literature on Indian Knowledge System (IKS) were analysed.
- Case studies and best practices from public libraries across India with specific reference to SDGs were reviewed.
- Conceptual analysis for strategies to integrate IKS at the cultural level into the public libraries' initiatives.
- In response, the data are entirely taken from secondary sources and established theoretical frameworks. No primary data were collected.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

### 5.1 Public Libraries Promote Sustainable Development

SN NO	Library & Place	Type / Scale	How it supports sustainable development (examples)
1	Delhi Public Library (DPL), Delhi	Large public-library network (37 branches) under Ministry of Culture	Free membership, multi-language & Braille collections → SDG 4 (education), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities).
2	Hare Krushna Mahtab State Library, Bhubaneswar, Odisha	State + city public library	Serves as Odisha state library + Bhubaneswar public library → supports higher education, civil-service exam prep, general literacy.
3	State Central Library, Kerala (Thiruvananthapuram Public Library)	One of India's oldest public libraries (1829)	Long tradition as a people's library; children's wing, digital services → lifelong learning, heritage, community space.
4	Visakhapatnam Public Library, Dwarka Nagar, Andhra Pradesh	City-level public library	Free services, Wi-Fi, study rooms & community events – “best place for job seekers” → skills, employability, SDG 8.
5	Nagaland State Library, Kohima	Metropolitan state library	Receives NML grants for e-resources; promotes reading habits, especially youth, with free reading facilities → reduces regional inequality.
6	State Central Library, Hyderabad (Telangana)	State Central Library, Hyderabad (Telangana)	Massive collection incl. rare manuscripts; digitisation projects → knowledge preservation + digital heritage.



7	State Central Library, Kolkata (West Bengal)	State Central Library, Kolkata (West Bengal)	Serves millions through state & district network → broad-based educational & informational support.
8	Dr Francisco Luís Gomes District Library, Magaro, Goa	Modern district public library	Acts as a model district-level hub: reading spaces, children's services → supports SDG 4 in South Goa.
9	Nalanda Complex Central Libraries, various cities in Chhattisgarh	New network of large central libraries & reading spaces	Purpose-built libraries in multiple districts to support youth in remote/affected areas → regional equity, SDG 4 & SDG 16.
10	All NML Model State & District Libraries (35 State Central + 35 District Libraries nationwide)	Model Library" component of National Mission on Libraries (NML)	Grants and ICT upgrades to state & district public libraries to improve infrastructure, e-resources & accessibility → system-level boost to sustainable, inclusive library services across India.

**Source:** Author's conceptual framework based on Govt. Official Website/Wikipedia

After reviewing data from official websites and verified sources such as Wikipedia, it is clear that public libraries in India make a significant contribution to sustainable development. The libraries I selected 10 in total demonstrate how these institutions promote equitable and inclusive access to information. Major public libraries like the Delhi Public Library, Hare Krushna Mahtab State Library, the State Central Library in Kerala, and the Visakhapatnam Public Library advance SDG 4 by offering extensive reading spaces, digital facilities, and resources that support lifelong learning. Institutions such as Delhi Public Library and Nagaland State Library help address SDG 10 by providing multilingual services, Braille materials, and free membership, ensuring outreach to marginalized groups. Heritage-rich libraries in Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Kerala safeguard rare manuscripts, thereby contributing to cultural preservation under SDG 11. Meanwhile, libraries in Goa, Chhattisgarh enhance employability and civic awareness, aligning with SDG 8 and SDG 16. The National Mission on Libraries (NML) strengthens these efforts through nationwide ICT improvements. Collectively, these libraries create a strong foundation for an informed, equitable, and sustainably growing society. Providing equitable access to Information, Knowledge resources, and digital tools for all section of society.

## 5.2 Contribution of Indian Knowledge System (IKS) Principles to Sustainability

The study highlights that the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) provides a holistic and culturally rooted framework for sustainability. IKS emphasizes living in harmony with nature, community-cantered lifestyles, ethical use of resources, and long-term ecological balance. Its key contributions include:

- **Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK):** Practices related to sustainable agriculture, water conservation, and biodiversity management.
- **Indigenous health systems:** Approaches such as Ayurveda and Yoga that focus on preventive care and sustainable well-being.
- **Social philosophies:** Principles like Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world as one family) that encourage collective responsibility and community welfare.

According to the IKS Division of AICTE (2021), indigenous knowledge traditions are inherently sustainable and provide context-specific solutions to contemporary environmental and social challenges.

These findings suggest that IKS can serve as a strong foundational framework for sustainable development education and practice, especially when integrated into modern community institutions.

### **5.3 Integration of IKS in Public Libraries to Support SDGs**

The study identifies several strategies through which public libraries can incorporate the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into their programs and services to strengthen sustainable development outcomes:

1. **IKS Knowledge Corners:** Developing dedicated sections with resources on Ayurveda, Yoga, traditional agriculture, folk literature, and ecological practices.
2. **Digitizing Local Knowledge:** Recording oral histories, indigenous practices, and traditional crafts to preserve and provide broader access to community knowledge.
3. **Community Workshops:** Organizing sessions on topics such as sustainable farming, medicinal plants, traditional water management, and cultural practices.
4. **Collaborations with IKS Institutions:** Partnering with research organizations, cultural bodies, and universities for content development, training, and knowledge exchange.
5. **Educational Programs:** Implementing storytelling, value-based learning, and cultural activities inspired by traditional Indian pedagogical approaches.

These initiatives directly support SDGs such as SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action), integrating cultural and environmental knowledge into public library services to actively engage communities.

The findings suggest that integrating IKS into public library programs supports the continuation of India's cultural legacy and improves sustainable development literacy, creating a stronger link between traditional knowledge and modern community needs.

### **5.4 Proposed Model: Public Libraries as IKS-Based Sustainable Development Hubs**

Drawing on the literature review and case studies, this study proposes a conceptual framework for positioning public libraries as hubs for sustainable development grounded in the Indian

Knowledge System (IKS). The model consists of four interconnected components as reflected in the figure below.

The model focuses on preserving Indigenous Knowledge Systems by digitizing and creating multilingual collections of traditional manuscripts and community histories. It promotes sustainability education through workshops, exhibitions, and reading programs that highlight environmental awareness and traditional ecological knowledge. The model emphasizes community engagement by involving local practitioners and supporting livelihood skills rooted in traditional knowledge. It also ensures inclusive access by using digital platforms, mobile libraries, and digital literacy initiatives to reach rural and marginalized communities. This model emphasizes the integration of cultural heritage, environmental sustainability, and inclusive education, positioning public libraries as vital centres for community-based sustainable development while preserving and promoting India's traditional knowledge.

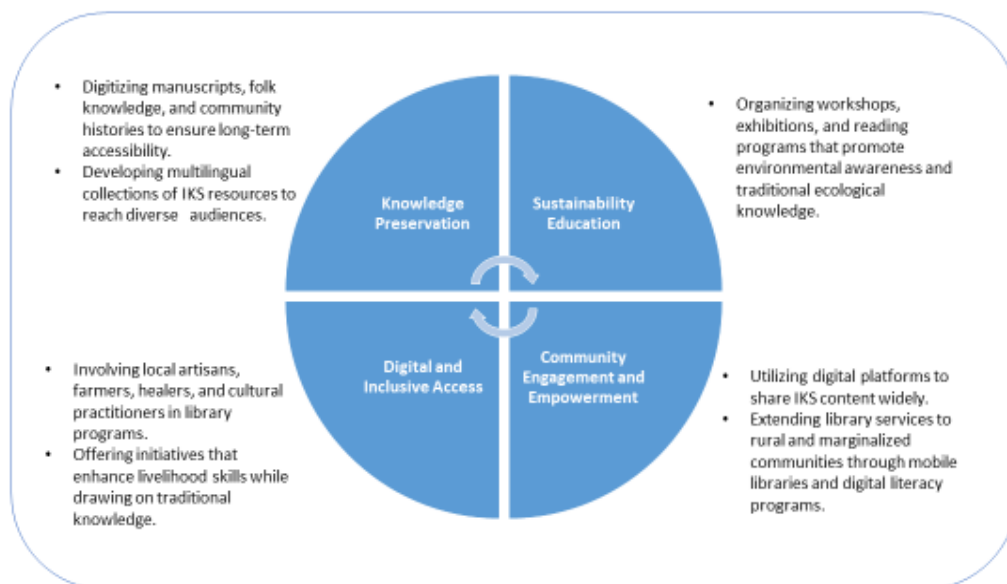


Fig-2: Model of Public Libraries as IKS-Based Sustainable Development Hub

## 6. Conclusion

Public libraries can act as focal centres of sustainable development when combined with IK. Libraries support education, information and learning, among other activities, and, when combined with IKS, will further support the SDGs. There are also very clear propositions that could become innumerable in scale, such as creating dedicated IKS resources, encouraging active community participation and equipping librarians with the appropriate skill. Strengthening the library system through policy support has been the tradition of creating such centres for IKS forward sustainable development.

Generally, it would follow from the research that the integration of public library services and the IKS principle would construct a much stronger and more holistic process of sustainability in India, one that establishes a link between heritage and innovation and that signifies community and knowledge for a sustainable future.

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