

## Disaster Preparedness in Libraries : a study based on the museum library of Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

*This research is conducted to identify the Disaster Preparedness in National Museum Library of Sri Lanka. Disaster preparedness is essential on the part of each library or archive. Disaster preparedness prevents response to damage caused by water, fire and other emergencies. This activity should be a priority in all institutions, the reason is because of the value of the collection, but although collections that are not meant to be stored for long are institutional investments, therefore must be saved. Disasters in libraries come in two main forms, namely natural and man-made. The museum library which has a largest collection in Sri Lanka. The main objective of this study is to identify the disasters influenced to the museum library of Sri Lanka related to the library building, staff, collection and recognized current disaster preparedness actions. The museum library of Sri Lanka is used as the sample. The questionnaire and interview were used as the instruments in this study to collect data. Data analysis is carried out using the word software. End of the research this study discovered not there a formal disaster management plan in this library and there is not a good support of the mother institute, financial constraints and an inadequate policy framework, less resources are reasons for that. It is recommended that library development plan for disaster management training programs for staff order to increase their preparedness about disasters and make a disaster management plan.*

**Keywords :** *Disaster Management , preparedness , Museum Library , Library Management*

### Introduction

A disaster is , “any incident which threatens human safety and / or damages or threatens to damage ,a library’s buildings , collections , contents , facilities or services”(Mathews & Eden,1996:4)Various disaster related issues impacting libraries , some context must be established by way of historical background. In 2005, prior to Hurricane Katrina , historic presentation and the institute of library services partnered to conduct an extensive survey of libraries throughout the united states to determine the overall “health” of collection.

Library disasters have the unique quality of being both unexpected and inevitable. Disasters can be caused by nature. These include floods, earthquakes and tornadoes. Disasters can be caused by man. These include civil unrest, arson and vandalism. While we tend to think of disasters as large scale events, most disasters will be smaller in scope, much less newsworthy such roof leakages, termite activities, yet just as destructive. Libraries and archives are bedeviled by everyday assaults: leaking roofs, dripping pipes, a moldy book returned by a patron, a small fire set in the book return, a window left open during a night of pouring rain.

People generally think of disasters as events that occur suddenly, causing damage in a matter of seconds, hours or days. Some disasters, however, occur so slowly, that we suddenly realize we are in a disaster that has been underway for some time and may continue for an extended period of time. The cumulative damage may not be known for years and the public may not be aware or concerned until the damage reaches crisis proportions- building cracks, rodents, termites and insect activities.

Disaster preparedness make libraries more useful because access to information is maintained so they can

provide access to information for future generation.

### **Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to identify the disasters influenced to the museum library of Sri Lanka related to the library building, staff, collection and recognized current disaster preparedness actions. Other objectives are,

- Determine the level of staff sensitization and awareness on disaster preparedness of the library.
- Investigate why the management of the institute is not interested in developing a disaster management plan.
- Highlight the importance of disaster management plan

### **Methodology**

The method of study is qualitative case study. The research was carried out using national museum library of Sri Lanka. Primary data were collected from questionnaire consisting of librarian in this library. When submitting the questionnaire, a three pages questionnaire with simple questions was presented. The questionnaire was given the opportunity to present the questions in the correct and italic ways and to express his ideas in word. Further to that, conducted an interview with librarian to collect some data. The study can clearly identify the disaster preparedness actions related to the library building, staff, and collection.

### **Results and recommendations**

There is a likely-hood of fire as the collections are mostly organic in nature. Once fire starts, it is difficult to save those materials which get fire. Items not directly engulfed in flames can be charred by soot and smoke. Heat emitted from fire causes buildings to shrink and wrap and plastic base materials to melt. Water used for fighting fire can cause enormous damage. Besides fire, floods, high winds, cyclones, earth quakes are also agents of deterioration for the library collections. These will lead documents to absorb water, swell, warp and become extremely vulnerable to physical damage. Dyes and ink may bleed and book pages stick together. Leather bindings seriously wrap and change shape. Effects of disasters on library collections are too obvious to comprehend.

The results of the questionnaire and interview were summarized. According to them, the museum libraries in Sri Lanka still do not have a formal disaster management plan. The collection is destroying day by day. But they are not stored electronically and it appears there are not enough disaster management practices. Not only that, there is not enough subject knowledge of disaster management, not a good support of the mother institute, negligence of the staff, financial constraints and less resources are reasons for that. There was nonexistence of the library without disaster management plan.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were advanced:

- The formal disaster management plan of a library is made up of a compilation of smaller plans that must be crafted with the support of library staff. It should contain clear, short and precise instruction and be readily available to all employee, especially the disaster management team.
- Librarian should ensure adequate sensitization of all staff on disaster preparedness at all times. Creating disaster consciousness among library staff will make all the difference during disaster situations.
- Should start the electronically material stored programs
- The roof of the library buildings should be checked before and during the rainy season in order to repair leaking spots so that water seepage will be stopped or reduced to protect materials.
- Should establish disaster response teams who would implement their disaster plans. They should hold regular compulsory staff awareness and training sessions as supported by Ogden (1999); Adinku (2003); and Hasenay and Kritalic(2010).

## **Conclusion**

Disaster preparedness prevents response to damage caused by fire, water and other emergencies. Staff of the museum library of Sri Lanka was not sensitized at all on disaster preparedness. The activities of insects, termites and rodents constitute major threats to the safety of library resources. The study showed that library has not a formal disaster management plan, disaster response team, staff training programs and library had no insurance policy for their resources. There is no substitute for good preparedness when it comes to disaster response. But library need to disaster management plan and should ensure adequate sensitization of all staff on disaster preparedness at all times.

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