

Disaster Mitigation in Libraries: A study based on the National Museum Library of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Libraries must play a vital role in society. As a developing country Sri Lanka is facing the challenges of the protection of Library collection, life of readers and staff as well as property. Because disaster management has become an essential part of the library. The main objective of this study is to identify the physical resources and human resources which are vulnerable for disasters of the museum Library of Sri Lanka and disaster management activities and to present a suitable disaster management action for the library. Other objectives are to investigate why the management of the institute was not interested in developing a disaster management plan, investigate why the management of the institute was not interested in developing a disaster management plan, to identify the mitigation problems of frequently-use collections in museum library of Sri Lanka and Highlight the importance of disaster management plan. The museum Library of Sri Lanka is used as the sample. Relevant data was collected from the respondents using several methods which included observation, face to face interviews and document reviews. The collected data was analyzed, interpreted, and presented using qualitative methods. The findings revealed that as the largest library collection in Sri Lanka, had taken several simple actions to protect their collection. But we can't be satisfied about that. Because they are facing some problems. Such as there is no written policy on disaster mitigation in the library, lack of adequate facilities, inadequate fund allocation to libraries and lack of interest on the part of some disaster management issues. It was recommended that disaster mitigation facilities and funds to avert disaster should be provided for the government,

to have mitigation and disaster management policy and ensure they are adhering to and provide guidelines to the use and management of libraries.

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

Introduction

Libraries are gateways of knowledge. Libraries must play a vital role in society. Libraries of the word have faced a lot of disasters in the last few years. Disaster means sudden and terrible accident. It can strike at any time at any place. Disasters in the library context can be either natural or man-made. Natural disasters are generally induced by such events as floods, cyclones, Tsunami, and earthquakes. Man-made disasters include wars, rioting, malicious damage to materials, negligence, armed conflict, terrorism etc. No one knows when and how disasters come. In this situation libraries need to have a properly developed disaster management plan including disaster mitigation.

A disaster is "A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses that exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources." -WHO, 1998-

Disaster management encompasses all management issues necessary to deal with incidents that threaten library buildings, collections, services, and human lives. Since libraries of today are technology-driven, many nascent disasters are evolving. For instance, changes in energy systems and lack of electricity supply endanger traditional library materials, just as digital materials are useless without energy supply. No libraries are immune to these disasters; depicting that any of them could befall any library any moment since it is totally inescapable without appropriate control measures.

In a disaster that has been underway for some time and may continue for an extended period. 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 mitigation makes libraries more useful because access to information is maintained so they can provide access to information for future generations. Olatokun, (2008) opined that among the essential missions of libraries, two are complementary: preservation and access preserving for the sake of preserving is useless and giving access lavishly to all documents without taking into account preservation measures will, sooner or later, lead towards making the documentary heritage inaccessible for future generations.

The IFLA activity on Preservation and Conservation (PAC) through numerous conferences and publications provides support, information, and training for disaster management (IFLA, 2010). In a similar manner, the steps for the development of a disaster management plan for libraries, according to the work of Halsted et al. (2005), include the Setting up a disaster response team, Assessing the risks, Establishing a disaster communication network, Ensuring access to financial resources, Reinforcing building security, Creating lists and collecting supplies for cases of emergency, Defining weak points, Creating an evacuation plan, Drawing up a disaster management plan, Conducting disaster exercises (preparedness exercises), Reviewing and updating the disaster management plan.

Foundation grants for preservation in libraries, archives, and museums (2010) stated that the conservation division of the Library of Congress in the United States ensures that the library's universal collection of

knowledge and creativity will still exist for future generations through adequate funding of conservation and preservation of conservation division activities.

Wong and Green (2008) write on crucial aspects of formulating a disaster management plan. The study identifies six important components in the disaster risk reduction plan that can be designed for both public and academic libraries and lists them as planning, prevention, response, recovery, preparedness, and training. The study states that so many institutions and libraries face many difficulties when it comes to disaster as they believe that disasters and unpredictable crises will not happen to them, and that this idea needs to be changed especially within the communities that access and work regarding these institutes and libraries.

Azigba and Edet (2008) said that disaster management is a dynamic process that requires good cooperation among different types of professionals. Kostagiolas et.al., (2011) stated that academic libraries in Greece have adopted a rather passive approach towards disaster preparedness, limited to a few elementary protection measures without following creative and modern methodologies to formulate an integrated disaster management plan.

Problem Statement

Mitigation seems to be a somewhat neglected area in the library and disaster management activity. In recent times many libraries within and outside Sri Lanka have been affected either by man-made or natural disasters. The museum library of Sri Lanka has not written disaster management plans and mitigation actions which we can be satisfied with. But as the largest library collection in Sri Lanka, it is one of the

national problems in Sri Lanka. Mitigation actions help to prevent, alleviate, suffering or diminish the potential effects of libraries in a disaster situation. Actions within this phase are aimed to lessen the effects of disaster on a library. The action of mitigation includes implementation of codes of building, system to protect emergency power supplies and vital communications, follow rules and regulation of land and development of libraries from disaster prone areas etc.

Objectives

The main objective

Which are vulnerable for disasters of the museum Library of Sri Lanka and disaster management activities and to present a suitable disaster management action for the library.

Other Objectives

- To investigate why the management of the institute was not interested in developing a disaster management plan.
- To identify the mitigation problems of frequently used collections in the museum library of Sri Lanka.
- Highlight the importance of disaster management plans.

Materials and Methods

The research was carried out with the use of a case study method. The main instruments for collecting data for this study were observation and face to face interview with the library staff. The study can clearly identify the disaster Mitigation actions related to the library building, staff, and collection.

Results and Discussion

The study reveals that there is no written policy on mitigation and disaster management in the Museum Library of Sri Lanka, hence it is impossible to cultivate the culture of mitigation in whole libraries in Sri Lanka, which place information materials, especially frequently used materials at a high risk for extinction. There is a likely hood of fire as the collections are mostly organic in nature. Once a fire starts, it is difficult to save those materials which get burned. 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, earthquakes 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 observation and interview were summarized. According to them, the museum library in Sri Lanka still does 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, but there is also 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 a disaster management plan.

Based on the findings of the study, 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 instructions and be readily available to all employees, especially the disaster management team. A good policy on short term to long term mitigation should be formulated, librarians should ensure adequate sensitization of all staff on disaster preparedness at all times, should create disaster consciousness among library staff will make all the difference during disaster situations, start the electronically material stored programs and 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.

Conclusion and **Recommendations**

Disaster mitigation prevents response to damage caused by fire, water and other emergencies. Staff of the museum library of Sri Lanka was not hypersensitive at all on disaster mitigation. The activities of insects, termites and rodents constitute major threats to the safety of library resources. The study showed that the library did not have a written 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 the library needs a disaster management plan and should always ensure adequate hypersensitive of all staff on disaster preparedness.

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