

Chapter 17

Disaster in Libraries in Developing Countries: The Need for Digital Preservation of Information Resources

Jerome Idiegbeyan-Ose
Covenant University, Nigeria

Goodluck Ifijeh
Covenant University, Nigeria

Julie E. Ilogho
Covenant University, Nigeria

Juliana Iwu-James
Covenant University, Nigeria

Roland Izuagbe
Covenant University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the concept disaster in libraries in developing countries and the need for digital preservation of library resources. It started with the definition of disaster as an event that produces casualties. It also highlighted the types, causes and effects of disasters in libraries. The chapter further discusses the concept of digital preservation of library materials as a viable option for disaster management. It also enumerated and discussed the various methods of digital preservation of library resources. The chapter also explains X-ray, the concept of libraries in developing countries and disaster preservation; it also discusses various challenges that developing countries face in terms of digital preservation of resources. Based on these discussions, the chapter concludes and makes recommendations so as to improve the level of library and information services as well as disaster preparedness in developing countries.

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INTRODUCTION

Disaster is the interference with the normal way of life of a society/community resulting in heavy economic, environmental, human and material resources (UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2009). According to WHO (2012), “Disaster is an occurrence disrupting normal condition of existence and causing a level of suffering that exceeds the capacity of adjustment of affected communities”. Implying that disasters do not just interrupt or interferes with normal conditions of existence, it introduces a degree of suffering that renders the affected people or communities incapable of making adjustment to normal/usual living condition. This means that disasters changes people’s living conditions from old to the new.

Disaster is a term “reserved for the actual occurrence of events that produce casualties and damage at levels exceeding a community’s ability to cope” (Lindell et al. 2006). Ottong and Ottong (2013) defined disaster as any incident which threatens human safety and/or damages, or threaten to damage, a library’s building collections (or items therein), equipment and systems” (p. 100).National Research Council of the National Academies (2007) described disaster as “events that disrupt the normal functioning of the economy and society on a long scale” Quarentelly (1985) defined disaster as a crisis situation causing wide-spread damage which far exceeds our ability to recover. From this definition disasters are called disasters because of their hazardous or catastrophic impact and capacity to overwhelm ability to recover or overcome. Thus, disaster may be predicted through the use of technology to determine the time and place of it occurrence, however, its impact can be controlled but the extent of damage cannot be determined.

Disaster causes “wide-spread damage”. This refers to the negative impact or effect of disaster on man and the environment. Disaster causes both physical and psychological damages. The physical damages include injury on people, destruction of infrastructure; equipment and the environment. The cycle of disasters is the same both for man-made or natural disasters, however, the degree (quantity and quality) of damage vary from one disaster to another. The cycle or continuum of disaster begins with level of preparedness – response – rehabilitation – reconstruction – prevention. The United Nation Statistics Division (UNSD) organized a workshop on environment statistics on May 19-23, 2008 to address the subject of natural disasters and the need for preparedness and risk management. According to UNSD (2008) natural disaster is a “...situation or event which overwhelms local capacity, necessitating a request to the national or international level for external assistance; an unforeseen and often sudden event that causes great damage, destruction and human suffering...”

Thus, library disaster may be described as a sudden event that disrupts the normal library operations involving all sections, including library routines, reference section, reader services, acquisition/development section, technical services, serials/periodical section and managerial functions. Library disaster touches on:

- The income and expenses of the library both as an organization and the personnel (workers) of the library.
- The library operations including library routines, services, orientation/training, acquisition of library and organization of collections etc.
- The physical environment- building structure, infrastructure and equipment.
- The social life of the library personnel, introducing overwhelming pain and suffering which make adaptation to changing conditions and ways of doing things very difficult.
- Introduces people to new living conditions temporarily or permanently.
- Impacts negatively on the physical and mental of the people or communities affected.

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