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Disaster Management in Central Library, Tezpur University: A Study

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Abstract:

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the state of preparedness, response and recovery strategy followed in the university library, Tezpur University, to protect and preserve library print collections from any potential disaster. Survey research method was adopted for the study. The researcher used interview and observation methods as tools to collect relevant data. Primary and secondary sources were also consulted. The study discusses briefly disaster, its types and importance of disaster management plan in university library to create awareness among library professionals and how to keep library print collections safe from any potential disaster, as a part of library management.

Key words: University Library; Disaster; Disaster Management; Disaster Management Plan; Preparedness; Disaster Preparedness.

1. Introduction:

University libraries every year invest huge amounts to select, collect, process, preserve and disseminate different form of print information sources. Thus, these libraries not only support the need of various categories of users but also conserve and preserve different form of print information sources for potential users. Being managers of the library or the custodian of these valuable information resources of the libraries, it is the prime duty of library professionals to keep these collections safe, along with the library's physical facilities, staff and users life's from any potential disaster as a part of library management.

1.1. Disaster and its types in the context of libraries

Disaster is a sudden and terrible event or occurrence. It can strike at any time and any place because of the fury of nature or folly of human without any warning. It may cause widespread casualties and loss and damage of properties, infrastructures, environment, essential services that the affected community has to respond by taking exceptional measures.

In context of libraries, Eden and Matthews (1996) described library disaster as “any incident which threatens human safety and/or damages, or threatens to damage a library’s buildings, collections (or item(s) therein), equipment and systems” (p. 6).

According to Wong and Green (2007) disasters in the library context can be either natural or manmade. Earthquakes, fires, storms, cyclones, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes etc. are examples of natural disaster and disasters resulting from human error and negligence are simply termed as man-made disaster and the most common disasters that can cause damage to libraries’ operations, services and collections are flooding, earthquakes, fire, leaks, power outages, severe weather conditions and hazardous materials incidents (p. 72).

In addition to these, “the activities of insects, termites, rodents, and roof leakages constitute major threats/risks to the safety of library resources” that could lead to a disaster (Abareh, 2014, p.45).

Thus, both natural and manmade disasters may cause serious damage and loss to library buildings, facilities, collections and can also disrupt normal library services. Therefore, library professionals should take preventive measure to minimise loss and damage from any potential risk to their respective libraries.

1.2. Disaster management in the context of libraries:

In general, disaster management is essentially a dynamic process. It encompasses the classical management functions of planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and controlling. It also involves many organizations which must work together to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from the effects of disaster. (Carter, 2008, P.XIX).

In the context of libraries, disaster management involves “the developments of a disaster plan, which can be described as a set of rehearsed actions, which will reduce the likelihood of a disaster occurring and further also reduce the extent of the damage, should a disaster occur” (Morgen and Smith, 1997, p.63).

According to Jaradat, Mziu and Ibrahim (2015) disaster management usually refers to the management of natural catastrophes such as fire, flooding, or earthquakes. Related techniques include crisis management, contingency management, and risk management. It involves preparing for a disaster before it happens, disaster response (e.g., emergency evacuation), as well as supporting and rebuilding society after natural or human-made disasters have occurred.(P.1)

Thus, in a nutshell, in the context of libraries, disaster management is a part of library management which deals with safety and security of the libraries, their staff, collections and services from any potential loss and damage through a cyclic process of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

1.3. Importance of disaster control plan.

A disaster control plan is essential in every organization, as it tells staff members what to do and what not to do when disaster strikes. Libraries are not exempted from it. Libraries need to make every effort to prepare themselves for possible disasters by analysing their situation and resources and devising disaster preparedness plan, to reduce the effect of disasters when they occur (Wong and Green(2007).

Morgan and Smith (1997) mentioned that a formal disaster plan is important not only for preventing disasters but to provide step-by-step instructions that help to eliminate panic and damage to collections in libraries.

Khalid and Dol (2015) stated that a readily available disaster manual is important so that libraries can immediately refer to the plan and make effective and timely decisions during disaster response.

Similarly, Kostagiolas et al. (2014) recommended to develop a disaster preparedness plan so that they can quickly, easily and efficiently manage disasters and risks prior to their occurrence.

Thus, a formal disaster plan is important not only for preventing disasters but to provides step-by-step instructions that help to eliminate panic and damage to collections in libraries when disaster strike.

2. Literature review:

There are plenty of print and digital literatures available which recognize the importance of disaster management, disaster control plan, disaster prevention and preparedness and post disaster recovery

Morgan and Smith (1997); Echezona et al.(2012); Rasaki (2019); Khalid and Dol (2015); Iloet al. (2020); Ahenkorah-Marfo and Borteye (2010); Ottong and Ottong(2013) in their studies have already mentioned about the non-availability of a written disaster control plan. Similarly, studies conducted by Zaveri (2012); Hussain (2019); Wani and Hussain(2017); Kaur (2016) mentioned that libraries in India are also not well prepared to meet disasters as most of the libraries do not have any written disaster management plans. It is equally true in case of North East India and more particularly in Assam as mentioned by Sharma et al. (2018). Non availability of a written disaster preparedness plan is a major concern of most of the libraries both in India and abroad.

A disaster plan should preferably be a formal, written document. It is essential that a disaster plan be formally developed, structured and documented. Morgan and Smith (1997); Khalid and Dol (2015); Ahenkorah-Marfo and Borteye (2010) Kostagiolas et.al. (2014) Hussain (2019) and Chakrabarti and Pramanik (2017) in their study mentioned that a formal written disaster control plan is essential in every organization, as it tells staff members what to do and what not to do when disaster strikes to eliminate panic, reduce the damage and destruction to their resources from any kind of disaster.

In addition to these there are plenty of literature in regard to the format, content and layout of a model disaster control plan both in India and abroad. McIlwaine (2006); Wong and Green (2007); Morgan and Smith (1997); Kostagiolas et al. (2014) and Ottong and Ottong (2013) presented a general overview of the theoretical aspects of disaster planning in libraries and a brief description of four phases in the disaster planning process. Ahenkorah-Marfo and Borteye (2010) Newman and Newman (2015) Fabunmi (2013); Khalid and Dol (2015); Hussain (2019); revealed that a comprehensive disaster control plan must include the role, duties and responsibilities of disaster management teams for successful execution, implementation and survival of any disaster planning and preparedness program. Abareh (2014) and Osunrinde and Adetunla (2018) emphasised to make deliberate efforts to insure their staff, resources and facilities with the full mandate of their parent organization, which are essential elements after completing the disaster preparedness plan.

Similarly, In India context Chakrabarti and Pramanik (2017);Hussain (2019) stated various phases and steps required for a comprehensive disaster plan and highlighted on some important facets, components and procedures, which enable library staff in bringing consciousness about disaster and disaster control plan. Gulzar (2015) highlighted the importance of disaster management committee or disaster teams. According to Bansal (2015) potential hazards, risks and threats inside and outside the library should be identified, actions related to them prioritized and strategies put in place for their removal or responding to them, to minimize their impact

Zaveri (2014) suggested a few preventive measures for libraries to treat library resources, particularly paper-based materials, photographs, Optical Disks- CDs and DVDs, Microfilm and Microfiche resources if damage happens due to water and Pathak (2019) put forwarded some

suggestive measures to minimize the cause and vulnerability to theft and mutilation of library collections in university library.

Disasters can be well managed and even be prevented if members of staff are trained and equipped adequately. Therefore, Abareh (2014) ; Ahenkorah-Marfo and Borteye (2010); Echezona et al. (2012); ; Iloa et al. (2018); Nwokedi et al. (2017); and Sharma et al. (2018) recommended for the library to have a disaster control plan and a disaster management team with fully trained professionals to coordinate all activities that are aimed at preventing, fighting, and managing disasters when they occur.

3. Statement of the problem:

By nature, library print materials are vulnerable to disasters of various kinds. These valuable resources of libraries may get lost and damaged at any time because of both natural and manmade disasters. Assam is highly vulnerable in respect to both manmade and natural disasters. Floods, fires and earthquakes are the greatest threats to Assam. In addition to these, political or social unrest and regional tensions have becoming regular features in recent years. After going through existing literature, it is observed that there are plenty of literature which recognised the need and value of disaster control plan in library. In spite of this, disaster management is still a neglected part in university libraries of Assam. So, there is a need for further research to find out the reasons of poor disaster management university libraries in Assam.

4. Objectives of the study:

The general objective of the study is to

- i. To investigate the staff awareness about potential disasters which may cause loss and damage to print collections Central Library, Tezpur University.
- ii. To investigate the availability of disaster management plan/policy, disaster response team, structured staff training programmes and insurance policy for print information sources in the Central Library, Tezpur University.
- iii. To investigate the prevailing preparedness, response and recovery strategy followed in the university library to protect and preserve print collections from disaster in the Central Library, Tezpur University.
- ii.. To ascertain the availability of response equipment and to investigate the maintenance and inspection frequency of disaster fighting equipments in the Central Library, Tezpur University.
- iv. To investigate the challenges faced by the library professionals while planning and implementing disaster management for library print collections in the Central Library, Tezpur University.

5. Methodology

The study adopted the survey design method using interview and observation methods for collecting data on the prevailing preparedness, response and recovery strategy followed in the university library, Tezpur University. The researcher consulted primary and secondary sources related to different aspects of disaster management, in order to support the research problem. The librarian and library staff working on permanent basis in the library formed the population of this study, because they are the key persons in introducing and implementing the library policy.

6. Scope and limitations of the study:

Disaster management is a vast subject for research. It is important to note that each library has different needs and operates under different circumstances and conditions. Therefore, in order to

access the prevailing preparedness, response and recovery strategy followed in the university library reserchers selected university library,Tezpur university of Assam. University libraries and other institute of national importance located in other parts of Assam are left out from the study because of time constraints.

7. Significance of the study:

It is hoped. this study will help university library professionals to recognise the importance of disaster management in university library and to create awareness about risks, threats and hazards to library print collection that may be caused due to disaster. Further, this study will also contribute to the literature on disaster preparedness and help university library professionals interested in disaster management related issues.

8. Findings of the study:

Findings of the study revealed that by and large disaster management is still a neglected part of library management in the Central Library, Tezpur University. Most of the library staff other than top level professionals were not aware about the risks, threats and hazards that may lead to disaster and may cause serious damage to library print collections.

Top library managers were very much concerned about the potential risks, threats and hazards that may be caused by flood water and earthquake and were found to be quite aware about the safety and security of print collection against vandalism and theft that may occur in the library.

The study also found that except for the earthquake resistance library building design, fire suppression systems (i.e. Fire extinguisher), CCTV, security system for protection against vandalism and destruction, no other significant preparedness to fight potential disaster was observed in the Central Library Tezpur university.

Inspection and maintenance of electrical equipment for problems that may be caused due to human negligence and seepage that may cause due to heavy rainwater are carried out regularly.

In regard to salvaging, library staff were not aware about salvaging of partly damaged that may be caused especially due to water and fire and no formal initiative has been made so far to train the library staff in this regard.

Binding of damage book, i.e. damage cause due to frequent used ,bindings of back volume journals and dusting and cleaning, are a regular activities of central library, Tezpur University and carried out at a regular interval, as a part of preservation and conservation policy of print collections.

It was found that library staff were aware about the existence of fire fighting equipment and aware about the purpose of these equipment and few selective library staff were trained to operate these equipments in any emergency situation. It is also found that staff orientation and training programme were held for awareness of library staff. Findings also revealed that except as a part of institutional insurance policy for library print collection, there is no written disaster control plan and no disaster management team in the library, which are essential elements that must exist in the library to prevent, fight, and manage disasters.

Lack of awareness about potential disaster, lack of model to serve as guide, lack of appropriate knowledge, lack of skilled manpower to plan and implement, non availability of disaster response equipments to combat disaster and training for library personnel are some major problems which always stand as hindrance to planning and implementation of disaster management in university libraries. Further, findings revealed that majority of staff of the university library surveyed were not sensitized at all on disaster preparedness and aware of potential disaster that may occurred.

Thus, disaster management, which is treated as cyclic process of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery is a neglected part of librarianship in Central library, Tezpur university.

9. Recommendations:

On the basis of the findings the following recommendations are extended:

- i. A formal disaster plan is important not only for preventing disasters but to provide step-by-step instructions that help to eliminate panic and damage to collections in libraries. Therefore, university libraries authorities should develop a disaster preparedness plan, so that they can manage disasters and risks quickly, easily and efficiently prior to their occurrence .
- ii. Disasters are better managed, when there is a management team. Therefore, library management should constitute a Disaster Management Committee(DMC) for successful execution, implementation and survival of any disaster planning and preparedness program.
- iii. Disaster management courses need to be incorporated in the course curriculum of the Library and Information Science, in order to make LIS professionals aware with the possible disaster management techniques and measures and to face the challenges and overcome the emergency situation,.
- iv. Disasters can be well managed and even be prevented if members of staff are trained and equipped adequately. Therefore university library should conduct training programme on different aspects of disaster response and recovery.
- v. University library should adequately equipt and procure more disaster management equipments to combat against disaster.
- vi. In addition to this, university library should map out a comprehensive insurance scheme with any of the reputable insurance brokers to insure their staff, collections ,facilities and services.

10. Conclusion:

Assam is highly vulnerable in respect to both manmade and natural disasters. Floods, fires and earthquakes are the greatest threats to Assam. In addition to these, political or social unrest and regional tensions have becoming regular features in recent years. Thus, it was believed that the probability of hazards in university libraries of Assam is fairly high. Print information resources may get lost and damage because of floods, fire. Therefore, to protect library print collections from horrendous natural and man-made disasters for future generation, university libraries must take the issue of disaster preparedness and management very seriously.

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