

Chapter 47

Disaster and Digital Libraries in Developing Countries: Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Digital libraries have become a modern day phenomenon. Their roles in information generation, organization, dissemination and storage cannot be overemphasized. This chapter articulates the importance of digital libraries and the need to preserve them from disasters. It highlights the causes and effects of disasters in digital libraries. Prevention and management of disasters were also discussed. Issues and challenges around information and communication technology (ICT), that has direct bearings on digital libraries and disaster management in developing countries were raised. In addition, recommendations were made on how to improve on disaster prevention and control.

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become integral part of human lives in many parts of the world today. They have become powerful tools for knowledge creation, processing and dissemination. It is therefore not surprising that information service industries like libraries have fully adopted and deployed ICT facilities in their processes and operations. It is the deployment of ICTs to

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library services that has brought about the concept of digital libraries. A digital library may be viewed simply as a library that selects, acquires, organizes, store and disseminate information resources to its users through electronic means. This view implies that most of the operations and services of digital libraries are executed through the use of ICT facilities. The development of digital libraries is relatively new in developing countries, when compared to trends in the developed world of America, Europe and parts of Asia. Digital libraries are still in experimental stage in most developing countries. Just like every other human endeavour, digital libraries (Like their traditional or conventional counterparts) are prone to disasters. However, the consequences of disasters on digital libraries are catastrophic as they are very expensive to build and maintain.

This chapter deliberates on the broad conceptual definitions and descriptions of digital libraries and disasters, with identification of various issues and practices as found in literature. The chapter is divided into six sections: Background, causes of disasters, effects of disasters, challenges of disaster management in developing countries, prevention and control of disasters, recommendations and conclusion.

BACKGROUND

Development is a major aspiration of every nation in today's world of global competition. Pivotal to the attainment of development is the acquisition and utilization of required information; hence Isiakpona and Ifijeh (2012) posited that information is the driver of development. The availability and accessibility of information is the primary responsibility of libraries; it is in that light that we refer to the library as a storehouse of information. Ottong and Ottong (2013) opined that the library is an institution set up to support the tripartite functions of teaching, learning and research.

A library could also be seen as an institution concerned with the collection, processing, storage and dissemination of recorded information for the purpose of reading, study and consultation, in order to satisfy the varying information needs of its clientele. (Aina, 2004). Kargbo (2002) noted that "libraries are derivative agencies. They arise from particular needs within a society, and their types and functions reflect the diversity within the society."

Since the turn of the 21st century, libraries have been drifting from the utilization of manual methods of operations to automated methods. The resources made available in the libraries are also being repackaged in virtual or electronic format. It is this drift that has brought about the concept of digital libraries (Ottong and Ottong, 2013).

Digital libraries carry out specialized library services and functions to its clientele through automated methods or machine readable formats. Nwalo (2011) described digital libraries as any of the following:

- Collection of electronic journals and books
- Repository of multimedia files
- Archives of information created from local knowledge
- Electronic version of libraries.

A close look at the above listed descriptions of digital library, reveals that many libraries in our today's world can be categorized as either digital or hybrid. A hybrid library combines both manual and automated methods in information acquisition, organization, storage and dissemination. Nwalo (2011) pointed out that a digital library can be regarded as a marriage of library system with computer network

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