

CDNL Annual Meeting 2011 - Agenda item 6

Panel discussion on the recovery of national libraries from natural disasters

Note for guidance

Background

At the Annual Meeting of CDNL in Gothenburg, in August 2010, there was a discussion on the recovery of national libraries from natural disasters, with presentations by the representatives of the national libraries of China, Indonesia and Chile. Some of the information presented then is available on the website of CDNL under the link for the 2010 papers: see www.cdnl.info/2010/cdnl2010.html. It had been hoped to include a presentation on earthquake damage to the National Library of Haiti, but that was not possible; however CDNL members can find information in the section on Haiti on the websites of IFLA (www.ifla.org) and other organisations.

Due to the further natural disasters this year, it has been decided to hold another session on this topic at the Annual Meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico – this time including contributions from the national libraries of Haiti, New Zealand and Japan.

Objectives of this session

There is not time, within the framework of the Annual Meeting, for detailed presentations on the realities specific to each of the countries affected. Therefore the aim in this brief session is to discuss some of the issues raised in the presentations last year, together with the experiences of the national libraries affected by disasters this year. The discussion among the panellists will be chaired by Dr Deanna Marcum (Library of Congress, USA), and opened up interactively to questions from the floor.

It will not be possible to deal exhaustively with the topic – the issues are varied and complex – but the discussion may perhaps clarify and explain the effects of such disasters on national libraries as key cultural heritage institutions, and raise awareness of the need to be prepared.

Why this ‘note for guidance’?

This note is for all CDNL members, but it is particularly intended for those at the Annual Meeting in August 2011 who will be able to listen to the panel discussion and engage in debate.

The Note has two annexes:

Annex 1 is a summary of key points from the presentations made at the CDNL meeting last year, to which have been added some brief references to Haiti, and some points which reflect the experience of the national libraries of New Zealand and Japan in the earthquakes that have occurred in those countries since late 2010. The summary is not intended to be comprehensive, but to stimulate debate.

Annex 2 is an information note from the National Diet Library, Tokyo, on the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Possible questions for discussion

It is suggested that, having noted the information provided, panellists and other CDNL members may wish to discuss:

- Other conclusions and reflections?
- What are the key elements of disaster preparedness?
- What are the key elements of an action plan for response?
- Is there a role for CDNL (or individual CDNL members) in facilitating elements of disaster preparedness or as part of action plans for response?

W. Roberts
National Library of New Zealand
12 July 2011

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Annex 1:

Summary of key points

Events which have caused destruction to libraries:

China:

- earthquake (Richter 8), Wenchuan County (Sichuan) – May 2008
- earthquake (Richter 7.1), Yushu County (Quinghai) – April 2010

Indonesia:

- tsunami, Aceh – December 2004
- floods, Situ Gintung - 2008
- earthquake (Richter 7.6), Padang (West Sumatra) – 2009

Haiti:

- earthquake (Richer 8), Port au Prince – 2009

Chile:

- earthquake (Richter 8.8), Santiago and Concepcion (5 regions affected) – February 2010

New Zealand:

- earthquakes: a series (up to Richter 7.3), Christchurch (Canterbury) – September & December 2010, February, April & June 2011

Japan:

- earthquake (Richter 9) and tsunami, Tohoku – March 2011

Direct or indirect involvement of the National Library (as reported in papers to CDNL):

China:

- the NL provided assistance to disaster relief efforts, working with the national and provincial library societies
- the NL has since led strategic planning to improve libraries' state of preparation for & response to future events

Indonesia:

- the NL has been involved in disaster planning for the library sector since 1999
- the NL works with the National Archives and National Museum on regional planning
- the NL and Archives work together to make staff (conservators) and heavy equipment (deep freezers, vacuum chamber) available

Haiti:

- the NL suffered damage to its structure and collections
- the NL has facilitated response programmes for protection of cultural heritage, as part of overall disaster relief efforts of regional and international agencies

Chile:

- the NL suffered damage to its structure and collections
- the NL initiated a full technical assessment
- the NL had recovery plans which it could implement, and remains involved in developing long-term disaster response plans for the sector
- the NL kept in contact electronically with the public

New Zealand:

- the NL's Regional Centre in Christchurch suffered structural damage; collections and equipment were later recovered and moved to temporary premises
- some NL services were redistributed to other regional centres; national operations were slightly affected by the Government's declaration of a state of national emergency (the NL's parent Department is also responsible for civil defence)
- staff were able to maintain some digital services of the Library from their own homes using wireless broadband connectivity
- other libraries (public, academic and special) suffered damage and some remain closed

Japan:

- the National Diet Library, located far away in Tokyo, had 1.8m books on the higher floors of the stacks in the main building fall off the shelves
- the NDL was affected by problems with public transport and electricity supply
- the NDL is actively engaged in technical assistance to libraries in the affected regions

Some points relating to the experience of the national libraries affected:

- ensuring the safety of staff is the immediate priority
 - o evacuating staff may be difficult when stairs collapse and lifts are unusable
 - o staff must also cope with the effects on their own home and family
- in addition to the immediate structural damage, further damage is caused when electrical cables and water and gas pipes break (fire; flooding in the server centre...)
- immediate protection of heritage documents supposes the availability of technical supplies, and may require heavy equipment (which in turn requires a back-up power supply)
- staff may not be permitted to re-enter the building until its condition has been assessed (depending on which authorities are in control of the emergency response)
- earthquake damage may require immediate 'first aid', followed by major engineering work (e.g. in the case of slumped foundations, a cracked roof allowing rain to penetrate, or the collapse of heavy steel shelving)
- even if the Library itself does not suffer major damage, it may be unable to function if external infrastructure is destroyed (e.g. underground services, road access)
- it may be possible to maintain some web-based information services by remote operation (by staff working from home, or using back-up servers held off-site)
- electronic communication is important: regular updates to the Library's specialist users and the general public help maintain confidence
- it is important to have an agreed disaster response plan ready to put into action, at institutional, regional and national levels
- technical data on the damage caused by the event should be collected for analysis, for future reference
- it is valuable to collect documentation about the community's response to the event, and digitally archive it: that historical record is also part of the national cultural heritage
- the Library should review and update its action plan, in the light of actual events

'What we learned' [adapted from the presentation by the NL of Chile, CDNL Annual Meeting 2010]

- earthquakes will continue to occur: be prepared
 - train staff in advance
 - define security zones (internal and external)
 - bring up to date your evacuation plan, so it can be implemented effectively
 - firmly fasten furniture and equipment, fix light fittings and any objects that may fall
 - provide and use equipment for personal safety (gloves, masks, helmets)
 - ensure that alarms and security systems are well-maintained in able to function
- and a reflection from the National Library of China:
- "Drawing on the experience and lessons learned from disaster relief measures during the two earthquakes, as well as considering the wide use of ICT in libraries and the rapid development of digital libraries, it is concluded that the following three areas shall be further enhanced to improve libraries' capabilities

in addressing natural disasters: namely, establish a back-up centre for documents; plan and build a national strategic repository for documents; and third, better coordinate disaster relief measures in China's library community."
(from the abstract of the presentation by the NL of China, CDNL Annual Meeting 2010)

Annex 2:

Note from the National Diet Library on the Great East Japan Earthquake

The Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent tsunami on March 11th left a wide swath of destruction. Especially hard-hit are libraries in the coastal area; at worst libraries were wholly swept away, and many others report damaged premises and scattered, seawater-soaked collections. Library communities, government organizations, cultural institutions, private corporations and volunteers around the nation have been offering support for the libraries of the region.

-The NDL has been dispatching its specialists from the Preservation Division to affected libraries to investigate damage and give instructions in restoring books soaked with seawater. A preservation specialist of the Library of Congress will come in September and attend a workshop in the affected area held by the NDL.

-The NDL has been providing specially-tailored reference and document-delivery services for the affected area.

-The NDL has been archiving related websites immediately after March 11th and has been cooperating on the matter with institutions abroad. The NDL is also advocating the necessity of archiving all kinds of records of the disaster this time and is initiating inter-governmental meetings.

-The NDL, which is also the parliamentary library, has been producing special reports on the disaster and recovery issues for the Diet (parliament) members. These are also made available on its website for the public.

-The annual conference of the directors of public libraries was held at NDL in June and there the NDL was expected to draw up model disaster plans, to keep on offering technical assistance in restoring books, to perform back-up functions through digitization and so on. Most of all, it was unanimously agreed that a system to coordinate the needs of affected libraries and offers of support should be established and the NDL should play a role in it.

- The NDL, located far away in Tokyo, had 1.8 million books on the higher floors of the stacks in the main building fall off the shelves.

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