

A Case study of Computer facilities among Public Libraries in Sri Lanka: Special reference with Tsunami reconstructed Public Libraries in South Coastal area

J.M.S Dilinika
Department of Library and Information Science
University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka
shalanijayamanne@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: In 2004 Tsunami struck the coastal areas of Sri Lanka, destroying millions of property and displacing over half a million people. Due to the Tsunami 65 public libraries in coastal area were damaged. The government of Sri Lanka and nongovernmental associations had launched several rehabilitation projects to recover the infrastructure facilities in affected libraries. But, some of the development strategies in these projects are debatable. Though there was lot of reconstructed projects operated to facilitate the tsunami affected public libraries in south coastal areas, there are no sufficient computer facilities provided for them. Main objective of the research was to identify the availability of computer facilities among tsunami reconstructed public libraries in Sri Lanka. The data for the study gathered from the total population of tsunami affected public libraries in south coastal area in the island. Research indicates that majority of the sample didn't have computer facilities to carry out library services related work. There were many issues identified as causes for this situation. Solutions recommended for this problem are, need sufficient computer facilities for libraries, government should take policy decision to develop the infrastructures of Tsunami reconstructed libraries and need a policy initiative to maximize ICT applications in libraries.

Keywords: Public Libraries, Community Service, Tsunami, Disaster Recovery, Computer Usage, ICTs

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1. Introduction

Along the history tsunami had been affecting the human lives, life styles, property and assets in a devastating manner. Above all this natural disaster had taken away the human knowledge stored in libraries and other store houses of knowledge. Loosing knowledge and creating missing links along the knowledge chain is considered now as the biggest disaster, through which the damage caused is highly difficult or impossible to recover. In 2004 Tsunami affected Sri Lanka killing thousands and destroying billions worth public and private property [1]. It was recorded as the worst tragedy of the century. Coastal areas around Sri Lanka were badly affected by the tidal wave of exceptionally strong which was caused through an earth quake marked Richter value of 9.0. Due to the Tsunami, an estimated 150,000 lives were lost, and more than a million individuals were displaced. Libraries were equally affected by this tragedy. [3] As a result, Tsunami devastated 65 public libraries in coastal areas in Sri Lanka and out of these 65 public libraries 28 Libraries were completely destroyed.

After the Tsunami, governmental and nongovernmental organizations have launched projects to rebuild library collections and their infrastructure. [2] But, after 10 years since the disaster, proper aid has not reached many areas of the affected areas.

Library Sector. This paper studies the provision and development of computer facilities among tsunami affected public libraries in Sri Lanka.

2. Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, libraries were collections of books, manuscripts, journals, and other sources of recorded information. But, the rapid growth and uses of modern technologies has changed the traditional library into automated, electronic, virtual and digital library. As a result, library patrons in today’s environment expect access to electronic and digital items. [5] This revolution has completely changed the library concept. In this context, Computer facilities are essential to continue the library applications and to fulfill the patron’s needs.

Research issue identified for the study is that, though there was lot of aid programmes operated to facilitate the tsunami affected public libraries in south coastal areas [4], there are no sufficient computer facilities provided among them.

According to the observations, these libraries were unable to provide multiple services to its patrons with newly emerged user needs prevailed among them after the tsunami. Even though it was assumed that the disasters would change social thinking and revive the existing social structure a new, the libraries in question could not manage to initiate and operate up to the modern standards. Therefore it is necessary to explore the reasons for not having sufficient computer related facilities in Tsunami reconstructed public libraries in Sri Lanka.

3. Objectives

The principle objective of this paper is to identify the availability of computer facilities among tsunami reconstructed public libraries in Sri Lanka and reasons for not having sufficient number of machines. The other objectives are, to find out to what extent these libraries are providing Internet Facilities, Library software and digital services etc. In this research, it is also intended to introduce a technology usage policy for the public libraries in Sri Lanka.

4. Methodology

The population of the study consists of all tsunami affected public libraries in south coastal area. See table 1.0 for the selection of the sample. The researcher visited all of the above libraries and investigated the situation and gathered data using research techniques such as, structured questionnaires, direct observations and 16 librarians and library assistants were interviewed during the survey to gather data.

Population	Sample of the research	Percentage
65	16	
All tsunami affected libraries in Sri Lanka.	Tsunami affected public libraries in south coastal area.	24.61%

Table 1. Sample selection for the study

There were 02 Libraries in Hambanthota district, 02 libraries in Matara district and 12 libraries in Galle district which were completely destroyed. As a percentage, it was 24.61% of the total affected public library population.

5. Analysis of Data

From the reconstructed libraries still 6.25% percentage didn’t have electricity to do their works. It was the worst situation of this regard. According to that computer facilities are not applicable. From all the reconstructed libraries in the sample 50% libraries didn’t have computers. According to that provision of computer facilities are very limited in most reconstructed libraries. Research showed that the use of computer applications in tsunami reconstructed library services is being prevented by a number of factors. As a result implementation of computer facilities has been extremely slow.

	Name	Availability	Quantity	Remarks
1	Hambanthota Public Library	√	01	Not working
2	Dickwella Public Library	√	04	
3	Mathara Public Library	√	11	
4	Kudawella Public Library	NA	-	
5	Magalle Public Library	NA	-	
6	Ambalangoda Hirewaththa Public Library	NA	-	
7	Hikkaduwa Public Library	NA	-	
8	Wearagoda Public Library	NA	-	
9	Akurala Public Library	√	01	
10	Kathaluwa Public Library	√	02	
11	Ahangama Public Library	NA	-	
12	Habaraduwa Public Library	NA	-	
13	Doadanduwa Public Library	NA	-	
14	Rajgama Public Library	√	01	
15	Balapitiya Public Library	√	02	
16	Kosgoda Public Library	√	02	

NA =Not Available

(Source : Survey Data, 2013)

Figure 1. Availability of computer facilities

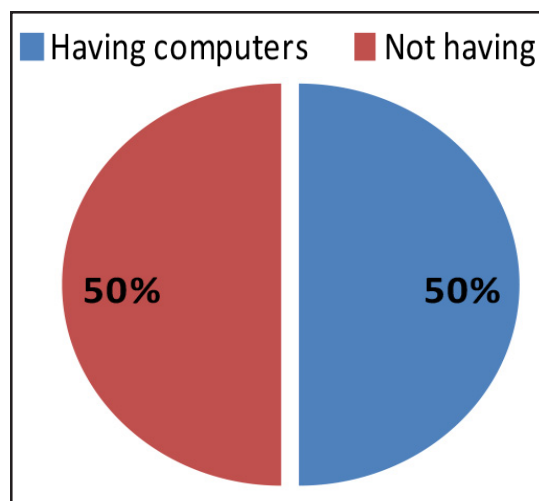


Diagramme 1. Availability of Computers

It was identified that from the total population, only 18.75% libraries have established a computer section in library. It was identified as a little satisfactory level in this regard. But, the problem is, the most of libraries didn't have experienced staff to conduct their services, not only that but also other libraries do not have necessary facilities to initiate the same.

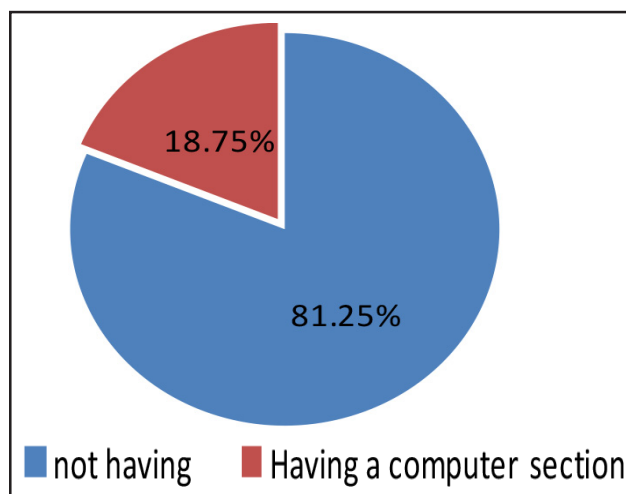


Diagramme 2. Establishment of Computer Sections

From all the reconstructed libraries in the sample 12.5% provided Internet facilities and 87.5% were not offered internet facility in the Library. But, internet is important for the individual user to evaluate the resource or information, to find current information and to connect with other networks. [9] Offering access to the Internet is probably only the first step for libraries into the information age. [6] so that Internet facility is very important for a library. But, majority of Tsunami reconstructed libraries have failed to achieve that development level.

	Name	Availability of Computers	Internet Facilities	Remark
1	Hambanthota Public Library	√	NA	
2	Dickwella Public Library	√	√	
3	Mathara Public Library	√	√	
4	Akurala Public Library	√	NA	Not working
5	Kathaluwa Public Library	√	NA	
6	Rajgama Public Library	√	NA	
7	Balapitiya Public Library	√	NA	
8	Kosgoda Public Library	√	NA	

NA = Not Available

(Source : Survey Data, 2013)

Figure 2. Availability of Internet facilities

According to findings 50% percentage of libraries didn't have computer facilities to conduct their library functions. But, the research reveals that 12.5% libraries were partially automated using "Pusthaka" and "Koha". Pusthaka is a simple web based library information management system for small to medium stand-alone school, campus, and public libraries [8] and Koha is open source content management software and it is a fully featured, scalable library management system.

Development is sponsored by libraries of varying types and sizes, volunteers, and support companies worldwide. [7] These libraries are namely Mathara Public library and Dickwella Public Library.

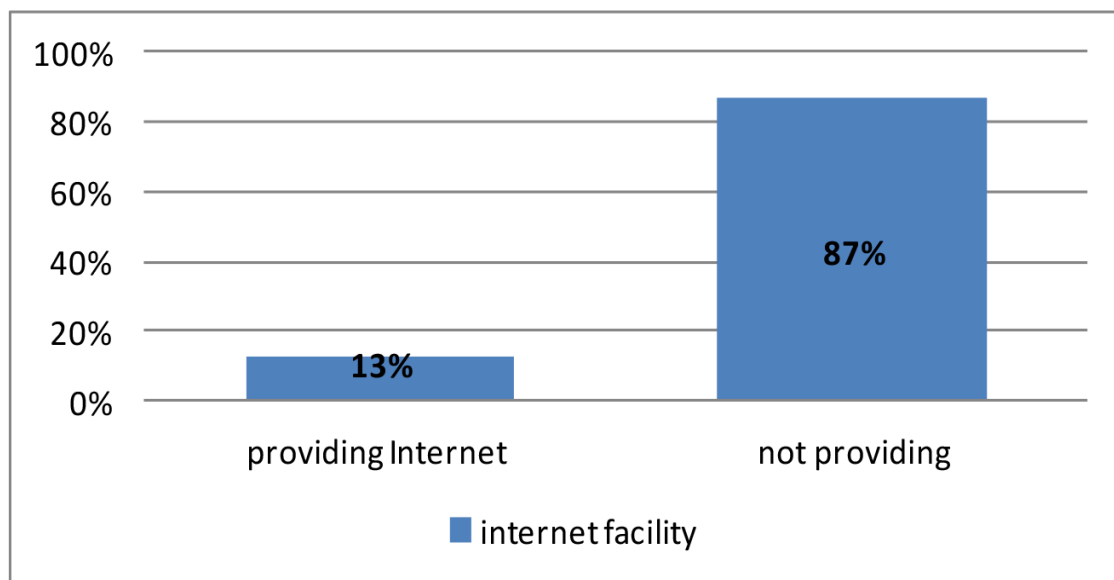


Diagramme 3. Internet Facility

The researcher was able to identify a number of problems that are affiliated to libraries with regard to computer facilities.

The main challenge faced by libraries is, Availability of few number of computers.

The other problems were, lack of funding, inadequate staff to handle operations, Lack of proper planning for ICT in libraries, Issues relating to Tsunami reconstructed projects, lack of awareness by the authorities regarding issues faced by the libraries and Negative attitude of supervising authorities towards computer facilities. According to the attitudes of local authorities, towards providing computers for these libraries following are worthwhile to mention;

- No point of providing computers to the libraries as libraries should consists of books
- Funds should be utilized only to obtain library resources
- For what purpose the computers can be used in libraries and will be idle once provided
- There is no competent people in the library to handle the computers
- Electricity supply is not stable hence no point of providing computers

These points indicate negative attitude to support the library in a modern perspective. The authorities failed to understand the use of computers in modern information infrastructure and the information seeking behavior of modern generation. They also failed to understand the importance of having library automation system or digital library system in public libraries in serving the numerous needs of the society.

When asked from both users and librarians what they think about the library and computer facilities, some librarians directly mentioned that ‘There are no computers in our library. So that, users don’t like to come to our traditional library and they are going internet cafés to find information via web’ Considerable amount of librarians and library assistants reported that. If these barriers are removed, libraries will be able to find the solutions for computer and infrastructure facilities in this information age.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The public library is the main avenue through which the overall information resources in various areas of knowledge are made freely available to all members of society, irrespective of age, sex, race, educational level, or political and religious inclination, not

only that, but also libraries are important partners in sustainability and focal points for community education. [9] In this context Information technology is an important tool that can be used to fulfill the community needs. So that Computer facility is very useful for the tsunami reconstructed libraries to redevelop their services, motivate patrons and to introduce new trends to the community, not only that, but also the development of computer facilities offers very strong opportunities to libraries, but the adoption of computer facilities in public libraries are significantly suffering due to above mentioned facts.

According to the findings, following are recommended: the libraries in focus need sufficient computer facilities, Government must develop the infrastructures of Tsunami reconstructed Libraries, Government should have a policy for ICT applications and usage in libraries, need proper funding from local authorities, Tsunami reconstruction projects must be equitable and need proper technology deployment and utilization plan for libraries.

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