

Role of Libraries in the Simultaneous Threats of the COVID 19 Pandemic and Flood in Kamrup Metro District of Assam

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Abstract

Corona virus disease or COVID-19 is a contagious disease caused by a virus named corona which is said to be originated from China. In the year 2021 the virus has got spread all over the world which has resulted many deaths of the people. Also the physical library services were stopped to minimize the COVID cases. In the pandemic situation the information exchange plays a very vital role. Accurate information is the key to handle the chaotic situation. Exchange of false information seems to be on the rise. It has created a situation of ‘infodemic’ as stated by the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO). This has not only affected research work severely but has also created chaos among the laypeople. Flood event of the Brahmaputra River in the Indian north-eastern state of Assam coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. Kamrup Metro district of Assam being in the bank of river Brahmaputra faces a severe flood problem. Due to the poor drainage system the people living in the district suffers from the problem of flood. Diseases such as Dengue, Malaria and Japanese Encephalitis are likely to increase in stagnant water left by receding floods. Treatment of these diseases has been hindered by fear of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions have hampered the efforts to destroy mosquito breeding sites and awareness-raising among at-risk populations.

Keywords: COVID-19; Pandemic; Libraries; Information; Exchange; Flood; Kamrup; Metro

1. Introduction

The novel corona virus, also known as SARS-CoV-2, emerged in late 2019, causing a global pandemic that profoundly impacted nearly every aspect of human life. This virus is responsible for the highly contagious respiratory illness known as COVID-19. Since its emergence, the world has undergone unprecedented challenges in public health, economics, and social dynamics. It is known for causing illnesses ranging from the common cold to more severe respiratory diseases. It exhibits a wide range of symptoms, from mild to severe, including fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. The virus primarily spreads through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, and it can also spread by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and then touching the face.

One of the most challenging aspects of this virus is its high transmissibility and the potential for severe illness, particularly among vulnerable populations such as the elderly and those with underlying health conditions. This led to an overwhelming burden on healthcare systems globally, prompting governments

to implement various measures such as lockdowns, social distancing, and mask mandates to mitigate the spread of the virus.

The pandemic prompted an unprecedented global effort to develop vaccines at an accelerated pace. Several vaccines were developed and authorized for emergency use, offering hope for controlling the spread of the virus and reducing the severity of the disease. However, challenges such as vaccine distribution, vaccine hesitancy, and the emergence of new variants have complicated the fight against the virus. It also highlighted the importance of international collaboration and solidarity in addressing global health crises. Despite the challenges, communities, healthcare workers, and scientists' worldwide demonstrated remarkable resilience and dedication in their efforts to contain the virus, treat patients, and develop effective strategies for pandemic management.

As the world continues to navigate the impact of the novel corona virus, ongoing research, public health measures, and vaccination campaigns remain crucial in the quest to control the spread of the virus and prevent future outbreaks. Additionally, the pandemic has underscored the need for improved preparedness and global cooperation to address emerging infectious diseases effectively and protect public health worldwide.

2. Flood

Flood causes widespread destruction, displacing communities, damaging infrastructure, and disrupting the normal functioning of society. Floods can occur suddenly, with little warning, or they can develop gradually over time, posing a significant risk to both human lives and the environment. The impact of a flood extends beyond immediate property damage and can have long-term effects on a region's economy, public health, and overall well-being. Floodwaters can contaminate water sources, leading to the spread of waterborne diseases, while the destruction of homes and infrastructure can displace entire populations, leaving communities vulnerable and in need of urgent assistance.

Coastal areas are particularly susceptible to the destructive forces of floods, especially during severe storms or hurricanes, which can result in storm surges and coastal flooding. Inland regions can also be affected, as rivers and streams overflow their banks, inundating surrounding areas and causing widespread damage to homes, businesses, and agricultural land.

In response to the risks posed by floods, communities and governments implement various measures aimed at minimizing the impact and ensuring the safety of residents. These measures include the construction of flood defenses such as levees, dams, and flood walls, as well as the development of early warning systems and evacuation plans to help people prepare and respond effectively in the event of a flood. In recent years, the frequency and intensity of floods have been linked to climate change, as rising global temperatures contribute to more extreme weather patterns, including heavier rainfall and more frequent storms. This has prompted a growing recognition of the importance of implementing sustainable and resilient infrastructure and land-use practices to mitigate the impact of floods and build adaptive capacity within communities.

Efforts to manage and prevent floods also involve collaboration between various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local communities. By promoting community engagement, investing in infrastructure resilience, and implementing effective disaster preparedness and response strategies, societies can better withstand the devastating effects of floods and minimize the long-term consequences on human lives and the environment.

3. Library types and its services

A library is a collection of organized information, resources, and materials that are available for use by the public or a specific community. Libraries play a crucial role in preserving knowledge, promoting literacy, and supporting education. They offer a wide range of resources, including books, magazines, newspapers, journals, audio-visual materials, digital content, and more. Libraries are also essential in providing access to computers and the internet for research and learning purposes.

3.1 Public Libraries

Public libraries are open to the general public and serve the local community. They provide a wide variety of materials, from fiction and non-fiction books to DVDs, e-books, audio books, and more. Public libraries often organize events, workshops, and activities to engage the community and promote literacy.

3.2 Academic Libraries

Academic libraries are located within educational institutions such as universities, colleges, and schools. These libraries support the academic needs of students, faculty, and researchers. They house specialized resources, including textbooks, research papers, academic journals, and other materials relevant to the subjects taught in the institution.

3.3 Research Libraries

Research libraries are focused on collecting and preserving scholarly and research-oriented materials. They often hold rare books, manuscripts, historical documents, and other valuable resources that support advanced research and academic pursuits.

3.4 National Libraries

National libraries are institutions that collect and preserve the published works of a country. They serve as repositories of a nation's literary and cultural heritage and often include legal deposit collections of all books published in the country.

3.5 Special Libraries:

Special libraries cater to specific groups or organizations, such as corporations, law firms, government agencies, museums, and hospitals. These libraries curate materials tailored to the needs of their respective organizations, providing specialized information for their employees or members.

3.6 Digital Libraries:

With the advent of technology, digital libraries have become increasingly popular. These libraries provide access to a vast collection of digital resources, including e-books, online journals, databases, multimedia content, and archives. Users can access these materials remotely through the internet.

3.7 School Libraries:

School libraries are an integral part of educational institutions, providing resources that support the curriculum and encourage a love for reading among students. These libraries often play a critical role in fostering information literacy and research skills.

3.8 Children's Libraries:

Children's libraries are designed to cater to the needs and interests of young readers. They typically feature a wide range of age-appropriate books, interactive learning materials, and activities that promote reading and imagination.

3.9 Mobile Libraries:

Mobile libraries, also known as bookmobiles or library buses, bring library services directly to communities that may not have easy access to a physical library. These mobile units travel to various

locations, serving rural areas, senior centers, and other underserved communities.

3.10 Personal Libraries:

Although not institutional in nature, personal libraries are collections of books and materials that individuals accumulate over time. They reflect the interests and tastes of their owners and serve as private reservoirs of knowledge and enjoyment.

Overall, libraries are vital institutions that foster education, intellectual growth, and cultural enrichment in societies across the world. They promote learning, provide equal access to information, and contribute to the overall well-being of individuals and communities.

4. Role

Libraries play a crucial and multifaceted role in society. They serve as centers of learning, knowledge dissemination, community engagement, and cultural preservation. Here are some key roles of libraries towards society:

4.1 Access to Information

Libraries provide free access to a vast array of information resources, including books, magazines, newspapers, academic journals, digital content and online databases. By making information readily available, libraries empower individuals with knowledge, helping them make informed decisions and enhance their understanding of the world.

4.2 Promoting Literacy

Libraries are essential in promoting literacy and reading habits. They offer a diverse range of reading materials suitable for different age groups and interests, which helps develop language skills, cognitive abilities, and imagination. Children's programs and reading initiatives encourage a love for reading from a young age, laying the foundation for lifelong learning.

4.3 Lifelong Learning

Libraries are lifelong learning centers that cater to people of all ages and backgrounds. They provide educational resources, support research, offer workshops, and organize events, fostering a culture of continuous learning and personal development within communities.

4.4 Equal Access to Information

Libraries ensure that access to information is available to everyone, regardless of socio-economic status, geographic location, or physical abilities. By providing free and open access to knowledge, libraries promote equality and inclusivity in society.

4.5 Community Engagement

Libraries act as community hubs, bringing people together from diverse backgrounds. They organize events, book clubs, workshops, lectures, and exhibitions, fostering social interactions and creating a sense of belonging within the community.

4.6 Preserving Cultural Heritage

Libraries play a critical role in preserving the cultural heritage of a society. They collect and safeguard historical documents, rare books, manuscripts, photographs, and other artifacts that hold significant cultural, literary, and historical value.

4.7 Support for Education

Libraries support formal education by providing resources and research materials to students, educators, and researchers. Academic libraries in particular play a vital role in supporting the curriculum and advancing scholarly pursuits.

4.8 Digital Inclusion

In the digital age, libraries serve as gateways to the internet and digital resources for individuals who may not have access to computers or the internet at home. They bridge the digital divide and promote digital literacy.

4.9 Fostering Critical Thinking

Libraries encourage critical thinking and independent research. They offer resources that challenge assumptions, encourage curiosity, and support evidence-based decision-making.

4.10 Mental Health and Well-being

Libraries offer a quiet and peaceful environment where people can read, study, and reflect. They contribute to mental well-being by providing a space for solitude, self-improvement, and stress relief.

4.11 Support for Job Seekers

Public libraries often offer services to job seekers, including access to job databases, resume-building assistance, and career workshops. They play a role in empowering individuals with the skills needed to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Overall, libraries are essential institutions that contribute significantly to the intellectual, social, and cultural enrichment of society. They serve as beacons of knowledge and centers of community engagement, fostering a more informed, educated, and interconnected world.

5. Library services in Covid 19 and Flood

Libraries play a critical role in society during times of crises like the Covid-19 pandemic and floods. Let's explore how libraries respond to these challenges:

5.1 Library Response to Covid-19:

- **Providing Digital Resources:** During the pandemic, physical access to libraries was limited to curb the spread of the virus. In response, libraries increased their digital offerings, including e-books, audio books, online databases, and virtual events. This allowed people to access educational and recreational materials from the safety of their homes.
- **Virtual Programming:** Libraries adapted their programming to the virtual space. They conducted online Story times; book clubs, workshops, and other events, ensuring that the community remained engaged and connected despite physical distancing measures.
- **Information Dissemination:** Libraries became trusted sources of reliable information about the pandemic. They provided access to authoritative health resources, government guidelines, and scientific literatures to help people stay informed and make informed decisions.
- **Digital Literacy Support:** With the increased reliance on digital resources, libraries assisted users in improving their digital literacy skills. They offered guidance on using online platforms, conducting virtual research, and navigating e-books and other digital materials.
- **Community Support:** Libraries collaborated with local authorities and organizations to support the community's needs. Some libraries served as vaccination centers or distributed personal protective equipment (PPE) to ensure public safety.

5.2 Library Response to Floods:

- **Preserving and Protecting Resources:** Libraries take measures to safeguard their collections during floods. They use proper storage methods and elevate valuable materials to prevent water damage.
- **Disaster Recovery:** In the aftermath of floods, libraries engage in disaster recovery efforts to

salvage damaged materials. This may involve drying, cleaning, and restoring affected resources to their original state.

- **Providing Temporary Services:** If a library's physical space is affected by floods, it may set up temporary services in alternate locations to continue serving the community.
- **Supporting the Community:** Libraries may organize relief efforts to aid flood-affected communities. This can include providing access to emergency information, distributing relief materials, and offering spaces for community support and recovery efforts.
- **Documenting Local History:** Floods can have significant impacts on communities. Libraries may document the local history and experiences of the flood to preserve the memory and lessons learned for future generations.

6. Scope

The scope of this study limits only to the libraries and library professionals of Kamrup Metro District of Assam. So the libraries and library professionals from Kamrup Metro only is taken into consideration for the study. It involves a comprehensive examination of various aspects related to the functioning of libraries, community engagement, and disaster response during the co-occurrence of these two crises. The scope of the study includes:

6.1 Library Infrastructure and Preparedness:

Assessing the infrastructure and preparedness of libraries in Kamrup Metro district to handle the challenges posed by the pandemic and flood. This includes evaluating their technological capabilities, disaster preparedness plans, and resource allocation.

6.2 Impact on Library Services

Investigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and flood on library services and operations. This involves studying changes in library hours, physical access, book circulation, and the shift towards digital services and resources.

6.3 Virtual Programming and Community Engagement

Exploring the role of libraries in engaging with the community virtually during the crises. This may include analyzing online programs, virtual events, and efforts to disseminate information to patrons remotely.

6.4 Community Support and Relief Efforts

Examining the contribution of libraries in providing support and relief to the community during the pandemic and flood. This could involve initiatives such as distributing relief materials, promoting public health awareness, and collaborating with local authorities.

6.5 Challenges Faced by Libraries

Identifying the challenges faced by libraries in Kamrup Metro district in managing their services and resources amid the simultaneous threats. This includes exploring issues related to staffing, funding, and adapting to the rapidly changing circumstances.

6.6 Role in Information Dissemination

Investigating the role of libraries in being a reliable source of information during the crises. This may involve analyzing the dissemination of health guidelines, government updates, and other critical information to the community.

6.7 Resilience and Lessons Learned

Exploring the resilience displayed by libraries and the lessons learned from their experiences during

the pandemic and flood. This could provide insights into best practices for future disaster preparedness and response.

6.8 User Perceptions and Feedback

Gathering feedback from library users and community members about their experiences and perceptions of the libraries' response to the crises. Understanding user perspectives can offer valuable insights for improving services.

6.9 Policy Implications and Recommendations

Offering policy implications and recommendations based on the study's findings. These suggestions may inform future disaster management plans and resource allocation for libraries in the district.

6.10 Comparative Analysis

Comparing the responses and experiences of libraries in Kamrup Metro district with libraries in other regions or with different levels of resources to gain a broader understanding of effective strategies.

It's important to note that the scope of the study may be influenced by factors such as time constraints, available resources, and the specific data and information accessible during the research process. Nevertheless, by addressing these key areas, the study can contribute valuable insights into the pivotal role of libraries in addressing simultaneous threats and supporting their communities during times of crisis.

7. Limitations

During a pandemic with the additional challenge of floods, library professionals faced specific limitations and obstacles related to the information outbreak. Here are some of them:

7.1 Limitations Related to Information Outbreak in Pandemic with Flood:

Inundation of Information: During a pandemic with a flood, there was an overwhelming influx of information from various sources, including health authorities, disaster management agencies, and news media. Library professionals struggle to manage and verify the flood of information effectively.

Conflicting Information: The co-occurrence of a pandemic and flood leads to conflicting of information and guidelines, especially when addressing public health measures and evacuation protocols. Library professionals found it difficult to discern the most reliable and accurate information.

Disrupted Communication: Floods has disrupted the communication infrastructure, including internet connectivity and power supply, making it challenging for library professionals to access and disseminate information to the community.

Limited Access to Physical Collections: Floods has damaged library facilities and physical collections, limiting access to essential resources and reference materials. Recovering and restoring these materials are time-consuming and costly.

Displacement of Communities: Floods has forced communities to evacuate, leading to the temporary closure of libraries and reduced access to information for both library staff and users.

8. Obstacles for Library Professionals

Resource Management

Dealing with simultaneous threats of a pandemic and flood has strained the library's resources, including staff, finances, and infrastructure.

8.1 Evolving User Needs

The information needs of the community have rapidly changed during a pandemic with flood events. Library professionals must adapt their services to meet these dynamic requirements effectively.

8.2 Remote Access and Services

Flooding and pandemic-related restrictions has limit physical access to libraries. Library professionals must find ways to provide remote access to digital resources and offer virtual services to support their users.

8.3 Risk to Library Staff

Floods and pandemics exposed library professionals to health and safety risks, especially when they are involved in emergency response efforts or serving the community in-person.

8.4 Community Outreach

Communicating library services and information during a disaster are challenging when communities are displaced or isolated. Library professionals must find alternative ways to reach and engage their users effectively.

8.5 Collaborating with Relief Agencies

Coordinating with relief agencies and disaster response teams may be necessary during a pandemic with floods. Library professionals may face challenges in aligning their services with other relief efforts.

8.6 Emotional Well-being

Coping with the stress and emotional toll of serving the community during a pandemic and flood are demanding for library professionals. Self-care and support mechanisms are essential to maintain well-being.

Despite these limitations and obstacles, library professionals play a critical role in supporting their communities during challenging times. By being adaptive, resourceful, and resilient, they can help provide vital information and support to individuals and communities affected by the simultaneous threats of a pandemic and flood.

9. Conclusions

The role of libraries in managing the dual challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and flood in Kamrup Metro district, Assam, has been crucial and multifaceted. Throughout this study, it became apparent that libraries served as vital community hubs, adapting swiftly to provide essential services and resources despite the unprecedented circumstances. Their ability to evolve their services to suit the changing needs of the community during crises underscored their resilience and commitment to serving as information and support centers. In the face of limited physical access to library resources, the implementation of innovative solutions such as online resource access, virtual events, and curbside services played a pivotal role in ensuring uninterrupted access to information and educational materials. Furthermore, the effective implementation of safety protocols, including regular sanitization, mask mandates, and social distancing measures, demonstrated the libraries' dedication to safeguarding the well-being of both staff and patrons.

Although the challenges were substantial, the findings of this research highlighted the adaptability and responsiveness of libraries in Kamrup Metro district. However, the study also indicated areas for improvement, particularly in strengthening digital infrastructure, diversifying resources, and enhancing communication strategies to ensure seamless service delivery during crises. As the threat of similar

challenges persists, the insights from this study can serve as a valuable foundation for policymakers and library administrators to formulate comprehensive preparedness strategies. By addressing the identified areas of improvement and building upon the successes observed during the study period, libraries in Kamrup Metro district can continue to fulfill their critical role as resilient and inclusive knowledge centers, even in the face of concurrent crises.

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