

Libraries Situation after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami

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MIURA Taro (Meiji University)
Chair, International Relations Committee, JLA**

We would like to express our deepest condolences and sympathy to the victims of other recent earthquakes that have occurred in Haiti, New Zealand, and Chile.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, the JLA received the large number of letters and emails with sincere sympathies, encouragement, and support messages from library organizations all over the world. We would like to say thank you to all of those messages. We have uploaded the situation report on the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami on our English website.
[<http://www.jla.or.jp/english/tabid/77/Default.aspx>]

1. The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami

On the March 11, 2011, northeastern Japan was hit by a massive earthquake. The magnitude was 9.0, and its epicenter was off the coast of Miyagi Prefecture. It was one of the largest earthquakes ever recorded in Japan's history, and it caused series of huge Tsunamis. In some places, the tidal waves were higher than 10 meters (33 feet) and reached height of 40 meters (131 feet) above sea level. The earthquake also caused ground liquefaction and subsidence, and the area damaged was vast, ranging from the northeastern region into densely populated eastern region of Japan.

The Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power station operated by Tokyo Electric Power Company lost all power, and technicians therefore could not cool down the reactors. A large amount of radioactive materials was emitted, and the situation reached a critical level. This accident forced people living around the power station to move into evacuation facilities, where they have remained since then.

As of July 25, 2011, more than 20,000 people have been counted as dead or missing, and over 240,000 buildings were completely or partially destroyed, including houses. The number of the evacuees reached 400,000 at its peak. More than 8 million households experienced electrical blackout, and over 1.8 million families suffered loss of water supply. The Japanese government estimated the total damage at between 16 trillion yen (200 billion dollars).

2. Damages to Libraries

Some libraries had their buildings destroyed by the earthquake and tsunami, while others had their shelves fall down and materials scattered on the floor.

In Iwate Prefecture, there were casualties at Rikuzen-Takada City Library flooded by tsunami. Although there were no casualties at the Iwate Prefectural Library, 10% of its collection fell down from shelves onto the floor, and its computer system was damaged. As of June 27, 50 of 56 libraries in the prefecture were open or partially open. However, Rikuzen-Takada City Library, Otsuchi Town Library, Noda Village Library and some schools (school libraries) were completely destroyed by the tsunami, since they were located very near the coast.

In Miyagi Prefecture, there were casualties at Minami-Sanriku Town Library totally damaged by tsunami. At the Miyagi Prefectural Library, nearly the entire collection of 1 million items fell down onto the floor. The building and the library computer system were damaged. The estimated damage was around 60 million yen. The buildings of Minami-Sanriku Town Library, Onagawa Lifelong Education Center, and some schools were completely destroyed by the tsunami. Almost all of other libraries had opened again by the end of June.

The Fukushima Prefectural Library building was seriously damaged. Although the library had to stop accepting visitors and circulation services to individuals, they have lent materials to evacuation sites as well as to other libraries in the prefecture. Likewise, Ibaraki Prefectural Library has been closed, but they continued to lend materials to other libraries in the prefecture and answer reference questions through e-mail.

A planned electricity blackout was conducted in the Kanto region right after the earthquake, and a lot of libraries there reduced their opening hours or closed for the days. The National Institute of Information in Japan stopped their online union catalog for universities, but their service is back to normal at present.

3. Supports of the JLA.

The Japan Library Association has been working hard to support the libraries and people in the areas affected by the March 11 disaster. We delivered books to the people in evacuation sites, read books to children, and provided a Bookmobile. We also dispatched volunteers to repair documents and conduct quick-and-easy book repair workshops. We arranged for instructors to give lectures on book covering. In addition, we provided missing issues of newspapers and established a system to manage volunteers to respond to the particular needs of libraries in the disaster-stricken area.

- Reading books, delivering books

After the earthquake in March, five to 15 volunteers from the Japan Library Association visited evacuation sites and schools every weekend and read books for children in Kesenuma City in Miyagi Prefecture, etc. By May, they had visited 20 places, and a total of 630 children and other evacuees had participated in the activities. We also donated 2,500 books to children and other institutions.

The need for these materials and activities was high in those places where there were few other entertainments.

In addition to the JLA, various other organizations including the Japan Committee for UNICEF and the Japan Book Publisher Association have been sending books to the disaster-stricken areas. However, there was not enough staff to receive those materials. As a result, many boxes of donated books remained unopened and were simply kept in storage. Moreover, sometimes books for adults were sent to children, and some of the donated books included stories that could have reminded children of the tsunami or of deaths in their family. Those who donate materials and those who receive them often have a large gap in their perceptions and expectations. The most important thing is to respect the needs of the people we are supporting.

- Bookmobile

There was a strong need for Bookmobiles in the areas where libraries were severely damaged, since Bookmobiles can function as a base for library services. In Kesenuma City in Miyagi Prefecture, the 13,000 materials in the Bookmobile collection were damaged by the tsunami and became unusable. The Japan Library Association arranged for a secondhand Bookmobile, once used in Shizuoka Prefecture, to serve again in Kesenuma City at the end of July. This initiative cost 1 million yen, including repair and transportation of the Bookmobile, and the Japan Library Association paid for this from earthquake relief contributions it collected.

We provided 2,000 children's books and 150 sets of story picture cards. With the help of the Japan Book Publisher Association, the JLA also provided 3,000 more books for the Bookmobile. With this support, Kesenuma City was able to resume library services with the Bookmobile visiting 80 sites inside the city.

- Repairing Books

In Iwate Prefecture, the Rikuzen-Takada City Library was flooded up to the ceiling by the tsunami. The historical document called Yoshida's Documentation, officially designated by the prefecture as an important cultural property, was soaked in salt water. This cultural treasure was found later and is currently being repaired by the prefectural museum. The staffs soaked the document in water to remove dust and salt, and now it has been restored.

There was nowhere near enough staff to repair all the damaged materials, and it is difficult to devote time and energy to restoration work. When such a devastating disaster as this case occurs, it is not possible to rescue all the collection. Therefore, it is inevitable to prioritize and focus on unique collection items, including local historical materials, and start repairing them first. It is also important for librarians to decide how much repair work should be done to

the prioritized items, as well as establishing guidelines for disposal of materials.

- Call for Contributions

The JLA has been calling for contributions to help in the recovery and restoration of libraries. As of July 25, the amount collected reached 13.5 million yen. These contributions will be used to support volunteer activities, to purchase library materials, and to restore the damaged facilities. This will help the people in the disaster area to use their libraries again and read books, which should help restore their peace of mind.

- Publication Offers from Libraries

In March, the JLA asked copyright organizations for permission to use copyrighted materials for the libraries in areas struck by the earthquake. We asked permission for libraries to photocopy materials and send or fax them to people or other libraries in the disaster-stricken area, just for a limited time while obtaining information is difficult due to the disaster. Additionally, we asked permission to photocopy materials for use in storytelling events for infants and for older people, as well as to broadcast and distribute recordings of these events and transmit printouts of picture book pages.

Niigata Prefectural Library was hit by a big earthquake in 2007, and since then they have collected a lot of literature on reconstruction and recovery plans. The JLA delivered these materials from the 2007 earthquake to municipalities and libraries in the areas damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011.

- Requests for the Japanese Government

In April, the JLA submitted a request to the Japanese Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology to allocate staff and a budget to help damaged libraries resume services, to take necessary actions to enable libraries all over Japan to help the stricken libraries, and to provide reading devices for people with disabilities.

We also requested the government pay special attention to limited-term library staff and prevent them from being laid off due to their libraries being closed. Finally, we asked the government to investigate the conditions of damaged libraries and to support efforts to make a comprehensive library reconstruction plan.

4. Other Support

The National Diet Library in Japan provides information on the earthquake and reconstruction of the disaster area on their website. They answer reference questions and provide information materials to people and organizations in the

stricken area where libraries cannot provide regular services. In addition, they support book repair and preservation activities, as well as services to children.

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology made a grant of 8.7 billion yen to the project called “Portal Website to Support Children’s Learning.” This website helps people in the disaster area connect up with the support offered by municipalities, boards of education, schools, etc.

Many museums and local history libraries were damaged by the earthquake, and efforts have been made to repair their collections. People working at museums, libraries, archives, and “kominkan” public halls (MLAK) established their own website called “saveMLAK.” This site provides information relating to disaster area support activities, and volunteers from these organizations have been entering data into a combined database.

The Osaka Prefectural Library, Tokyo Metropolitan Library, Yamanashi Prefectural Library and others have been answering reference questions from people in the disaster area through the Internet.

Those people who have been evacuated from the disaster area can obtain library cards through an easy application procedure at the Yamanashi Prefectural Library, Sapporo City Library and others.

Libraries in various areas are also organizing exhibits on disaster prevention. Many prefectural libraries in Osaka, Tottori and elsewhere provide information on their websites about earthquake disaster prevention.

The Sapporo City Library provides information including maps, telephone directories, and newspapers from northeastern Japan on their webpages dedicated to frequently asked questions. Some libraries also set up donation boxes for disaster relief inside their facilities.

Various organizations have started creating archives of information on the 2011 earthquake to share with future generations. For example, the Sendai Mediatheque established a “Remember 311 Center.” They set up a studio and broadcasting facility with equipment to film, photograph, and record the reconstruction and restoration process. Citizens, specialists, and Mediatheque staff work together on this project. The archive of these records will be kept as a “Disaster Reconstruction Archive.”

In the United States, the Internet Archives record and preserve Japanese websites relating to the earthquake. The Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies at Harvard University is collecting information on the earthquake in English, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean for their “Digital Archives of Japan’s 2011 Disasters.” In addition, the Newseum, a newspaper museum in the U.S., announced that they will add hand-written issues of the “Ishinomaki

Hibi Shimbun,” a daily newspaper in Ishinomaki City, to their permanent collection. Ishinomaki City was severely damaged by the earthquake. These newspaper issues were published right after the earthquake and placed on the walls of evacuation centers in Japan.

For medical experts and staff in the disaster area, companies provide databases and e-book editions of medical literature. With the help of publishers, the Japan Medical Library Association is providing medical literature for free to medical staff working in the affected area.

The Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) is making available its science and literature database, called “JDreamII,” to organizations and groups working on disaster response in the fields of reconstruction and health, for a limited period.

5. Toward Reconstruction and the Future

The Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused massive damage. Libraries in the disaster-stricken area need long-term support in every field to rebuild and restore their services. The support may include recovery and repair of materials, provision of books, reference service assistance, and training. It is important for the people supporting the stricken libraries to communicate well with staff in the disaster area, identify their requests precisely, and provide the support that is most needed.

The JLA has received requests from library directors and librarians in the disaster-stricken area to combine sources of information in one location rather than to distribute information from myriad sources. They also asked us to help plan an overall framework, rather than providing separate small-scale activities or services. Moreover, they would like us to examine and develop a long-term support plan for the affected libraries until restoration and reconstruction is completed.

The cooperative network among libraries has already been developed in the past in Japan, and cooperation between municipal, prefectural, and national libraries has fortunately been functioning well despite the devastating disaster. This will become a major driver for reconstruction in the future.

The National Diet Library in Tokyo held a symposium, “Support for Reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake” on the July 13, 2011. The director of the Iwate Prefectural Library said, “We will need your support for a long period of time for reconstruction. We appreciate your remembering us, and continued support.” It is important for us to continue and expand help for the damaged libraries. We also really appreciate the international support you have provided, and we will very much appreciate your continuing to remember us and support libraries in Japan.