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Information vaccine: HIV/AIDS and libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Information vaccine: HIV/AIDS and libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa

Kendra Albright

Introduction

There is no known cure for the Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV) and the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Information is the most crucial weapon in the war against HIV/AIDS and serves as the only vaccine to prevent the spread of the disease. In Sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS threatens to decimate entire societies. Women and youth are the greatest at risk to be affected by the disease in Sub-Saharan Africa, with most new infections occurring in young adults between the ages of 15 and 24. To combat the disease, formal Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) policies have been designed to make information widely available and raise awareness about prevention efforts. Libraries and information professionals stand to be key participants in this fight against HIV/AIDS, with most new infections occurring in young adults between the ages of 15 and 24. Young women are at the greatest risk of contracting the disease. Further, the total number of orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2004 reached an astounding 34 million. According to the United Nations (AIDS Orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa, nd), “Eight out of every 10 children in the world whose parents have died of AIDS live in sub-Saharan Africa.

The number of people living with HIV/AIDS continues to increase and the disease has become a global pandemic. Currently, there is no cure for the disease, which kills millions every year. Sub-Saharan Africa is the hardest hit region of the world, with 10% of the world’s population but over 60% of the total number of HIV/AIDS cases (UNAIDS 2004d). This translates into a total number of 2.2 million deaths in Africa (over 75% of the world’s total) from AIDS-related illnesses in 2004 (UNAIDS, 2004d). From its initial discovery in the Rakai District of Southern Uganda in 1982, the number of people infected and affected by the disease has risen dramatically. Women and youth are those most affected by the disease in Sub-Saharan Africa, with most new infections occurring in young adults between the ages of 15 and 24. Young women are at the greatest risk of contracting the disease. Further, the total number of orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2004 reached an astounding 34 million. According to the United Nations (AIDS Orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa, nd), “Eight out of every 10 children in the world whose parents have died of AIDS live in sub-Saharan Africa.”
Africa. During the last decade, the proportion of children who are orphaned as a result of AIDS rose from 3.5% to 32% and will continue to increase exponentially as the disease spreads unchecked.”

Not only is AIDS decimating populations throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, it is having a devastating affect across all sectors of society. For example, education is suffering due to the loss of teachers to AIDS. Furthermore, AIDS has reversed or halted the economic progress in many countries that had just begun to improve since their independence.

Despite this devastation, some countries have successfully reversed the prevalence of AIDS. Uganda, for example, has lowered the estimated HIV/AIDS infection rates from 18.5% in 1995 to under 5% in 2003 (UNAIDS, 2004a). Uganda’s success has been attributed to several factors. Early public acknowledgement of and political commitment to the AIDS epidemic, spearheaded by President Yoweri Museveni in 1992, provided impetus for mobilising communities against transmission of the virus. The efforts of government, combined with a multi-sectoral approach across all segments of society, also contributed to the raising of awareness. Uganda developed formal policies which focus on information as a means of prevention. A formal Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) strategy was developed for the multi-sectoral dissemination of information from numerous partners including libraries, educational institutions, government, and non-governmental organisations (Albright and Kawooya 2005). The IEC strategy included the ABC model (Abstinence, Be Faithful, and Condoms) that has also been credited with reducing HIV prevalence rates. Uganda’s approach has been largely successful because of the widespread message of AIDS throughout society.

Other countries have adopted similar policies to promote widespread dissemination of HIV/AIDS information. By raising awareness of HIV/AIDS and the availability of HIV/AIDS related services, the people in Sub-Saharan Africa have more knowledge about how to prevent the spread of the disease, thus slowing the rate of transmission.

Libraries, in Sub-Saharan Africa, have a central role to play in the implementation of IEC policies through information dissemination and related activities. Their role, however, is constrained by a number of factors which impede their involvement in IEC activities. These constraints must be examined and understood within the context of the societies they serve in order to fully exploit their contribution to the prevention of HIV/AIDS. This paper will describe current IEC activities conducted by libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly those that target pre-adolescents and adolescents, and identify barriers to service. The paper will also identify common practices that appear to work well within selected Sub-Saharan nations that could be replicated in other African countries. A summary of observed patterns and trends found in the literature will be presented.

HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa

The incidence of Human Immune-deficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has lead to a global pandemic. The poorest countries of the world (i.e., those in Sub-Saharan Africa), have the greatest incidence of HIV/AIDS; yet
they have the fewest resources to combat the disease. Almost two-thirds of all people living with HIV/AIDS in the world are found in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS, 2004b). Seventy-four percent of all deaths that occur from AIDS worldwide are in Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet Sub-Saharan Africa only accounts for 10% of the world’s population. At the end of 2004, 25.4 million people living in Sub-Saharan Africa had HIV/AIDS out of the total 39.4 million worldwide (Figure 1).

In East Africa, there appears to be a pattern of gradual decline. Despite the decline, however, the number of deaths from AIDS increases dramatically each year and each year brings many new infections. In West and Central Africa, prevalence rates have changed very little, hovering around 5% or below. There are exceptions, however, (e.g., Cameroon and Cote d’Ivoire) with rates of 10% or higher among pregnant women at antenatal clinic sites. Southern Africa is experiencing similar rates around 10%. Angola, however, has lower rates holding steady at around 5% (UNAIDS 2004a).

Women are more likely to be infected than men and account for 57% of people living with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS 2004c). Women are more likely to be infected at an earlier age because the age of sexual debut for women is earlier (Green 2003). This is most pronounced among young people, aged 15-24 years (UNAIDS 2004c).

Libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa

The United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) identifies four major types of libraries in Africa (International Federation of Library Associations 2003). These include National, Education, School, and Public libraries. In 1999, there were 1,129 libraries in total in Africa (International Federation of Library Associations 2003). Of these, nearly 800 were public libraries.
UNESCO defines a national library as, “Libraries which, irrespective of their title, are responsible for acquiring and conserving copies of all significant publications published in the country and functioning as a ‘deposit’ library, either by law or under other arrangements. They will also normally perform some of the following functions: produce a national bibliography; hold and keep up to date a large and representative collection of foreign literature including books about the country; act as a national bibliographical information centre; compile union catalogues; publish the retrospective national bibliography. Libraries which may be called ‘national’ but whose functions do not correspond to the above definition should not be placed in the ‘national libraries’ category.” (UNESCO 1970).

Kawooya (2005) defines national libraries as large governmental funded institutions made available to the public. Benge (1970) further suggests that the purpose of a national library is to serve as a depository to preserve all materials produced in a given country or about a country. According to the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA 2003), there were 15 national libraries in Africa in 2001 according to UNESCO data.

Education libraries can be defined as institutions, which primarily serve “students and teachers in universities and other institutions of education at the third level” (UNESCO 1970). Education libraries are also frequently available to the general public. There were approximately 266 education libraries in Africa in 2001 (IFLA 2003).

School libraries are libraries that serve students and school teachers “below the level of education at the third level” (UNESCO 1970). Like education libraries, they are also frequently open to the general public. In 2001, there were 51 school libraries in Africa (IFLA 2003).

Public libraries “serve the population of a community or region free of charge or for a nominal fee” (UNESCO 1970). Often known as “popular” libraries, they serve the general public as well as particular segments of users including children, military personnel, hospital patients, prisoners, and employees. Public libraries are typically funded by the local, district/provincial, or national government.

The majority of African library staff work in education libraries followed by public, national, and school libraries (Table 1). This suggests a serious shortage of school library staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10,236</td>
<td>5,403</td>
<td>4,396</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Total Library Staff in Africa in 2001 by type of library: http://www.ifla.org/III/WSIS/WSIS-stats4pub_v.pdf

There is also a similar shortage of school librarians in the United States, with school library staff accounting for 15% of the total library staff nationwide (Somerville 1998). In Africa, the number of school library staff account for even less than 1% of the total library staff, further suggesting the serious need for school librarians. This is particularly important for HIV/AIDS information dissemination, where school-
aged youth are the highest risk groups and for which prevention efforts must be targeted. There is a similar shortage of library staff to serve children in the public libraries in Africa. In Uganda, for example, there is one children’s librarian in the entire country (Barongo 2004; Setuwa 2005).

In terms of collections, African libraries collectively hold over 53 million items of traditional library media. These include 5 million books, 14,000 microforms, nearly 3.9 million audiovisual materials, and 8.9 million “other” types of materials (IFLA 2003). Compared to the worldwide total of 29 billion traditional library media, Africa’s library collections account for a mere 0.02% of the total world collections.

Libraries in the Sub-Saharan Context

UNESCO defines a library as,

“any organized collection of printed books and periodicals or of any other graphic or audio-visual materials, and the services of a staff to provide and facilitate the use of such materials as are required to meet the informational, research, educational or recreational needs of its users” (UNESCO 1970).

But in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, libraries do not fit neatly into this definition. Africa has unique characteristics of society and culture including oral tradition, print illiteracy, and scarce resources. Libraries, in the UNESCO definition, are often limited in their usefulness. Coupled with a limited awareness and understanding of the information needs of people of Sub-Saharan Africa societies, libraries, in the UNESCO sense, are few and far between.

That does not mean, however, that Sub-Saharan African societies are information-illiterate; they have well-developed systems of information transmission that fall outside the scope of a traditional library. Information is frequently exchanged through informal channels, from one person to another, often in the village, marketplace, or transportation centres (Sturges and Neill 1997). Mchombu (1992) suggests that an African will often go to the marketplace or other location (e.g., mosques, health centres) for informal information exchange.

The use of oral tradition is a common means of information transmission. Story, song, and poetry are often used to deliver messages. Specially designated persons within the pre-colonial African society, often poets or griots, were assigned the primary responsibility for information dissemination (Benge 1996). Therefore, the question can be raised whether libraries are necessary in Africa at all (Amadi 1981).

There are other problems with existing libraries regarding HIV/AIDS information. Libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa have historically had difficulties understanding the information needs of their societies. Needs analysis is a common failing of libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa in general. Adimorah notes:

“The public libraries still lack the interest or capacity for carrying out an analysis of the community, isolating its needs and satisfying them. They are yet to make a real commitment to the free flow of information, harnessing and providing ready access to information on rural development that would change the social circumstances of the rural poor.” (Adimorah 1984:25)
Libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa were developed based upon the British model. The emphasis is more on the collection and services, rather than on the individual needs of their users. Because resources are scarce, libraries interpret information needs to support the justification needed to maintain the library. Sturges and Neill (1998) observe that when libraries attempt to understand the users’ needs, they do so by asking leading questions that support their own needs, rather than identifying the actual needs of those interviewed. They suggest that if more appropriate questions were asked, libraries would discover that users’ needs are “seldom library needs, which is what many investigators have been seeking” (Sturges and Neill 1998:50). According to Benge, public libraries in Africa should be “more closely geared to African realities” (Benge 1996:171).

Libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa also have limited resources in terms of funding, resources, and staff. Funding is also scarce because of the poor perception of libraries in these countries. Libraries are not seen as vital to the solution of critical problems such as the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Therefore, libraries cannot compete for government funding with something that appears more critical such as agriculture or health care.

The lack of national policy to direct library participation in HIV/AIDS information also exacerbates the problems for libraries. Without guidance and support from national, district/provincial, and local government, funding remains constricted, staffing shortages continue, and poor perceptions of the library is the result. Financial assets are a particular problem for academic libraries, as universities typically contribute less than 1% of their budgets to their libraries (Sturges and Neill 1997). This translates into shortages of both materials and skilled staff.

Library materials are also scarce. Acquisitions are expensive, particularly from foreign publishers. Book donations from other countries, while well intentioned, often result in materials that are out of date or outside the scope of African collections and can incur additional costs for discarding the materials. This is not just a matter of funding, however. Few materials have been developed specifically for Sub-Saharan societies and are culturally appropriate. Most foreign publishers are unwilling to invest in African publishing because of the limited market for African works (Sturges and Neill 1997).

As a result, many informational materials on HIV/AIDS that are distributed in Sub-Saharan Africa do not originate there and may not be as culturally appropriate or effective as those that could be developed by Africans. In addition, printing costs are very high (e.g., paper, coloured prints, reproduction) and often render materials too expensive for many libraries to afford.

While libraries, as defined by UNESCO, may not be commonplace in Sub-Saharan Africa, record numbers of information professionals are graduating from Library and Information Science (LIS) programmes throughout the continent. These professionals work in libraries and in community information centres; resource centres; documentation centres and other information agencies, both standalone and as part of a parent organisation.
Because the notion of a ‘library’ differs in the African context, and because information flows are different within the oral traditions of African society, variations in where and how HIV/AIDS information is disseminated are accommodated through alternative constructions. Despite the variation in what information organisations are called, they share certain common traits.

For example, Mchombu (2002) identifies four key functions of a resource centre:
- gathering data and information
- acquiring and processing information materials
- sharing and disseminating information; and
- mobilizing the community

The collection of local community information in addition to local and international data can be combined to reveal trends and patterns within the community. Information staff can share this information with local community leaders in order to facilitate change.

**Information and HIV/AIDS**

Information is vital to prevent the spread of the disease. UNESCO (Communication, Information and AIDS, nd) observes that without a cure or vaccination available to curb the spread of the virus, “communication and information can help to fight HIV/AIDS by changing young people’s behaviour through preventive education schemes.” Common strategies used to promote behaviour change are information, education, and communication (IEC) programmes designed to educate and raise awareness about HIV/AIDS (Batambuze 2003). According to UNAIDS (1999), IEC programmes promote behavioural change and help people avoid behaviours that could lead to HIV infection.

Several types of information are needed to promote behaviour change. Information about the disease itself is necessary to help people understand its causes through sexual transmission, mother-to-child transmission, intravenous drug use, and other methods of transmission. With proper knowledge, people can take necessary steps to prevent the disease or to seek treatment. It is also important to have information about how to care for those infected with HIV or AIDS. Community-wide knowledge of local available resources, nutritional information, testing and counselling, and social and financial support, will help raise awareness and make sure that necessary and vital information reaches everyone within the local community. Information also helps to fight the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS. Relevant and accurate information helps to reduce fears, increase awareness and compassion, and change behaviours leading to increased risk of exposure to HIV and infection.

**Library Activities in HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Despite the recognised importance of information in the fight against AIDS, libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa are not considered to play an important role. IEC programmes that are becoming more common throughout Sub-Saharan Africa are not directly linked with libraries in any formal way. There is a lack of national HIV/AIDS policy that directs and supports library participation in HIV/AIDS information activities (Batambuze 2003). This is further
compounded by regional variations in library participation in HIV/AIDS information activities. Variations in level of services will be found, even within the same country, depending upon local, district/provincial, and national conditions. For example, in Uganda, school libraries lag behind other types of libraries in the provision of HIV/AIDS information (Batambuze 2003). Mostert (2001) suggests that problems for libraries stem from their outdated colonial model, lack of professional training, lack of inter-agency cooperation, and deficiencies in conducting needs analyses.

Batambuze (2003) proposes that libraries should take a strong lead in the provision of HIV/AIDS information dissemination and its activities, particularly for activities targeting children and young adults. But the difference between information activities of non-library organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa and those of libraries also depends upon how libraries are construed. UNESCO’s definition of a library is constrained within the Sub-Saharan context and thus restricts the way in which libraries are engaged in HIV/AIDS information activities. If that definition is expanded to incorporate information and documentation centres, community centres, resource centres, and library associations, specific examples of information activities can more easily be identified.

Libraries serve not only as an information clearing-house on HIV/AIDS but also local community needs. This approach is reflected in the rise of community centres, youth centres, documentation centres, multipurpose telecenters, resource centres, and other similar centres. Not just a collection of resources, these centres also serve as a central point for their communities where local forums and meetings can be held.

Resource centres are one common, unique form of library within the Sub-Saharan context and should be considered as a library. Their role in the dissemination of HIV/AIDS information and activities is unique to their local culture. As such, resource centres have the responsibility for specific tasks. They must acquire and process information materials. Multiple formats should be included in the collection such as books, videos, audio materials, pamphlets, brochures, reports, fact sheets, etc. Topical materials should include research and statistical data, IEC, and other government materials available on HIV/AIDS.

Materials selection should take into account the types of literacy in their users, especially the oral tradition. Information that is current and accurate is vital to the users of the resource centre. Efforts should be made to verify the source of materials for authoritative-ness and timeliness. Materials should also be available in the local language(s) of the users and should be translated if necessary. Mchombu reports that information is better portrayed through a “pictorial, story board and poster format” in order to capture the cultural aspects of materials that are appropriate for local users (Mchombu 2004:95). Mchombu also suggests that information can be disseminated to users through either a “push process”, where information is provided to many people without their participation, or a “pull process”, where information is delivered to users on demand (Mchombu 2004:95). Advertising campaigns and drama are best delivered via push delivery where lectures and talks are best delivered on demand. Resource centres may also choose to create their own HIV/AIDS materials for use in their local
communities. Story boards, posters, translations into a local language, booklets compiled from newspaper clippings, and recordings of radio and television programmes are but a few examples of locally created materials that can be housed in a resource centre (Mchombu 2004:97).

Increased community knowledge about HIV/AIDS is only successful if the community embraces and launches effective HIV/AIDS prevention programmes. Therefore, the resource centre needs to mobilise the community. In order to accomplish this, everyone in the community must be educated about HIV/AIDS and participate in its solution. There must also be an emotional investment on the part of everyone in the community if the programme is to be successful (Mchombu 2004). Local community efforts must also be coordinated with national and international efforts, organisations, and policies.

Mchombu (2004) suggests that the resource centre should be part of a community centre or library. Space is often limited so resource centres should display their materials on a table top or in a formal display. HIV/AIDS messages can be posted on a notice board for posting information about relevant events in the community. If a resource centre is part of a faith community (i.e., within a church or mosque), the resource centre needs to reflect the values and beliefs of its parent organisation. Information on abstinence and faithfulness may reflect a broader view of family planning and appropriate behaviour between married adults. If the resource centre is part of a larger organisation, its “focus on information provision activities should promote the whole range of HIV prevention strategies of abstinence, faithfulness, and condom use, as well as family planning and how to deal with infections” (Mchombu 2004:100). If the resource centre is a standalone facility, Mchombu (2004) suggests that it is helpful to create a committee or forum to help advice and guide the centre’s activities. The committee can assist with acquiring necessary resources including a display table, audiocassette tape player, etc.

Despite their limitations, resource centres, and other library variations, participate in HIV/AIDS information activities in a variety of ways. Educational institutions and youth organisations have become involved in getting HIV/AIDS information to the youth population. For example, HIV/AIDS information is commonly integrated into the school curriculum. Head teachers of primary and secondary schools have been directed by the President’s office in Uganda to talk with their students about HIV/AIDS at least once a week (Batambuze 2003). Like educational institutions, libraries have similarly integrated HIV/AIDS educational information into their general services. HIV/AIDS ‘corners’ are commonly found in many public and school libraries. These provide pamphlets, ephemeral materials, and other materials for children and allow them the opportunity to talk about HIV/AIDS through guided discussion sessions with peers, referred to as peer education. Unfortunately, the materials often tend to get lost in large collections (Baffour-Awuah 2004). Matoksi (nd) further suggests that public and school libraries should have daily discussions about HIV/AIDS in the HIV/AIDS ‘corners’.

Libraries also disseminate information through a variety of media, including drama, poetry, singing and dancing. This is particularly useful in societies with
a high rate of print illiteracy, such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa. Albright and Kawooya (2005) found that radio and drama are the two most widely used formats for the dissemination of HIV/AIDS information in Uganda. These are culturally appropriate and particularly effective, given the oral literacy of Sub-Saharan societies. Other formats should also be considered and utilised under appropriate conditions. For example, the use of fiction can facilitate the interest of children and young adults in HIV/AIDS information. Basic reading programmes that integrate HIV/AIDS information are common in libraries and can be very effective. Working with local communities on reading addresses issues of both print literacy and raising HIV/AIDS awareness.

There is also a need for materials to be available in the local languages. Despite official languages of English, French, and Portuguese, many indigenous languages and dialects are spoken throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. Without the necessary translations, even the best information is useless. Libraries can take a role in offering this service.

Peer education is one of the most common methods for disseminating HIV/AIDS information. It is a particularly effective method for disseminating HIV/AIDS information to young people. Libraries can utilise volunteers from their local communities and train them to provide peer education services.

**Recommendations**

Three specific recommendations are presented, based on the reported activities of libraries involved in HIV/AIDS information dissemination in Sub-Saharan Africa. These include: 1) the role of partnerships; 2) the scope of libraries; and 3) the emergence of a new identity for libraries and information professionals. Together they create an opportunity for an expanded role of libraries within Sub-Saharan Africa in becoming a vital component to combating the spread of HIV/AIDS.

First, it is recommended that partnerships between libraries and other sources of HIV/AIDS information activities be established. Despite the poor perception of libraries, the value of information in HIV/AIDS prevention is well recognised and is increasingly at the centre of policy and funding practices. Partnerships, therefore, could be made with educational institutions and communication organisations. Partnerships with educational institutions could speed up the effectiveness of HIV/AIDS related information activities for both organisations. They could be stronger together than either one separately. Partnerships with communication organisations, especially radio, could be strengthened in the targeting of programmes for children and youth. Kawooya (2005) suggests that libraries could partner with radio stations to offer on-air readings of appropriate HIV/AIDS materials. Charles Batambuze, Chair of the Uganda National Library Association, suggests,

“I think that libraries have had a limited and sometimes an indirect role in the dissemination of HIV/AIDS information. For example communication experts who develop radio and other mass media messages for the general public get their facts by undertaking research in a library of some kind” (Batambuze May 31 2005).

Second, the scope of libraries could be expanded to
include information sources and services outside the role of UNESCO-type traditional libraries. By offering broader, more flexible programmes, library services can be better designed to meet the unique needs of the societies in Sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically, libraries can serve as community centres to address issues of HIV/AIDS as well as other issues including healthcare in general, agriculture, women and children, and other local information needs. Libraries can also utilise a broader approach to dissemination including radio and mobile libraries.

Likewise they can take a leadership role in using ICTs for sharing digital materials. Graduates of LIS programmes are uniquely qualified to serve as the interface between technology and local communities. Information professionals are also uniquely qualified to understand the needs of the local community, particularly those of children and young adults regarding HIV/AIDS information. This includes both the format of information targeting these vulnerable groups, but also the understanding of effective ways to make information accessible and interesting to assist children and young adults in making good decisions about their own sexual behaviour. This also includes the development and production of information products and services appropriate to the local community, including language, delivery, and selection of materials.

The third recommendation centres on the emergence of a new identity for African libraries, librarians, and information professionals. There is an opportunity for information professionals to take a strong lead in the dissemination activities of HIV/AIDS information, thereby strengthening their image and value to society. Dr. Robert Ikoja-Odongo, Senior Lecturer at Makerere University’s East African School of Library and Information Science suggests, “African librarians can be tuned to making HIV/AIDS information available or become conduits for that information when they are given a little orientation to it” (Ikoja-Odongo July 22 2005). It is important to note that there are efforts underway to facilitate the development of a unique African LIS identity. Plans are in development to establish a consortium of East African library and information science programmes that will allow for resource sharing, faculty and student exchange, and collective buying practices. The East African School of Library and Information Science at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda announced the creation of a doctoral programme in 2005 and had four students in its initial cohort (Kigongo-Bukenya 2005). In addition, there is increasing demand for graduates of LIS programmes, particularly at the Bachelor’s level, since it is considered to be the professional degree.

**Conclusion**

Libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa are in a difficult position. There is a gap between the perceived importance of information in combating HIV/AIDS and the poor perception of libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The formal IEC strategies common throughout Sub-Saharan Africa are not formally linked to libraries or information/documentation centres. Libraries, therefore, do not assume an important role in IEC activities often sanctioned and funded by national and local governments. The library and information professional community has raised concerns about this lack of involvement. As Moshoeshoe (2005), Act-
ing University Librarian at the University of Lesotho, observed,

“We have noted with concern that substantial studies on HIV/AIDS profusely continue, yet with no significant involvement of Libraries or Librarians. Let me hasten to suggest that, ideally, any research team should have a librarian in it. Why? She/he would ensure that relevant information stored in [a] formal collection is used. As well, the final reports would be deposited. At [the] present moment, it is likely that some externally-funded research output is never acquired within the country.”

There is, however, ample opportunity for library and information professionals to take a stronger lead in HIV/AIDS information activities. There is also an opportunity to create a stronger perception of the LIS profession, in some ways to actually establish the LIS profession in Sub-Saharan Africa for the first time. By taking a lead in HIV/AIDS information efforts, LIS professionals have a unique opportunity to establish and build their visibility, contribution, and establishment as a recognised, respected profession. Mchombu asserts, “library and information services cannot sit on the fence when their nations young people are being decimated “by the enemy from within who strikes silently and in darkness” (2002).

Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa


Notes

1 Sub-Saharan Africa includes the countries listed above
2 Includes the following countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Reunion, Senegal, Togo, Tunisia, and Uganda.
3 For specific examples of library activities in HIV/AIDS information dissemination in Sub-Saharan Africa, see www.nclis.gov, which was compiled by this author.
5 Sub-Saharan Africa includes the countries listed United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 2004d).
6 Sudan was not included in the UNAIDS list but is included in this paper.

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