

COLLABORATION, CONVERGENCE AND COOPERATION OF VETERINARY LIBRARIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE AFRICAN SITUATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

A gloomy picture is presented of Africa's university libraries in Diana Rosenberg's review published in 1995.

"With the exception of South Africa, Botswana and some of the private universities, libraries in Africa are dying from lack of institutional and governmental support" (1)

As these libraries enter the 21st century however, there are signs of hope, provided the librarians can implement some of the advice given in her report.(2)

By positively working towards cooperation and convergence with other libraries in Africa and elsewhere they can become the information support system so necessary to their institutions.

II. SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa cooperation and convergence have made much progress. Through amalgamation of universities and other cooperative measures library expenditure is being reduced by minimising duplication of resources.

South Africa's two veterinary science faculties (at University of Pretoria and MEDUNSA) were amalgamated in 1999 and this led to the formation of the National Veterinary Faculty under the auspices of the University of Pretoria.

III. SOUTH AFRICA AND AFRICA

SA is considered the leading force for development in Sub-Saharan "Africa. The University of Pretoria's Veterinary Faculty is playing an increasingly active role in the region, such as in the development of educational programs for instance the Regional MSc in Tropical Animal Health.

Our library is the main information provider in these projects, as pointed out by my colleague Tertia Coetsee in her paper presented earlier during this Conference.

IV. INFORMATION NEEDS OF AFRICA'S ANIMAL HEALTH COMMUNITIES

- ❖ There is a need for information sources in most African libraries where funds are not available to purchase books or journal subscriptions.

The University of Pretoria's Vet Books for Africa project attempts to address this need in veterinary school libraries.

This year we hope to include more electronic material, donating CD ROMS from our Faculty and video material which is locally produced.

- ❖ There is also a need for electronic databases of literature references, especially CAB Abstracts. Would CAB International be prepared to help?

PUBMED is free but it does not fully cater for the animal health information needs of Africa. NISC is a company that helps developing countries by providing some products free or at special rates, such as African Health Anthology.

- ❖ There are plans to improve the IT problems of Africa. Fibre optic cables are being laid across the continent and a satellite system will soon link 70% of Africa. (3)
- ❖ Electronic document delivery will be available for all the SADC veterinary schools (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda, Tanzania and Mozambique) if funding can be found to install Ariel receiving equipment.
- ❖ Training is needed. Often the heads of the veterinary libraries have postgraduate qualifications and then they do not stay long in one post. Their second-in-charge run the libraries with the minimum qualifications.
We then find that donated books, for example, are not being catalogued and made accessible to their users.

V. NETWORKING WITHIN AFRICA

- ❖ There is no specific veterinary library association in Africa, but veterinary librarians can join AHILA. (Association for Health Information and Libraries in Africa).

AHILA holds biannual congresses and has a listserv.

It publishes AIM (African Index Medicus). This database includes material not covered by MEDLINE or other international databases. Veterinary publications are included. Each country in Africa submits its own publications for inclusion in AIM.

A veterinary librarian is the co-editor of the *AHILA Newsletter* and another veterinary librarian played an important part in organising the last AHILA Congress.(No.6 in Lusaka Zambia in 1998).

The *AHILA Newsletter* is a good example of international cooperation. Its printing costs are funded by 2 British organisations (Partnerships in Health Information UK and North Thames Regional Library and Information Service).

- ❖ The 1st Conference of African Animal Health Information Workers organised by our library in 1995 was the first get-together of Africa's veterinary librarians.

We hope to continue arranging meetings, but more along the lines of continuing education programs.

- ❖ SABINET is the interlending network for Southern Africa. It covers most of the libraries in South Africa as well as neighbouring countries.
- ❖ HICSA (Health Information Community of South Africa) is a medical librarians association in South Africa, open to animal health librarians as well.

VI. INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING AND COOPERATION

Vetlib-1, the listserv for veterinary librarians worldwide is an essential tool for international networking, facilitating dissemination of information. Veterinary librarians in Africa who are members find it an invaluable.

WHAT ELSE CAN ANIMAL HEALTH INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANISATIONS OUTSIDE AFRICA DO TO HELP?

1. **TRAINING** : on site experience that information workers receive in libraries in developed countries is of great benefit. Recently the veterinary librarian from the University of Zimbabwe and a librarian from the University of the North in South Africa were hosted by Vicki Croft at Washington State University .

Library associations in the UK also play a significant role in the continuing education of Africa's librarians, such as the Partnerships in Health Information and the North Thames Regional Library and Information Service who send photocopies of articles on library science topics that have been abstracted in the *AHILA Newsletter* to information workers upon request.

2. **DONATIONS** of relevant textbooks needed by libraries. It is important to ascertain the needs of the libraries and also to ensure that material is not outdated. Videos are a very popular learning tool and would be much appreciated as well.

Donation of relevant journal subscriptions, e.g. AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) used to donate subscriptions to main veterinary journals such as *JAVMA* to various veterinary institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, but unfortunately this admirable scheme does not seem to be continuing.(4).

The veterinary librarians at the Universities of Zambia and Zimbabwe informed me that they have no current journal titles. *Veterinary Record* would also be appreciated by these libraries.

3. **DOCUMENT DELIVERY** - for instance the articles that Trenton Boyd, University of Missouri Veterinary Library so generously supplies to veterinary libraries in Africa play an important role in improving the information provision capabilities of those libraries.
4. **TWINNING** - e.g. between the University of Illinois Veterinary Library and Makerere University Veterinary Library, Uganda. Mitzi Williams and David Mutazindwa described the twinning arrangement at the 1st International Conference of Animal Health Information Specialists in 1992 (5). Training and journal collection development are important benefits for African libraries in such arrangements.
5. **DONATION OF ELECTRONIC DATABASES**, such as *CAB Abstracts*.

HOW WILL THE REST OF THE WORLD BENEFIT BY HELPING AFRICA?

- ❖ Local African-orientated publications will be generated
- ❖ Local African expertise will be available, for instance the wealth of indigenous knowledge about the medicinal uses of local plants which has not yet been fully documented
- ❖ Through improving animal health in Africa, they will be benefitting human health as well
- ❖ Knowing that they have made the world a better place by having information and knowledge readily available to all its inhabitants

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