



NCLIS

U.S. National Commission on  
Libraries and Information Science

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February 22, 2006

President George W. Bush  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

In fulfilling the Commission's statutory mission to advise the President and the Congress on the library and information needs of the public, I am pleased to present *The Role of Libraries in HIV/AIDS Information Dissemination in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

In recognition of your administration's ambitious initiative—the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)—for defeating HIV/AIDS and turning the tide against a pandemic by combating the disease in some of the world's most afflicted nations, the Commission established a task force, led by former Commissioner Dr. Joan Challinor, to explore how libraries could be consumer health information distribution centers in Africa. A UNESCO grant made possible by the U.S. Department of State provided funding for the project.

This report describes how the current crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa can be an occasion for libraries to become more involved in education of the people in regard to prevention, treatment, and care. The situation is also an opportunity for growth of the library and information science profession in that part of the world. The report identifies the best practices of HIV/AIDS education activities in order to encourage replication in other environments.

Because libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa do not exist in the same way that Western societies perceive libraries, a broad definition of libraries, including "library-like" institutions, was used to measure current and potential information dissemination centers. The report's findings are intended to be general enough to apply to other developing countries or even in parts of developed countries such as the United States—wherever there are insufficient libraries and information institutions to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse people.

The study makes three main recommendations:

1. Libraries should strengthen their role in disseminating HIV/AIDS information by establishing partnerships with other organizations already involved in dissemination and education activities.
2. Libraries in Africa should expand the scope of information resources they collect and distribute to include sources outside the role of traditional libraries, including taking a leadership role in using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for sharing digital materials, and providing information in formats that are accessible and interesting to young adults who are making decisions about their own sexual behavior.
3. An opportunity for African librarians now exists to redefine and expand their profession by taking a strong lead in the dissemination of HIV/AIDS information.

The findings in this report were substantiated by a broad review of the literature, including materials collected on the ground in Africa and e-mail reports from real projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as personal observation of the situation in Cameroon and face-to-face meetings with Cameroonian librarians. Given the enormity of the problem of disseminating information to the people in some parts of the world, this report is an important contribution to clarifying the scope of the challenge and to increasing the visibility of the opportunities for African LIS professionals to contribute to the efforts in preventing and treating HIV/AIDS.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the war against HIV/AIDS, especially through PEPFAR. Please contact me if you would like further information about how libraries can be a weapon in the battle by disseminating appropriate, useful, and reliable health information to people directly affected by the disease.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Beth Fitzsimmons". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

C. Beth Fitzsimmons, Ph.D.  
Chairman