



NCLIS

U.S. National Commission on
Libraries and Information Science

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News Release

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For Immediate Release

NCLIS Study Recognizes New Roles for Libraries in Africa

Washington, DC USA, December 13, 2005—The U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) today announced the publication of *The Role of Libraries in HIV/AIDS Information Dissemination in Sub-Saharan Africa*. The report is available on the NCLIS Web site (<http://www.nclis.gov>) and a limited number of print copies are available on request (info@nclis.gov; tel. 202-606-9200; fax 202-606-9203).

Believing that a key weapon in the battle against the HIV/AIDS pandemic is education and information targeted directly to the general public, especially young people, the Commission set the goal of this study to explore how information is—or can be—disseminated in parts of the world where the impact of HIV/AIDS has been the greatest, and the resources of the countries impacted have been the smallest. Nowhere is information so crucial and nowhere is information for the general population so lacking as in Africa.

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 recommendations of the report 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' role in disseminating HIV/AIDS information is strongest when they establish 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 (ICTs) for sharing digital materials, and providing information in formats that are accessible and interesting to children and young adults who are making decisions about their own sexual behavior.
3. An opportunity for African librarians now exists to redefine their traditional roles and take a strong lead in the dissemination of HIV/AIDS information.

A UNESCO grant made possible by the U.S. Department of State provided funding for this research project. The Commission is deeply appreciative of this support. Two consultants, Dr. Kendra S. Albright and Mr. John Scott, conducted the research and contributed major portions of the report.

Dr. Beth Fitzsimmons, NCLIS Chairman, commented, "The value of the report comes from the 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."

Dr. Joan Challinor, former Commissioner, led the NCLIS initiative on libraries as consumer health information distribution centers in Africa. Dr. Challinor said, "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."

About NCLIS

The U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) is a permanent, independent agency of the Federal government charged by Public Law 91-345 to advise the President and Congress on national and international library and information policies, to appraise and assess the adequacies and deficiencies of library and information resources and services, and to develop overall plans for meeting national library and information needs.

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