The Fight Against HIV / AIDS: Are the School Libraries at the Battle Front ?
Baffour-Awuah, Margaret
International Association of School Librarianship. Selected Papers from the ... Annual Conference; 2002;
Education Database
pg. 329

The Fight Against HIV / AIDS:
Are the School Libraries at the Battle Front ?

Margaret Baffour-Awuah
Principal Librarian, Educational Libraries Division
Botswana National Library Service
P/Bag 0036
Gaborone
Botswana
mbaffour-awuah@gov.bw

Abstract

HIV / AIDS has impacted history in a uniquely global manner. Sub –Saharan Africa has been very hard hit, Botswana the hardest hit. The onslaught of this viral war is being counteracted from many battlefronts. The study examines data from twenty of Botswana's educational libraries to determine how much, and to what extent they are providing information on HIV /AIDS in varied formats. The finding reveal there is very little information provision. In the assessment of the librarians, they are doing what they can with what little is available. The study concludes with the cry for better co-ordinated effort perhaps regional in scope.

Introduction

HIV / AIDS does not need an introduction to an informed gathering such as this. The issue may be in relating the virus to this conference, to school librarianship and the conference theme. The linkage lies in one word: relevance. For a library to be relevant and worthy of its place in the community it serves, it must share the vision of that community and identify with that shared vision by building a knowledge sharing culture with the community. It must share the hopes and aspirations of the community just as it taps into the economic and cultural wealth of that community. It must have a symbiotic relationship with the community.

The decimation of the HIV / AIDS scourge on human lives has certainly earned its place in human history. When at some future date the history of this era, in which we live, is written, many things would be mentioned. There would be mention of virtual libraries and advancement in human technology, trips to the moon, cloning of sheep, terrorism and 11th September 2001. But it would not be complete if it does not also touch on the fact, that it was a period when man became very concerned with his purpose in life. Vision and mission statements are plastered everywhere. Individual, institutional and organisational visions and mission statements are being artfully crafted in myriad formats everywhere. A threat to human existence be it in the form of a virus or a terrorist has only led to man taking a closer look at his' mission on earth.

As it is for any relevant public or private organisation, vision, mission and objectives should not stand in isolation from the communities served. The school library's mission should take cognisance of and reflect the vision of the community it serves. The communities would be the immediate school environment, comprising students, teachers, non-teaching staff and

administrators. It would also include extended school environment. This would be the locality with its neighbouring shops, hospitals and other public facilities, (ward, as we refer to these localities in Botswana), municipality, and the concerns of the nation at large. That is why school libraries must be concerned with HIV /AIDS.

That is what is being tackled in this paper. Whether the school libraries and other supporting libraries - in their selection, acquisition and management of their information sources including disbursement of funds, reflect the major concerns of the societies they are serving? Concerns such as the sickle of HIV / AIDS mowing down generations? HIV/AIDS, one of the defining public health issues of our era must influence every policy arena including the school library. In fact it is not a matter of choice for the school librarian; it is a responsibility.

The conference theme: *"School libraries for a knowledge society"* led to a challenge to school libraries in Botswana, the essence of which can be summed up into two questions:
- what is the society / community served currently most concerned with?
- to what extent are, they, school libraries, involved in building a knowledge sharing culture so that society's challenging needs can be met, and the libraries can also tap into the expertise of the community? This study set out to investigate issues arising from these concerns.

Botswana and Vision 2016
Botswana, a former British protectorate became independent in 1966, and will be celebrating 50 years of nationhood in 2016. A national vision generally referred to as Vision 2016 has been put into place. It has been widely disseminated and the nation has taken ownership of it. It sets out the nation's aspirations for the 50th birthday. Among the many great challenges set for 2016 are:
- the challenge of an AIDS free generation by 2016 (no new infections)
- and the overall challenge of *an educated and informed nation by 2016.*

There are numerous other challenges but for the purposes of this paper immediate pertinence is to the challenge of an HIV / AIDS generation by 2016. These challenges are actually linked; it is only by being informed that we can be empowered to take a stand, which will turn things around! As school / teacher librarians who have the privilege of directing the information seeking habits of the generation that will by 2016 be the adults and leaders of the nation, this places enormous responsibilities on us.

Literature Review
There is very little literature related to the study. Most of references would be from out side the sub region the area base for the study. It is evident is that very little study has been done in Africa on the subject of the libraries as battle front for any war, no matter its nature. While cultural inhibitions related to sex and sexuality in Africa, and may be a factor in this particular case, it is obvious that libraries are not seen as essential places for equipment against anything. By inference the power of information as artillery is also not recognised.

There was need to further establish whether there was documentation on what libraries have contributed to the HIV / AIDS fight, or the documentation of the specific involvement of libraries in any fight that threatens mankind no matter its nature.

The search revealed a proposed joint project between the Internet Learning Trust and Global Health Projects to promote HIV / AIDS Education and provide an accessible resource on HIV/AIDS for use in education throughout the developing world. There is to be developed a web CD that would serve as a major resource in many developing countries. The Department for International Development (DFID) was to be approached to fund project. The proposed project is to provide an additional extension medium to support other more traditional approaches to education about HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Its goal is the creation of a very powerful state-of-the art digital Emergency Management Library providing instant information, when needed. The entire collection is to be such as to be easily copied on to a hard disk or be made available over an Intranet or through an Internet Service Provider. It could not be established whether in fact the project has taken off, but it has tremendous possibilities for HIV / AIDS education, if it could provide free access. If access could be freely provided to the site.

That different types of libraries such as the Newburgh Free Library are building up collections became evident. The National Library of Medicine in the USA had warded the latter the contract to create an AIDS Information centre. There are more than 600 HIV/AIDS-related books in the collection in addition to videos, magazines, pamphlets, and brochures. It is available to library patrons throughout the Mid-Hudson who call or visit the Newburgh Free Library. (aidsinfo.html)

This is the type of support that school libraries in Botswana, South Africa and the rest of the affected world could benefit from if the libraries in the study could benefit from. Nearer home, searching revealed the report of an Evaluation of the Implementation of AIDS Action Programme Book (UNICEF-Harare, 1996) '*Let's Talk,* books 1-7. The series developed by the Ministry of Health to educate and arm the school children in Zimbabwe on the dangers of HIV /AIDS was being well utilised. But it was a classroom project and librarians were not specifically involved as such.

Many interesting HIV / AIDS resources seem to have been put together in different parts of the world. The availability of these resources would have been very exciting if the institutions involved have been school libraries. The resources available in Hong Kong, found on the net consist of special collections catering for different HIV / AIDS issues. *AIDS Concern* is a grass-roots organisation whose main aim is to generate extensive community involvement in the provision of HIV / AIDS education and support services through trained volunteers. It provided amongst other things, a library collection of AIDS materials. The Hong Kong Aids Foundation is reported as having a library of over 900 publications and AV materials to promote its mission; which is limiting the spread of HIV infection in the community and providing support to those affected by the virus. *The Red Ribbon Center* and the *TEEN AIDS* project also in Hong Kong have both collections aimed at the prevention of HIV / AIDS infections among the youth.

This is similar to *Tsoga Monana* (a clarion call to youth arise) in Botswana. Though the *Tsoga Monana* project, established as pilot by the Botswana National Library, was originally more concerned with youth sexuality, than HIV / AIDS per se. It has a collection in one public library (Serowe Branch library), made up of videotapes, books, pamphlets, and charts. It is a small collection of less than 500 items. The project is supposed to be rolled out to the rest of the twenty-four branch libraries in the country. It has been cited in papers and articles, (Phaswane, 2001; Baffour-Awuah 2000).

Lekau (2001) refers to resource centres in Botswana, dealing with youth sexuality, but does not detail nature or format of resources. The paper stresses the fact that most of those involved in the provision of sex education resources are not working together and a lot of them are restrictive through their religious affiliation

The Problem

AIDS, has cut "a destructive path across the [African] continent, striking down young adults, young mothers and fathers, the core of society, in the prime of their life" (UCLA Newsletter Spring 2001, p1). AIDS has impacted Africa negatively and has wiped out a lot of the economic gains of the past 30 years. That it is a threat in Botswana has been recognised since the early eighties when the first case was recorded. Since then the Ministry of Health has been publishing estimates of people infected annually. By 1992, the rate of infection was reported at 60,000. Two years later, in 1994 it had more than doubled to 125000. Today, 2002, ten years later it is 300,000. Introducing the booklet: "Towards an AIDS free generation, the Minister of Education, George Kgoroba said, "HIV / AIDS threatens to wipe out three decades of human development in Botswana unless a social revolution takes place" (Ministry of Education, 2001).

Botswana's population figures published by the Central Statistics organisation, from the 2001 census puts the population currently at 1.680 863 million. The 300.000 infected individuals means about one out of five members of the community are infected with the HIV virus. Among certain age groups the situation is worse. In the category of ages 15 – 49 the prevalence rate is said to be 55%. Pregnant women are said to be also 55% infected. The President of Botswana in February 2000 at the opening of an HIV /AIDS conference called for a continuos national mobilisation in the face of the threat posed by HIV /AIDS. He declared that he had personally taken the chair of the National AIDS Council, because of his prioritisation of the need to sensitise every member of the society of the urgent and pressing need for self protection against infections. He said it was time Batswana realised that their very existence was being threatened.

This is a time for introspection: a time when we assess our input into what is no less than a war that threatens our very existence.

The Rationale for the Study

The threat is not just national; no, in this era of globalisation, every threat to human existence anywhere assumes global dimensions. And the global scene must be set to underline its relevance and grave importance for the age group that would currently be in schools and be using school libraries. It is imperative that we all join the fight to counteract the threat of HIV/AIDS, globally, in the sub-Saharan region and at different national levels. It may be more pertinent for some nations than for others.

Recent figures released by UNAIDS reflect the extent of the problem:

- 40million people are living with HIV /AIDS world wide
- 2.7 of the 40m are less than 15 years old.
- 60% of the world's HIV /AIDS cases live in sub –Saharan Africa
- 3.8 million adults and children became infected with HIV in 2000
- 12.1 of the 13.2 million world's AIDS orphans live in sub Saharan Africa
- The eight worst affected countries of the world are in sub-Saharan Africa:

Botswana, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Swaziland
Over 1 in 3 adults between 15 - 49 are infected in Botswana; in Zimbabwe its 1 in 4, and in RSA.1 in 5 (UNAIDS, 2002)
While the figures from Sub-Sahara Africa are bad, the threat is global: every continent is affected as is indicated by Fig 1 (UNAIDS, 2002)

FIG 1
The Sub-Saharan / Western Europe/ North America Scene: HIV / AIDS figs

Area	Period Epidemic Started	HIV /AIDS: No Of Adults & Children infected	Adults HIV /AIDS: prevalence rate	Adults newly infected	Positive women adults %
Sub Sahara	Late 70s Early 80s	28.1 million	8.4%	3.4million	55%
Western Europe	Late 70s Early 80s	560,000	0.3%	30,000	25%
North America	Late 70s Early 80s	940,000	0.6%	45,000	20%

Hypothesis

The premise of the study is that libraries and librarians are not seeing libraries as battlefronts from which to join in the fight against HIV/ AIDS. With relatively small budgets libraries are missing out on an opportunity to inform, empower and save lives.

Setting the Scene in Botswana

Botswana is one of the countries hardest hit by the HIV / AIDS. Over 30% of the population is said to be HIV positive. Recent Botswana census reports released by the Government Statistician indicates that life expectancy had fallen by almost 20% (The Botswana / Harvard AIDS Institute, 2002). Teenage pregnancy is high. Statistics from UNAIDS indicate that over 55% of pregnant women are HIV positive (UNAIDS 2002) This has very dangerous implications for the future, especially in terms of human resource development. It is also estimated that 35.5% of all HIV infections occur between females of ages from 15 – 19 (DISWAI 2002). Among teachers the prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS is more than 30% (UNAIDS, 2002) The impact on education in a situation where one in three teachers is said to be HIV / AIDS positive cannot be overstated. The number of orphans has increased from 36,000 to 57,0000 and is projected to reach 214,000 by 2010. How then could an information dissemination organisation like a school library continue its management as if the very existence of its users is not threatened?

One of the first things a visitor to Botswana would see at some of its immigration entry points would be the call to ABC (Abstinence, Being faithful and Condomising). The billboards are attempting to educate, the various NGOs are talking, conferences and seminars abound, and drama groups are acting. The whole school curriculum is set to go back to the drawing table to integrate HIV /AIDS into every aspect of it. The library as an information centre has to join the fight in an all out manner.

Some concerned organisations both national and international have joined the fight against the pandemic. Their support has been made in different forms. As at November 2001

the following countries and organisations had contributed funds to support Botswana in the fight against the onslaught. Some of them and the contributions made are listed here:

FIG 2: Contributions of Various Organisations towards the HIV /AIDS war

Organisation	Contribution
Swedish International Agency SIDA)	US$ 441,000; US$ 642,000
Botswana-Harvard Partnership	1 million

European Union
       National)
       Regional)
	
	645,000
	6.5million

Department of International Development (DFID)	11.3 million
United States Embassy	unspecified

At the national level an HIV / AIDS Policy is in place, a document that the study expected every library to have in its stock.

Methodology
To get the necessary data a questionnaire was designed and distributed to fifty teacher-librarians and school-librarians. Botswana has a total of 30 public and private senior schools and 206 public junior secondary schools (CJSS). Two health institutes and one college were also sent questionnaires. These would be support libraries for schools when they need to look further afield for information beyond their school libraries. Questionnaires were expected back within a fortnight. Unfortunately five weeks down the line only one had been received. Several telephone calls, faxes and visits later, twenty were received. A few have trickled in since then but were discounted.

For the personal assessment aspect of the study, ten institutions (50% of the respondents) were followed up. This was to establish the veracity of data provided, and to ensure that any misunderstanding that could have contributed to late dispatch of completed questionnaires could be clarified

Though data from twenty institutions is a fairly small sample, previous visits to schools around the country indicate that the school libraries are fairly similar. One of the institutions did not have a library, but had a stack of books meant to go into a library. But every government secondary school has a library structure, though stock varies considerably depending on institution and management.   The questionnaires focused on HIV/AIDS material in different formats. It also tried to find out to what extent ICT was utilised in HIV / AIDS information dissemination.
It solicited two types of responses:
- ◆ A quantitative response giving statistics of material
- ◆ A qualitative response indicating opinion as to assessment of the situation

Data Analysis
From an analysis of the data of the 20 completed questionnaires, the following emerged:
- ◆ Of the 20 valid respond library personnel 3 had first degrees (B.A; BSc, etc.) and one an MLIS.

- 11 had undergraduate diplomas and 2 had certificates in teacher librarianship and 2 with Diplomas had part 2 of the certificate in school librarianship.(The Certificate in School Librarianship is a two part sandwich programme)
- 3 respondents were from private schools, and the rest from public or government assisted schools.
- 88% of responding institutions had HIV/AIDS material in stock, which ranged from a single book to 49 this is against a general book stock which ranged from 300+ to 26.000
- In many cases there was an average of one HIV / AIDS book to over a hundred students
- The percentage was so negligible that it could not be seen on certain types of Excel charts (fig 3)
- % of HIV/AIDS material in stock ranged from nothing to less than 1%
- Posters, videos and other non-book format was negligible
- Internet access was pitifully lacking three schools out of twenty.
- Internationalisation was being utilised as a tool in the fight (* Stuvesyansenant High school in the USA was involved in Co-operative ventures with schools in the developing countries, among them Botswana, Ghana, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. One of their many concerns was HIV / AIDS. ONE Botswana School involved in the project was actively using the web sites to supplement its meagre library rescues.
- From the personal assessment it emerged that the few books were scattered across the libraries due to classification and shelving categories (300s, 600s and fiction)
- Three of the institutions marked with asterisks could serve as support libraries but their stock is not such as they could support all these libraries.
- There was little material but a lot of effort was being put into the fight but verbally, talks, clubs assembly addresses, and on one occasion even a parade, were being undertaken, to publicise the HIV /AIDS threat.
- Some staff indicated that a bigger budget than the P30.00 per student a year allowed for library book might help acquire more HIV /AIDS information sources.
- Another school indicated the need for TV/VCR to facilitate video shows
- One respondent indicated that she had just acquired condoms for the library to leave at the check out for users.
- In almost all the schools visited it turned out that the Guidance and Counselling Department (present in every school) was in charge of HIV /AIDS Awareness.

The Botswana National Library Network as Support

A search under into the National Library Service's OPAC for its network of twenty-four public libraries indicated a total of 113 items. This would not include posters and charts, as these are not processed. Nor would it include CD ROMs as they are not acquired separately for the branch libraries. (A few such as Book Find are centrally acquired and provided to external branches through networking.) Any registered member can borrow material within any public library. If a particular branch does not have what a user wants the library can request it from another branch so theoretically the 113 titles can be assessed by any user within the country.

Fig 3:
The bright colour reveals the bare presence of HIV /AID material among the general book stock
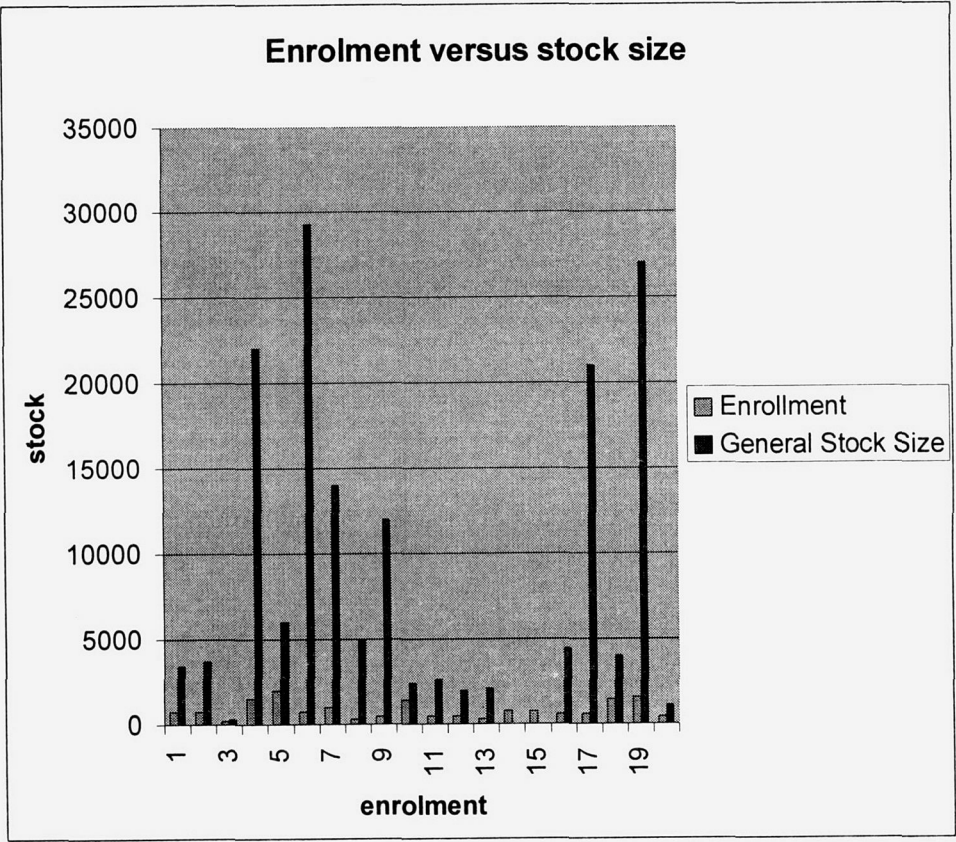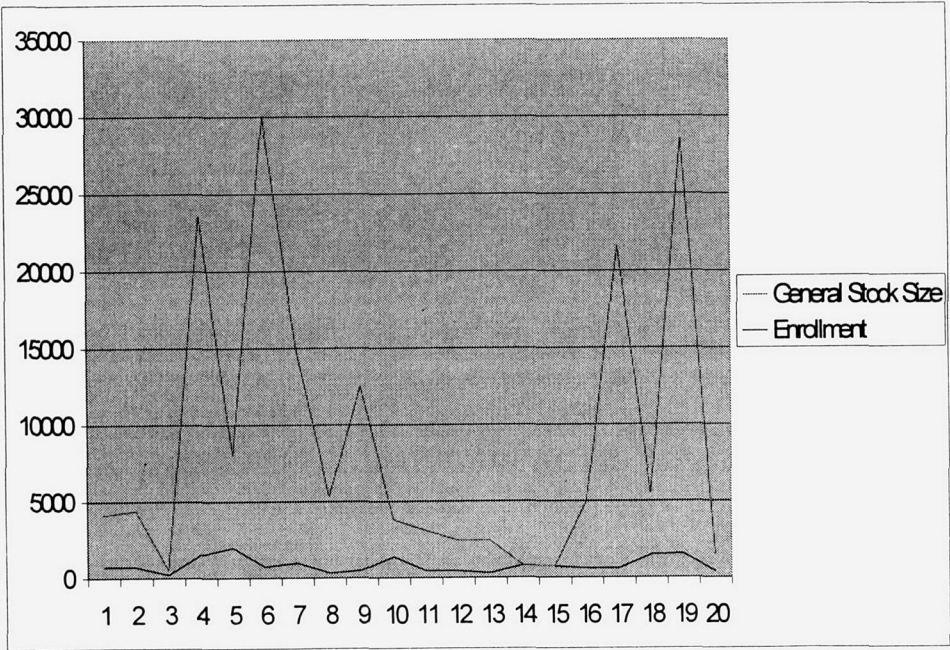
Enrolment versus stock size

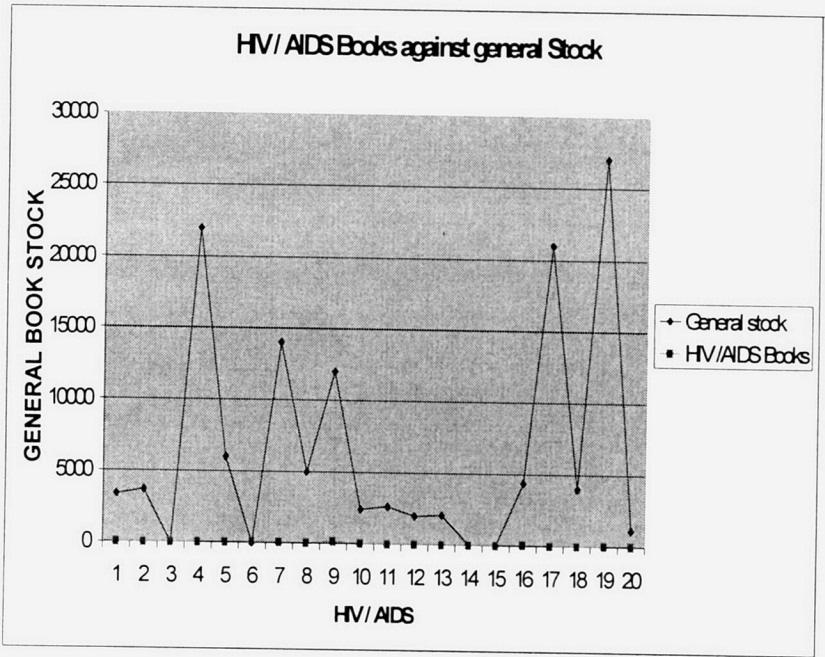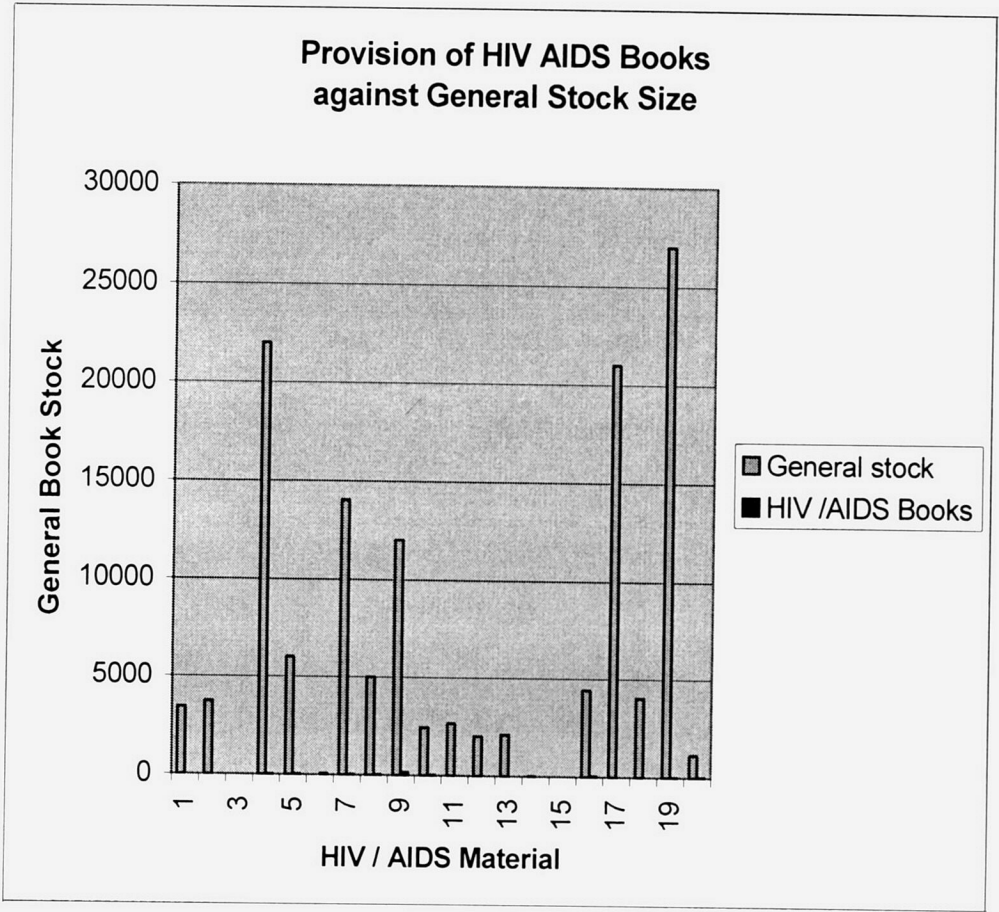Fig 4. Book stock averaging about one to four against student population

Fig. 5. The hardly visible shade of brown graph shows the meagreness of the HIV / AIDS material against the general book stock.

Conclusions Drawn from the Findings

♦ It is clear that there is insufficient provision of HIV / AIDS information resources in the in the school libraries.

♦ The other libraries (asterisked) that though they have their own users could be regarded as support libraries because they allow neighbouring schools reading access cannot offer much as their stock is insufficient even for their own users.

♦ It is also clear that ICT is not being explored an effective and viable means of carrying the message of the threat of HIV /AIDS to several people at once and in a more impacting manner.

♦ Many schools are trying different means of reaching their pupils with the HIV/ AIDS message but there is need for co-ordination.

♦ Knowledge sharing needs to be promoted: one school indicated that a local nurse was coming in to give talks, on weekly bases, but other schools were not aware of the need to share in the knowledge of the community.

♦ Not all school have Internet access, but information could be printed out and shared

♦ Information sharing is grossly wanting: posters freely distributed by various organisation are not known about by nearby institutions

♦ Information sharing is grossly lacking

♦ Expertise of the communities is not being seen as resource to be utilised.

♦ School Library policies need to address the HIV / AIDS Resource acquisition

♦ The proposed integration of HIV/AIDS issues across the school curriculum could be a golden opportunity which the library can support with acquisition of special collections as they would any new discipline into the curriculum

♦ Awareness must be created as to what is being published

Recommendations

♦ There should be created a local database of HIV / AIDS resources.

♦ Every school in Botswana (and any other country that sees the virus as the threat it is, must build up HIV /AIDS information corner in every school library / resource centre.

♦ Though the material due to natural classification is broken up by subject, genre and category it should be pulled together into a unit of special material.

♦ Periodically titles of available material, must be circulated by the different ministries, so that there would be ongoing awareness of what is available.

♦ The importance of information dissemination as crucial weapons in the war must be stressed at every opportunity.

♦ Workshops on how to create awareness corners need to be organised for teacher librarians and school librarians

♦ More easy readers should be developed (in association with publishers) that would make the information available to the younger readers.

Conclusion

The study was not as extensive as it could have been. It could have enquired into how often these HIV AIDS information sources were used. It could have interviewed students using the school facilities as to what they wanted by way of HIV / AIDS information. It could have investigated whether there was suspicion and stigma attributed to the borrowing of HIV /AIDS material. It could have investigated whether there was support material for the hurting who may have lost parents or other carers. It could have been extended beyond Botswana's

boarders, or even extended across the sub-Saharan region and a comparative investigation done. It could also be extended into a regional study, and become a project for IASL sub Saharan Africa?

References

Baffour-Awuah, M. (2002). The National Library's Contribution to the Battle against HIV / AIDS. A position paper prepared for the BOCCIM Newsletter.

Botswana Ministry Of Education & Undp (2001) Towards an AIDS –free Generation Botswana Human Development Report 2000 The Popular Version, War Against HIV /AIDS in *The Voice,* Friday April 5th 2002.p3

Diswai, C. (2001) Schools to teach HIV /AIDS *Health News* (17) 1 p6

eDumela.com.online (2002) AIDS Awareness Campaign:::: Aids awareness

HIV / AIDS Pandemic in Africa & World Response *Spring 2001 Newsletter UCLA , James S. Coleman African Studies Center.* p1; p10.

Lekau, A. (2001) Sexual Health Information Provision To Young People. The Role of Information providers in Botswana presented to the Carnegie sponsored Stakeholders Consultative Seminar on the Revitalisation of the Public Library system in Botswana11-14 December 2000, Boipuso Hall, Gaborone, p65 -p66

Moso Supplementary Second Term (2001) Francistown: Teaching Aid Production Division, Ministry of Education

Orr, Neil ([2001]) Positive Health. Nelspruit: Creda Communications

Phaswane, F. (2001) *Tsoga Monana:* a Report on the project, unpublished manuscript, Serowe Branch Library

Tselayakgosi, M. (2001) Many Health Challenges (e.g. HIV/AIDs, TB etc) Face The Nation Today. What Role Do You Expect The Revitalised Public Library Service To Play In This Fight? Paper presented to the Carnegie sponsored Stakeholders Consultative Seminar on the Revitalisation of the Public Library system in Botswana11-14 December 2000, Boipuso Hall, and Gaborone. p67 –76.

TODD, R. (2001). Building a Knowledge-Sharing Culture in Connections, issue no. 37

TSENANG, M. (2001) Hope for teenage mothers in Health News vol17, no1 p12 –14

UNAIDS / WHO: AIDS Epidemic update. Geneva: UNAIDS, 2001

UNAIDS Epidemic report, 2000. Http: //www.world-links.org/aidsweb/project.htlm

HIV/ AIDS Profile: BOTSWANA (2002) http://www.census.gov/ipc/hiv/botswana.pdf Www.census.gov

TITLES THAT COULD BE ACQUIRED TO BUILD UP HIV / AIDS CORNERS

- Men, Culture and HIV/AIDS
- Men as care givers and fathers in a world of AIDS
- Handbook for legislators on HIV/AIDS, Law and Human Rights: Action to combat HIV/AIDS in view of its Devastating Human, economic and social impact.
- Report on the global HIV/AIDS epidemic: June 1998
- Situations and response Analysis of the urban youth project in Botswana: Draft Summary
- Fighting HIV related intolerance: Exposing the links between Racism, Stigma and Discrimination.
- AIDS epidemic update : Dec 2001
- A cultural approach to HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care: UNESCO/UNAIDS Research project report of the sub- regional workshop, Kampala Uganda- 8-12 May 2000.
- A cultural approach to HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care: proceedings of the Nairobi International conference- 2-4 2000
- A human approach to AIDS prevention at work: The Southern African Development Community's code on HIV/AIDS and Employment.
- Protocol for the identification of discrimination against people living with HIV.
- UNAIDS Compendium on Discrimination, Stigmatisation and Denial: Research studies from India and Uganda, and Comparative Analysis of the two studies.
- The AIDS curriculum: Badge curriculum of HIV/AIDS
- Together we can: Leadership in a world of AIDS.

UNICEF REPORTS
- The State of the 4 world's children- 2000
- Botswana towards National prosperity: Common Country Assessment of the UN agencies working in Botswana;

UNAIDS REPORTS
- AIDS Ethical considerations in HIV preventive Vaccine Research
- The HIV/AIDS Epidemic- An Inherent Gender issue
- Working together towards a safer world
- Condoms and HIV prevention
- Boys, young men and HIV/AIDS
- Injecting Drug users and HIV/AIDS
- Men who have sex with men and HIV/AIDS

MISCELLANEOUS
- Africa United for the prevention of AIDS & Alcoholism, Choosing the Best Alternative- A message from the Seventh Day Adventist Youth in 45 countries of Africa, Gaborone, 1989
- AIDS / Andrew MCphee, (Watts Library), Franklin Watts, 2000
- AIDS Epidemic Update 2001/ UNAIDS
- Calming the Storm/ Robert Kelly (Christian Reflections on AIDS), Mission Press, Ndola.
- Growing up Positive. Stories from a generation of Young People affected by Aids / Ian Lucas,1995.
- The Truth About AIDS / Cecile MATHER (Africa AIDS Education Series) Awareness Publishing, 2002