

Meeting collection development needs in resource poor settings: the University of Zambia Medical Library experience

Christine Wamunyima Kanyengo
University of Zambia Library, Lusaka, Zambia

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to take stock of the current state of information resources and approaches used to meet collection development needs at the University of Zambia Medical Library.

Design/methodology/approach – A case study methodological approach accompanied by a review of the literature, annual reports and official documents was used

Findings – The findings indicate that the UNZA Medical Library has not had adequate funding since the early 1980s and its collection cannot meet the information needs of its users without the support of other organizations.

Practical implications – Dwindling financial resources are a scenario that is common to libraries all over the world but more pronounced in Sub-Saharan Africa, where libraries have seen major reductions in their funding levels over time. The library has devised alternative strategies, other than funding from the parent institution, for meeting its collection development requirements.

Originality/value – Lessons learned over time and best practices that can be of use to other libraries that are facing funding problems are highlighted.

Keywords Collections management, Serials, Financing, Zambia

Paper type Case study

Introduction

The University of Zambia (UNZA) Medical Library, a publicly funded institution, was established in 1970. It serves the School of Medicine, which is one of the professional schools of the University of Zambia. UNZA School of Medicine offers degrees, both undergraduate and graduate programs, in Anatomy, Biomedical Sciences, Nursing, Physiological Sciences, Pharmacy as well as the clinical areas of Medicine, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Pediatrics, Psychiatry, and Surgery. The library serves as a national information resource for research, health care, education of health professionals, and service activities of government and private agencies, organizations, institutions, and individuals. The Medical Library further serves as the backbone of the national medical resource-sharing network, which creates and unites a variety of bibliographic databases, information sources and collections, local research publications and electronic information.

Current state of information resources

Inadequate funding levels over long periods of time has seen the library collection dwindle to levels where it cannot continue to efficiently and effectively support the constantly increasing information needs of students, researchers and health practitioners in the School of Medicine, the University

Teaching Hospital and the country at large. The Library's desperate funding situation was echoed by Simui and Kanyengo in their study on "Funding of university libraries" (Simui and Kanyengo, 2004, p. 47). They established that the University of Zambia and Copperbelt University libraries, both publicly funded universities, had not received adequate funding from their central administrations to update their collections since the early 1980s (see Figure 1).

However, the library funding situation has since improved slightly. For instance, in 2006 the UNZA library was able to purchase 93 titles from the Text Book Programme for the Medical Library (University of Zambia Library, 2005, p. 5). The Text Book Programme, funded by cooperative partners, mainly from the European Union, was administered by the Zambia Ministry of Education to support the learning needs of students in higher institutions of learning in the country.

The Library has not had current journal subscriptions since the mid-1980s. The only journals that the library has been receiving are those few titles that come in through donations (Kanyengo, 2007). The resultant effect of this inadequate funding has been an aging collection of books, with the existing print journal subscriptions diminishing over the years. Currently all the print and electronic periodicals titles that the library is receiving are by donation.

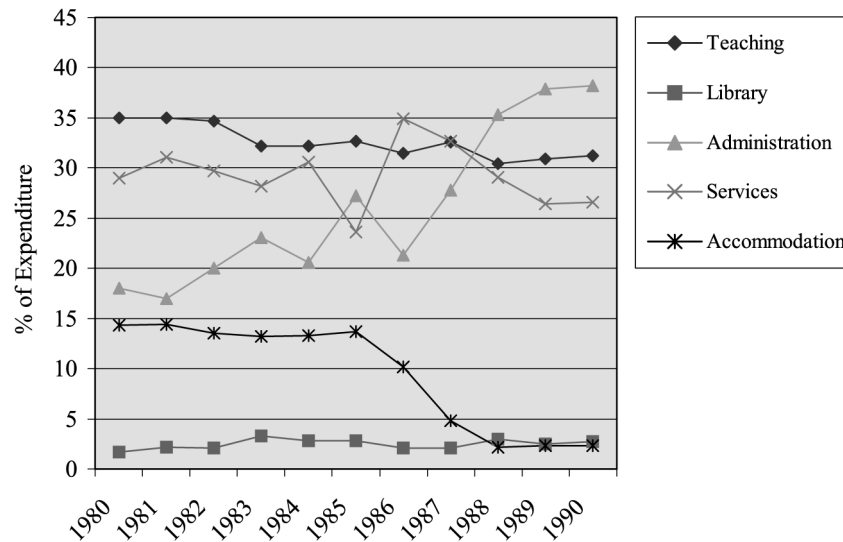
The Library also keeps a collection of both undergraduate and postgraduate research projects from the 1970s to date. Postgraduate dissertations are sent to the Special Collections Division of the Main Library as part of the Zambiana collection. However, once expansion plans are completed,

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Figure 1 Allocation of expenditure by percentage for the years 1980-1990 Source: Simui and Kanyengo (2004, p. 35)

Source: Simui and Kanyengo (2004, p. 35)

future plans are to have a copy of whatever is deposited in the main library in the Medical Library. There are CD-ROMs on various subjects that are accessible to library readers, a very much needed resource due to the limited number of computers available to library users across the university. There are also a number of audio-visual materials and a limited number of videotapes. Although inadequate, the library has computers that are connected to the internet available for use by students and faculty as well as other members of the user community.

Library funding mechanisms

There are various mechanisms through which the library accesses funds and other support programs. They can be classified under two systems:

- 1 internal funding support is from government funding and internally generated revenue; and
- 2 external financial support is another funding mechanism that allows the library to access outside funding from different sources (see Table I for library funding support programs that last for more than a year).

Table I Library funding programs and timelines

| Donor program | Funding purpose | Decision | Period |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| African Journals Distribution Program | Journals subscriptions | UNZA Medical Library | 1994-1997 |
| American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) | Journals subscriptions | UNZA Medical Library | – ^a |
| BookAID: International Campus Book Link (ICBL) | Journals subscriptions | UNZA Medical Library | 1994-1996 |
| DFID | Books/equipment | UNZA Medical Library | 1994-2000 |
| FINNIDA | Books | UNZA Medical Library | 1994-1999 |
| Flemish Inter University Council (VLIR) | Books/equipment | UNZA Medical Library | 1997-2006 |
| Sister Library Program between the University of Zambia Medical library and the University of Florida Health Sciences library | Offprint journal articles | UNZA Medical Library | 1994-2005 |
| Swedish International SIDA/SAREC | Journals subscriptions | UNZA Medical Library | 1994-1996 |
| World Health Organization Country Office in Zambia | Journals subscriptions | UNZA Medical Library | – ^a -current |

Note: ^aData not available

Internal funding support

The Medical Library belongs to a publicly funded institution, the University of Zambia; therefore, the bulk of its funding (90 percent) comes from the government, as it is classified as a grant-aided institution. According to Simui and Kanyengo (2004), the library's budget estimates, submitted to the government through the consolidated University budget, covers staff emoluments, general expenditures (including operational costs such as fuel, travel, stationery, protective clothing), and Library and Information Resources. The other source of funding available to the library is through student tuition fees and income generated from everyday library operations – library membership fees, binding, photocopying and printing.

External financial support

External financial support to the library has over the years come mainly through two avenues:

- 1 financial support that goes through technical bilateral agreements from government to government; and
- 2 the library actively writing or responding to grant proposals to support various activities in the library.

The bulk of the donated serials subscriptions come through technical bilateral agreements between governments to governments. For instance, the financial support of the Swedish International Development Agency/Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation (SIDA/SAREC) to the library was a result of a bilateral agreement between the Zambian government and the Swedish government, while the Finnish International Development Agency (FINNIDA) and Department For International Development (DFID) support for book purchases were bilateral agreements between the Zambian government and the Finnish and British governments, respectively. The other funding mechanisms that the library has had access to are those where the library deals directly with the outside funding agency. Examples of these funding programs are:

- the African Journals Distribution Program;
- American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS); and
- BookAID: International Campus Book Link (ICBL).

Trends in serials acquisition

Serials acquisitions at the University of Zambia Medical Library stopped in the 1980s (Simui and Kanyengo, 2004). Although libraries can depend on donations of serials, unless there is a donation of serial titles, instead of single issues, it is impossible for any library to try to keep viable a serials collection. A library has to make a calculated decision on whether to continue to subscribe to periodicals when they are faced with financial problems. The difficulty with serials acquisition is that the institution has to make a strategic decision and be able to project that they can be able to sustain serials subscriptions over long periods of times. Unlike book purchases that can be done in a one time purchase manner, serials require that the institution commit itself to purchasing that particular serial title at least for a year or longer. Also serials collections usually consume a large portion of overall library budget expenditures of the library's information resources. In a report by the Association of Research Libraries (2005, p. 11), it was indicated that the cost of serials has been going upward to over 20 per cent in the past years prior to the survey in 2005. In 2007, the average cost of a health sciences serials title was \$1,199 as compared to \$1,098 in 2006, making a 9 per cent increase in the two-year period (Van Orsdel and Born, 2007). However, given the funding situation that the UNZA medical library and indeed many libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa are faced with, it is difficult to imagine there is any institution that can keep up with these price increments.

Serials print donations

The UNZA medical library has received donations for subscriptions to print journals, mainly funded by the World Health Organization (WHO) Country Office in Zambia. They have funded subscriptions to 15 journal titles. The library was given a choice in terms of choosing the journals that could be supported. Other donations that the library has received over the years that have made it possible to access current serial titles are those that were funded by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the Swedish International Development Agency/Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation (SIDA/SAREC). These programs were part of a large donor support program for the whole

University of Zambia Library System. The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) had a program of support to the library with subscriptions to major scientific journal titles, and a number of those journals were health sciences journals. The Swedish International Development Agency also had a similar program to that of AAAS. These programs really just provided the funding; the responsibility for identifying and selecting the journals was left to the recipient library (Kanyengo, 2007, p. 36).

In terms of UNZA Library serials subscriptions, the library was left to follow their own collection development process by working with members of faculty, students and the various collection development committees in the different schools of the university to make the selection of the journal titles that were needed by the institution. This meant that the bulk of the funding of the serials subscriptions went to ongoing maintenance of the journals that the library was already subscribing to. Other print donations that the library has received in the past came mainly from journals published by the various professional societies who give complimentary subscriptions to developing-country libraries. These societies include, among others, the Society of General Microbiology who gave complimentary subscriptions of the *Journal of Microbiology*, *Journal of General Virology* and *Journal of Medical Microbiology*. Another professional society that has been of much help to the library is the International Society of Surgery, which has over the years donated the *World Journal of Surgery*.

Sister Library Program between the University of Zambia Medical Library and the University of Florida Health Sciences Center library

The library has over the years built up a collection of offprint journal articles. The offprint journal collection arose as a sub-project of the Communication for Better Health (CBH) project that was implemented between the University of Zambia and the Dreyfus Health Foundation of New York in the 1990s. As a result of that project, a Sister Library Program was developed between the University of Zambia Medical Library and the University of Florida Health Sciences Center Library. This project involved the publishing of a booklet quarterly, primarily aimed toward rural health practitioners in Zambia. The content of the *Zambia Health Information Digest* included a balance between research and clinical information (i.e. best practices) and local studies. Readers of the *Digest* then requested the articles whose citations were contained in the *Digest* from the Medical Library. If the Medical Library did not have the article, a request would then be sent to the University of Florida Health Science Center Library to fill it. The Medical Library would then make a copy of the article for the Offprint Collection before sending it to the person that requested it, leading to the growth of the Offprint Collection.

Access to full-text online journals

The main support for electronic access to journals has been the WHO's Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI) and the Program for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI). These programs provide access to full-text electronic journals to low income countries with a GNP of less than \$1,000 per year. As of 2007, the HINARI program provided access to 3,750 journals from diverse fields such as medicine, health and the social sciences (World Health Organization, 2007). The PERI program

works on similar lines. Other programs that have been extremely helpful are the open access journals such as those that are available through BioMed Central, Boline International, PubMed Central and Public Library of Science (PLOS). Other journals such as the *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* are freely available electronically to users. These programs of accessing electronic journals are extremely useful, especially for libraries that cannot normally afford access to the online journals. However, users are still not getting the full benefit of the programs due to inadequate computers available for use to both students and faculty. Although training programs in information literacy skills could be set up, the limited number of computers available for use in the library for students makes it difficult to mount an effective information literacy teaching program.

Trends in book acquisition

Book acquisitions for the library have followed similar trends as those of the serials subscriptions. The library has mainly depended on donations to sustain its book collection.

Book acquisitions

As stated earlier, the UNZA Medical library during the years 2001–2007 depended on donations from various partners, both individuals and institutions, for their book collection development. For instance, in the year 2005, the library received a donation of 5,140 books from both individuals and institutional donors. The biggest donation for the year 2005 was that of 5,000 books from the Family Health Trust. The Family Health Trust is a Zambian-registered non-governmental organization. However, for the first time in a number of years, the Medical Library, as part of the funding that came to the whole UNZA library system, also benefited from the K1 billion (\$US261,096.6057) Ministry of Education Sector Support Program pool funding. Through this program, 93 titles, mostly textbooks, were ordered and bought for the Medical Library (University of Zambia Library, 2005, p. 5). The Education Sector Support Program Pool funding was a funding program support from cooperating partners, mainly from some countries of the European Union, towards assisting the Ministry of Education in meeting its needs. The Library also received financial support from the Finnish International Development Agency (FINNIDA) from 1994 to 1999 for the purchase of books and textbooks. The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) has been one of the major supporting partners towards the revitalization of the University of Zambia School of Medicine. As part of their ten-year development support, in 2000 they funded the purchase of books to the amount of £60,000 (\$91,000), coupled with £80,000 (\$163,592) for the purchase of new equipment and renovations (UNZA Medical Library Annual Report, 2000). The Flemish Inter University Council (VLIR) has also supported the purchase of books for the whole university library system to the amount of €20,000, the Medical Library included. The Elsevier Foundation donated 481 new titles to the library in 2005. This was part of their celebration of 425 years of House of Elsevier and the 125th anniversary of the modern Elsevier company. Elsevier donated books went to ten beneficiary libraries in countries such as Ecuador, Guatemala, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique,

Sierra Leone, Uganda, Vietnam, Tanzania and Zambia (Elsevier, 2005).

In 2006 a partnership was initiated by one of the students from the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) who was on an internship program with the Center for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia (CIRDZ). A critical element of this student library partnership is that the library is forging linkages with USA-based students in Northern countries and a library in the South. This partnership is innovative in several ways:

- it ensures that the library does not become a dumping ground for books that are no longer needed in Northern countries and, therefore, have nowhere to go;
- only books that are really needed by the local institution, the University of Zambia Medical Library, are sent, and therefore there is a reduction in shipping and processing costs by avoiding books that are not needed;
- through this process a relationship is built between the donor and the recipient that can eventually lead to other projects.

This partnership, started by one student in the USA, has grown into something much bigger, with other students from UAB and faculty from the Sparkman Center for Global Health and the University of Alabama School of Medicine Lister Hill Library all participating in the project, so that each time a student or faculty member comes to Zambia, they bring books for the UNZA Medical Library. The partnership has led to the UNZA Medical Library and the Affiliates of the University of Alabama at Birmingham collaborating on a project that aims to increase the internet bandwidth access of the whole school so that students and faculty can benefit from various donor funded programs that provide for free access to electronic journals. It has also included renovations for the Library.

Future prospects in collection development

The inadequate funding levels experienced by the University of Zambia Medical Library are going to continue for the foreseeable future unless the country's economy improves. This is a situation similar to those of other libraries in sub-Saharan Africa where, as a result of poor funding, library collections are characterized mostly by a collection which has outdated books and journals, predominantly in print format, and a heavy dependence on donations. A key strategy to addressing the inadequate low funding levels and replenishing collections is for institutional funding to be raised significantly, especially for book purchases and the maintenance of serials subscriptions. This would also require that the School of Medicine, the University of Zambia Library System and the Central Administration work out a system of contributing a percentage of their tuition fees towards the purchase of books, subscriptions to journal titles and updating of other required information resources. This formula was tried at the beginning of 2000, with the University allocating 7.5 percent of tuition fees directly to the Library. However, it was later discontinued due to the central administration insisting that there were not enough funds to finance other operations of the university. This model is already in existence at the Copperbelt University, where the "CBU Council decided in 1998 that five (5%) percent of the total tuition fees paid by students should go to the Library for

purchase of information resources. In 2000, the CBU Council revised the figure to 12 (12%) percent of the tuition fees, to be used for acquisition of library and information resources” (Simui and Kanyengo, 2004). Importantly the Medical Library needs to continue to explore and develop long-term partnerships that could continue to support relevant information resources in whatever format, print or electronic. These partnerships can be developed as part of larger research programs that the faculty and researchers at the school are engaged in. Other partnerships can be explored with other libraries by forging exchange programs for serials. The library can also cultivate and develop linkages with local business and invite them to adopt and fund certain programs of the library.

Conclusion

The University of Zambia Medical Library has over the years experienced difficulties in funding its collection (serials and books) in order to meet the information needs of its constituency. It has been made much more difficult to offer an effective library and information service in an environment in which the numbers of students are always increasing whilst there are inadequate information resources and a high demand for current and appropriate information from both students and faculty. Consequently, the library has had to be proactive and innovative in finding alternative strategies to be able to meet those information needs. These strategies implemented over the years include, among others:

- forging Sister Library Partnership Programs;
- making use of the Offprints Collection as this type of information is invaluable;
- cultivating and courting various partnerships for relevant donations of information resource;
- working with the government so that funding for information resources is included in bilateral technical agreements and the use of electronic journal programs.

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Corresponding author

Christine Wamunyima Kanyengo can be contacted at: ckanyengo@yahoo.com