Contributed Paper Session I-3
THE STATUS OF ANIMAL HEALTH INFORMATION IN THE SADCC REGION WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON ZIMBABWE
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ABSTRACT: The paper will describe the status of animal health information in Zimbabwe as a developing nation. There are two recognizable libraries which deal specifically with veterinary medicine and animal science. The achievements of these centres will be dealt with. Especially the Veterinary Library of the University of Zimbabwe—how it has developed from being a little information unit to being a national reference centre.

Automation aspects will be dealt with, including CD-ROM and CDS-ISIS. Problems with periodical subscriptions and document delivery will also be addressed.

The implications of the political changes going on in South Africa as far as they affect animal health information in the region will also be mentioned.

Agriculture and stock breeding are still the dominant sectors in Africa. They provide for over 75% of Africa’s labor force, bringing the continent not less than 60% of its total export earnings. The continent has the potential to produce more food, but figures show that production is on the decline and that trend is likely to continue. The contributing factors to this decline are: uncertain weather conditions, infertile soils, lack of pesticides, poor food security systems, lack of medicines and grazing for livestock, and so on. One important factor which is usually overlooked is lack of information.

Up to now, it has been established that information is the backbone for planning, decision making and research activities. There should be information systems which are handled by trained library and information personnel who are able to disseminate information to the researcher, the policy maker/planner, the input distributor, the extension worker and the farmer. Up-to-date information on appropriate technology should be made available in the way of journals, books, handbooks, pamphlets and data bases which include CD-ROMs. Information repackaging is also becoming more and more important, especially if vital information is to reach the communal farmer.

The situation of information services as a whole is pathetic. Empty shelves are not an uncommon feature nor are shelves filled with archaic materials are not an uncommon feature. Policy makers should be made aware of the importance of agricultural information services to the development of agriculture as a whole. As part of the strategy, the respective government agencies should encourage the establishment of appropriate networking facilities to effect the sharing of agricultural information between countries and researchers.

In October 1988, The Technical Center for Agricultural and Rural Co-operation, (CTA) and the Southern African Centre for Cooperation in Agricultural Research (SACCAR) signed a Memorandum of Understanding for collaboration in the dissemination of information on agricultural and rural development for the benefit of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC). As part of the collaborative work programme for 1989, CTA and SACCAR jointly organized a training workshop on “Management of Agricultural Information Services” in Zambia. I attended this workshop, whose first activity was to review the agricultural information scene in the SADCC countries, to identify key weaknesses and threats, and to build the training programme towards a problem solving drive.

The importance of grey literature was also discussed. This form of literature is very important in Africa where a lot of useful literature goes unpublished. Therefore, ways of tapping this information were explored. Aggressive marketing of the infor-
mation unit was also emphasised. In many cases users were not aware of most of the services offered by the library. It was, therefore, up to the librarian to sell his product to promote the use of the library.

The Southern African Centre for Cooperation in Agricultural Research was established to provide the organisational basis for regional cooperation and technical support for national research systems, manpower and training, and information and documentation. Its overall objectives are to promote and disseminate available technology, to promote and implement studies of problems common to all or to several member states, and to initiate cooperative research to overcome them. In 1990, a four-week computer training workshop was held in Malawi. It was in essence a training course on CDS-ISIS software.

CTA and SACCAR are also collaborating with the member countries in CARIS, which is the Current Agricultural Research Information System, initiated by the FAO. Collaboration also has involved networking of agricultural information in the region. At a SACCAR/IDRC Planning Workshop for the Establishment of the Southern African Agricultural Information System, each participating country was given a key discipline of agricultural information to concentrate on. Animal production/veterinary medicine was given to our library, the University of Zimbabwe Veterinary Library and the Bunda College of Agriculture Library in Malawi. These centres were to develop their collections with a view to being focal points for the subject areas to other countries. It could safely be said here that the University of Zimbabwe Veterinary Library has about the best collection in veterinary medicine in the SADCC region, and it is kept busy with interlibrary loan requests. There are 10 SADCC countries, namely: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The region’s population is about 70 million.

In the SADCC region, animal health information does not normally feature as a special form of information in many respects. It is normally grouped with general agricultural information. However, at the Universities of Zambia and Zimbabwe, there are Veterinary Science Faculties which have their own specialised libraries. The University of Zimbabwe Veterinary Science Faculty library, of which I am librarian, was officially opened in 1986 as a branch library of the University Library System. Its existence came about as a result of the faculty requesting the main library to assist it in opening up a specialised branch library. Space was made available within the faculty, and was equipped with shelving and some audio visual equipment which included caramels and a microfiche reader. At the moment, the collection stands at about 12,000 volumes. We subscribe to about 60 periodical titles. We also exchange our Zimbabwe Veterinary Journal with 25 other journals from all over the world. We recently acquired CD-ROM equipment and are now subscribing to AGRICOLA, and will soon be getting CABl. We almost opted to subscribe to Vet CD and Beast CD as opposed to subscribing to the whole CABl data base. After weighing all the pros and cons, we decided that it would be more cost effective to subscribe to the general data base so that more users could benefit from the facility. CTA is considering donating AGRIS to us.

Since we started operating the CD-ROM, we find that it has really added a new spectrum to our services. Both academics and students are making good use of it. The frustrating part is that we do not have most of the cited references; therefore, we have to send for them through SAILS, which is the Southern African Interlibrary Loans Scheme based in the State Library in Pretoria, South Africa. None of the libraries in the University Library system are automated. We started planning to automate as far back as 1980.

As mentioned before, at a regional meeting held in Swaziland in June 1990, our library was earmarked as the regional focal point for animal production information and veterinary medicine information. The initial support for these functions would be supplied by SACCAR and IDRC. This project has not yet taken off, but we are hopeful that something will start happening soon.

We are also partaking in PMDISS which is the Pest Management and Documentation Information System and Service. It is housed in the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. We are the National Input Centre for Zimbabwe. That means we are responsible for identifying all material relating to insect pest management in Zimbabwe, and sending the details to ICIPE so that it can go into the PMDISS data base. Up to now, it has been very difficult for us to carry out this project because of lack of staff. Recently, we were given another staff member, so this has helped alleviate some of our constraints. We still need additional qualified staff to be able to carry out most of our functions effectively. At the moment, there are only three of us: an untrained library assistant with “A” Levels, a senior library assistant who is a graduate waiting to go for post graduate training in Librarianship, and myself with
an MLS. The animal science collection, which is still in the main library, is in the process of being moved to the Veterinary Library, so that the two collections can be united. Up to this point, one-half of the animal science collection is with us, whilst the other half is in the main library.

The services offered by our library include a photocopying service, CD-ROM searching, and current awareness in the form of photocopying contents pages of incoming journals. We also have an acquisitions list which is issued about every three months. The list is sent to all the Provincial Veterinary Centres because our library is used as the National Reference Centre in Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science. We also loan out audio-visual equipment to the various departments of the faculty, mostly caramels.

In Harare, we also have the Veterinary Research Laboratory Library which comes under the Ministry of Agriculture. The Veterinary Research Library is a joint library for the Veterinary Services and the Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis control staff. The library houses about 4,000 books and subscribes to about 50 journals. Established in 1977, its stock has been growing steadily. All staff members of the Veterinary Laboratory are entitled to use the library. In addition, the services of the library are available to all university students, lecturers, and other bona-fide researchers. This library is also not automated. The services offered are circulation, photocopying, referencing, and current awareness. The University Veterinary Library cooperates with this library in interlibrary loans.

There are various other little information centres within the Ministry of Agriculture which deal with animal health. For example, the Animal Production Branch has a small departmental collection. There is also the Ministry of Agriculture Central Library which houses quite a large number of animal science materials. A large part of this collection is grey literature. Veterinary practitioners who are in private practice do not have information services rendered to them. The ones who are members of the Zimbabwe Veterinary Association are allowed to come and use the University Veterinary Library and can borrow two items at a time. The University Veterinary Library is the only library in the country which also collects scientific information on pet animals and wild animals, while all the other libraries concentrate on livestock. Some public libraries, however, collect popular works on pets.

It can safely be said that Zimbabwe has one of the better animal health information systems in the region as discussed above. The general agricultural extension workers also disseminate animal health information, i.e., we have extension workers who disseminate information to the rural farmer. This includes information on animal production and diseases. Commercial farmers usually get information through the Commercial Farmers Union and through local journals. With the help of international donor agencies and our own resources, we are hopeful that information on animal health will become more specialised. We also hope that we will soon join the high-tech era which enables us to provide information at our finger tips.

References


4. Assistance to Faculties of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine in SADCC: Report to The Special Programme on African Agricultural Research (SPAAR) April 1989. Veterinary practitioners who are in private practice do not have information services rendered to them. Most of them who are members of the Zimbabwe Veterinary Association are allowed to come and use the university.