

The strong bridge between African librarians and international partnerships

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Abstract

The paper highlights the experience of working with Shane Godbolt when she was a practising Medical librarian, her mentorship to younger librarians/information professionals, her personal and professional support to African librarians and the role she played as the Director of Partnerships in Health Information (Phi). These activities led to successful collaboration between Phi and African librarians. Indeed Shane widened the networks and opened up opportunities for many.

Keywords: Africa; East; collaboration; continuing professional development; information science; information skills; librarians; librarianship, health science; libraries, health care;

I have been requested by colleagues organising the Special issue of Health Information and Libraries Journal (HILJ) to write an article about my experience of working with Partnerships in Health Information (Phi) and Shane, focusing on Phi-Uganda partnership, her involvement with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Health and Biosciences Libraries Section (HBS) and her vision regarding the Evidence for Global and Disaster Health Special Interest Group (SIG). These will reflect Shane's personality and highlight her contribution to international health librarianship as a factual record of the scope and impact of her achievements. The rest of the article, therefore, focuses on the above issues.

It is an honour to write about a great librarian of our time, Shane Godbolt (RIP). I first met Shane in 1985 when I was doing a Masters course in Librarianship at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. During the April holiday, I was given an attachment at the Charing Cross Medical Library where Shane was the Medical librarian. We did not meet again until 2002 during the Kent-Surrey-Sussex Link (KSSL) project supported by the British Council/DFID. The project was initiated by Michael Carmel and Jean Shaw as part of the activities of Satellife-UK, which later became Phi. When Shane became the Director of

Phi, she looked for Phi contacts in Africa and offered herself to revive the activities that had stopped, something she did with professionalism, passion, personal touch, selflessness and love.

Phi-Uganda collaboration

Our collaboration with Phi is best described by Carnwell and Carson (2009) who pointed out that 'the collaborating participants contribute their expertise to the degree it is needed to solve a problem, with hardly any expectation of reciprocation'. This is what Phi and Shane did all the years I have known them. When things worked out, for example, when a successful attachment of an African medical librarian to a UK institution was done, that was it, Phi and Shane got satisfaction as the librarian returned home to implement or apply what s/he learned. I know Lord Crisp (Omaswa & Crisp, 2014) pointed out that there are gains at both sides in collaboration, and I agree with him, but I also note that in most cases involving the developed and developing countries, the 'weighing scale' is more on our side; we benefit more.

Secondly, I think Phi was like a Mustard seed we read about in the bible. It started as a small organisation over two decades ago, it was then sprouting and growing, and the African librarians and related professionals, who benefitted from the many activities of Phi continued to enjoy the professional shelter provided by both Phi and Shane, just like the birds enjoyed the shelter

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provided by the branches that grew out of a mustard seed.

Makerere University Medical Library, where I used to work, collaborated with Phi since 1994; hence, becoming the longest surviving Phi partner. As indicated in the introduction, we initially worked with Jean Shaw and Michael Carmel. From 1994 to 2000, the aim of the partnership was 'to encourage the free flow of health-related knowledge between nations'. The partnership mainly focussed on supporting the Makerere Medical Library in increasing access to current literature for its users. Consequently, a fax machine was procured, literature requests made and articles were faxed initially from Leicester and later from South Thames Library and Information Service (STLIS) to the Makerere Medical Library. This made a lot of difference to the Medical Library users. In 2000/2001, Phi and the then STLIS, which later became Kent, Surrey and Sussex Library (KSSL) successfully applied for a British Council/DFID Higher Education Link project. The aim of the project was 'to provide an understanding of the global knowledge base and how it may be accessed, so enabling health practitioners to improve the quality of health care for the people of Uganda'. The project included (a) equipment (computers, printer, projector, etc); (b) training of health workers in rural Uganda by Makerere librarians on how to access the information resources at Makerere; (c) exchange visits by KSSL librarians to Uganda to conduct training and Makerere librarians to UK for short Continuous Professional Development (CPD) visits; (d) work on the Makerere Medical library website; and (e) evaluation of the impact of the project and dissemination at a conference. The project activities were successfully implemented and reported in a conference paper (Musoke, Street, & Cooke, 2004).

In 2009, the late Sara Mbagwa and I wrote a project proposal to the Elsevier Foundation (EF) and one of the requirements was to involve an International partner. The most appropriate one was Phi. However, EF being an American organisation, I had worries that they may require a US-based partner. I enquired, and I was informed that a UK partner was acceptable. This project

introduced Phi to EF, something that Shane greatly appreciated as it confirms that in collaboration, both partners benefit. I started working closely with Shane since 2009 until her death. Some examples of the project activities Shane was involved in:

As part of the Makerere University Library EF project titled: 'Enhancing Access to Current Literature by Health Workers in Rural Uganda and community Health Problem Solving', Shane and other Phi members visited Uganda in October – November 2011. A paper about this project (Musoke, 2014) was presented at the 2014 World Library and Information Conference (WLIC).

Shane and other Phi members travelled to Naggalama hospital that was founded in 1905, in a rural area, 40 km East of Kampala and observed the Ugandan facilitators (Maria Musoke and her team) who conducted the rural outreach training workshop for the community leaders and health professionals.

In 2012, Shane facilitated a capacity building workshop for Uganda health information professionals held at Makerere University Library. It was during this workshop that the Association for Health Information and Libraries in Africa (AHILA) Uganda chapter (Ug-AHILA) was born.

In 2010, Shane supported the African Prisons Library initiative through Phi. Consequently, the first Prisons librarian in Uganda received training in UK. With that support, she was able to write a paper that was accepted by IFLA and it was presented during the 2011 World Library and Information Conference in Puerto Rico.

Furthermore, Shane provided similar support to the African Hospital library project. Having been to rural hospitals in Uganda, Kenya, Sierra Leone, etc, Shane identified the needs of rural health workers and libraries (where they existed) and supported them in many ways. For example, she got ten copies of the new British National Formulary (BNF, 74, September 2017 – March 2018) for rural hospitals in Uganda. I carried them in September 2019 and have distributed them. This was the last donation before her death.

In 2018, Shane nominated me for an Honorary Fellowship of CILIP, the UK Library and Information Association. An Honorary Fellowship



Shane Godbolt at the capacity building workshop, Makerere University Library, Kampala, Uganda.

is the highest recognition CILIP gives to information professionals who have had a lasting impact on the profession. An awardee is nominated by a CILIP member, and a panel of judges makes a recommendation to CILIP.

As we built strong and true relationships in the Phi-Uganda collaboration, we continued working with Shane, even after the end of the funded projects and Phi because she always offered to help.

Support to Musoke (2016) book and Sabbatical

Related to Phi-Uganda collaboration above, was Shane's support to the book I authored. When I decided to take a Sabbatical from March to October 2015, to write a book (Musoke, 2016), the University regulations where I used to work required the applicant to justify the choice of the host institution. I thought it would be easy to justify the University of Sheffield where I did my PhD as the host; however, my supervisors and most of the Professors I knew had retired. When I shared this challenge with Shane, she said 'Don't worry, give me a few days, I will get back to you'. After 2 days, she forwarded to me emails between her and my host in a related department in the same University, with forms to fill; it was done, sorted; that was Shane, very good at solving problems!

When I was in UK during the Sabbatical, Shane advised me to attend professional meetings and

conferences. She then identified such meetings and conferences and organised my travel. Those professional gatherings enabled me to access additional information for writing the book titled: *Informed and healthy: theoretical and applied perspectives on the value of information to health care* (Musoke, 2016). The meetings and conferences included:

- i Critical Appraisal Skills and systematic review meeting, Oxford, UK, 27 March 2015. This was a one day meeting, which updated my knowledge on the important topic of critical appraisal. I met several professionals and researchers with projects in Uganda during the meeting, which was important for the introductory chapter of the book.
- ii European Association for Health Information and Libraries (EAHIL) Conference, Edinburgh, UK, 9-12 June 2015. The conference was very beneficial as it enabled me to update my literature on research methods and information seeking theories as well as health workers' access and use of information. Many interesting research papers were presented and it was a good opportunity for CPD from the workshops.
- iii Publishers in Development conference organised by INASP, London, 30 June 2015. This one day conference enabled me to update my knowledge on various issues concerning publishing and book trade, the challenges of IT

infrastructure in Sub-Saharan Africa from the keynote presenters, which were all important for the book. The conference also gave me further assurance that the choice of my book publisher was the best.

- iv Partnerships in Health Information (Phi) Celebration at the House of Lords, London, 6 July 2015. As Makerere University Library was the longest partner of Phi, Shane asked me to be one of the speakers at such an important occasion, which was a great honour and privilege to me. That was my first and most likely the last time to enter the House of Lords, a very humbling experience. I met eminent senior medical professionals, librarians, authors, researchers, publishers, etc and I later followed some of them and received relevant information for the book. Among the distinguished people who attended the celebration were two Lords who were medical doctors.
- v Global Health meeting in Manchester, 12 October 2015. The meeting gave me an opportunity to meet UK health professionals working in Uganda as well as Ugandan health professionals studying or working in UK. I got information about the many projects that I had not known before. Listening to the presentations during the meeting and reading the documents from the partners broadened my knowledge that enriched the concluding chapters of the book.

Another conference I attended with Shane during my Sabbatical was the WLIC organised by IFLA at Cape Town, South Africa, from 15 to 20 August 2015. I was a member of the Standing committee of the IFLA Section on Health and Biosciences (HBS) since 2011 and I had to attend the annual WLIC. So, I encouraged Shane to attend the conference.

During that WLIC, I was elected the new Chair of the IFLA HBS Standing Committee, becoming the first health information professional from Sub-Saharan Africa to chair that section. Secondly, I was able to attend various sessions with interesting papers and met several researchers and discussed issues and trends in the Library and Information Science (LIS) field that enriched my writing. We also spent some time discussing Research for Life (R4L) issues in Africa during a meeting organised

by the Information Training and Outreach Centre for Africa (ITOCA) and attended by the R4L Council chairperson and other members. Shane and I met several partners and planned for potential projects together.

I did acknowledge Shane's support in my book. Shane liked that book very much because, according to her, it brought out the voices and experiences of information users and their attribution of value to information and the resultant positive effects to health care.

After the book was published, there were two book launches in UK in 2016. Shane organised the 1st book launch at the University of Winchester in May. The launch was attended by the Ugandan High Commissioner to UK, Prof Joyce Kikafunda. Shane invited some members of the East African Health Care Forum in UK to attend the 1st book launch. This motivated the members of the Forum to organise a 2nd Book launch in August that was held at the British Medical Association (BMA).

Furthermore, Shane bought ten copies of the book and donated them to several medical libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The donation was announced during the AHILA conference in October 2016.

Contribution to IFLA Health and Biosciences Section (IFLA HBS) and the Special Interest Group

Shane played many roles in IFLA HBS. Initially, she was a very active corresponding member before she became a full member of the HBS Standing committee up to the time of her death. As a corresponding member, Shane was neither eligible to stand nor to nominate officers, but she was eligible to be a returning officer. In 2016, I requested Shane to be the HBS returning officer to oversee the elections according to the set IFLA guidelines for the 2017-2019 officers. She managed the electoral process very professionally.

As a member of the HBS Standing committee, Shane promptly reviewed abstracts for the annual Conference Open Sessions. She went further to propose the scoring grid that the HBS Standing committee uses to select abstracts up to now.



First book launch held at the University of Winchester, May 2016. From left to right: Cheryl Twomey; Maria Musoke; Shane Godbolt.

Furthermore, when I was HBS Standing committee Chairperson, I noted that there were good abstracts that we left out because of the limited time available for the Open session. I shared this concern with Shane. As usual, Shane proposed a solution of introducing lightning talks of 5–7 minutes each in addition to the full papers. This enabled the HBS to get 2–3 additional abstracts as lightning talks; hence, opening up opportunities for more speakers at such a prestigious conference as WLIC. In 2017/18, the HBS was happy to note that the main WLIC followed suit and opened up sessions for lightning talks.

Following a successful meeting during EAHIL 2017, it was Shane who proposed IFLA as the most appropriate host for a Special Interest Group (SIG) on Global and Disaster Health. The proposal required a lot of paper work and Shane worked very hard to meet the deadline. As the Chairperson of HBS, I welcomed the proposal and worked to ensure that the IFLA guidelines for HBS to host the SIG are followed. This was successful and the SIG is doing very well.

Another contribution was to the IFLA Special Journal issue: *Health information transforming lives* (Musoke et al., 2019), which I was the Guest

Editor with Shane and Martin Morris. Shane had professional contacts in most Universities in UK and in many other parts of the world, which made it easy to identify appropriate reviewers of the articles. She also provided the much needed support to mid-career authors that enabled them to get a publication in a reputable journal, which would not otherwise have been possible. The Special journal issue was produced on time and Shane was at the centre of this achievement for the HBS.

To recognise the many contributions Shane made to HBS and the health information profession in general, the HBS Standing committee resolved to honour Shane by dedicating its new book to her. The book is titled '*Growing Community Health Literacy through Libraries*' and it will be published this year (Dalrymple & Galvin, 2020).

Support to the Association for Health Information and Libraries in Africa (AHILA)

Shane made various contributions to AHILA, which other members are going to write about. In this article, I only outline the activities that I carried out with her. For example, during the AHILA conference in Mozambique in 2008, Shane worked with the then AHILA President, Nancy Kamau, to prepare a Strategic plan. I was one of the members who were invited to make further contributions to the Strategic plan during a one day meeting.

After over five years, the AHILA Strategic plan was due for revision. Hence, in August 2015 before the IFLA conference in Cape Town, Shane mobilised AHILA members and we spent a day with her and other colleagues reviewing the AHILA Strategic plan. This was greatly appreciated.

Furthermore, in 2014 during the AHILA biennial conference in Tanzania, which Shane attended, it was recommended that the AHILA Constitution be reviewed. The then President of AHILA, Dr Rehema Chande Mallya, requested Nancy Kamau, Shane and myself to review the Constitution. In 2016, we presented the draft and members made more comments. We worked with Shane to have the current Constitution that was

approved by the AHILA General Assembly in October 2019, and its provisions were immediately put into force.

During that conference, AHILA gave an award to Shane recognising her contribution to the African health information professionals.

Personality

If I am asked to describe Shane in two to three words, difficult as it is, I would describe her as loving, linking and an inspiration. Shane spent the last years of her life linking African health information professionals to various opportunities she struggled to identify. These built our capacity, widened our networks, mentored and inspired us in many ways. Mother Theresa said that '*some people come in our lives as a blessing, some as lessons*'. Shane was a great blessing in my life in many ways, and so she was to many other people.

Shane was very good and quick at solving problems and turning challenges into opportunities as already indicated in section 3. Whenever 'you' are happy, Shane was happy; she was indeed made to make others happy.

She went further to open her loving heart and gave us the physical, material and professional care. For example, Shane opened her house for us, would-be-strangers, and we became part of her family, picking us from the airport and taking us back at unfriendly hours of the night.

Shane was a 'morning' person, sleeping early and waking up early, whereas I am a late night person, sleeping late and waking up late; so, we called each other 'early bird' and 'owl/nocturnal', respectively. I enjoyed working with Shane, for we shared jokes as well as challenges facing health information professionals and we struggled together to implement many activities successfully.

Shane was very active in her parish church, Pinner. Whenever I visited, we used to attend Sunday and other services together. As a strong believer in God, Shane was positive about her health, which was encouraging. She was hopeful and kept encouraging me that things will be fine!

My last physical interaction with Shane in September 2019 was generally fine, but she kept

saying ‘when I am gone...’ which brought emotions and tears—I could not imagine that I would not see her again! We discussed many things and held online meetings with Grace Ajuwon about the AHILA conference scheduled for October 2019 and with Blessing Mawire about AHILA and ICML in June 2021. This shows how dedicated Shane was to the success of AHILA even at the time when she was unwell.

Finally, the sad message came. It was a few days before our University’s Graduation week, but I had to travel to Pinner to bid farewell to my friend. I was impressed by the number of people who attended the function, which clearly showed who Shane was, the generations of people she touched in her life and the effect of her activities on people from the different walks of life. May her soul RIP.

Conclusion

It was a great opportunity to know and work with Shane. She motivated, mentored and inspired me and so she did to many other people. Among other things, Shane achieved the following:

- Linked African librarians to many professional opportunities;
- Widened the networks of both the African and the UK professionals;
- Provided the professional and physical support, without expecting anything in return.

At the end of her term as Phi Director, it was very difficult to say bye to Shane because Shane and Phi had become synonymous. Now that both Shane and Phi are gone, I worry about the future, the unknown!

We all know what happens when a bridge is broken; we lost our bridge, Shane! The best we can do is to take forward the professional activities she supported.

I enjoyed Shane’s home hospitality. I will always cherish all the gestures of love and thank Richard, Miriam, and Selina for accepting us in their home. Rest in peace dear Shane!

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