



Public Access to Health Information (PAHI) Workshop

Dakar, Senegal, 29th & 30th June 2011



Report by

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PAHI Workshop Report *Dakar, Senegal*

This report records the activities and the highlights of a workshop funded by IFLA and jointly managed by IFLA and the UK NGO Partnerships in Health Information (Phi) working in partnership with Sen-AHILA, which is the country chapter of the Association of Health Information & Libraries in Africa (AHILA) and the *Environnement et Developpement du Tiers- Monde / Environmental Development Action in the Third World (ENDA)*.

Workshop planning and delivery was an international team effort with excellent local support from the members of Sen-AHILA. The local team was led by Ibrahima Bob, an experienced health information specialist and trainer, former President of AHILA and coordinator of the *Healthcare Information For All by 2015 (HIFA2015)* advocacy campaign in Africa working with Maïmouna Diallo, Director of the Library and Media Centre at ENDA in whose excellent facilities the workshop was held. Maïmouna personally ensured all local arrangements ran like clockwork and met all eventualities with a gracious efficiency. All technology was trouble free and twelve internet enabled terminals were an unexpected bonus. While such access was not a requirement having access gave welcome flexibility in allowing participants to search, share and discuss relevant sources on topics they identified as important and relevant in their local context. Timely and abundant refreshments aided the excellent learning environment!

The workshop was jointly facilitated by IFLA /FAIFE Committee member Philippe Colomb, from the Pompidou Centre Library in Paris and Ibrahima Bob. Both were fluent in English as well as their national language French which was of great assistance to Phi in coordinating the necessary logistics. The official language of the workshop was French and it marked the launch of the PAHI materials in the French language. It was clearly a matter of great pride to all present that Senegal had been chosen for the launch of the French language version of the materials. All participants received a USB stick pre-loaded with the PAHI learning materials.

We were honoured to have the Director of ENDA open the workshop with an excellent speech strongly supportive of the potential of those present to make a difference in expanding public access to health information. He insisted on the ideas that libraries must be part of the society and on the need for them to outreach. "Librarians must come out of the libraries to provide information to the people who need it", he said. We were also inspired by warm greetings sent by AHILA President, Nasra Gathoni, Kenya, who reminded us that:

"... health information professionals in Africa must take the lead in improving the health of the society. This should be done through active involvement in ensuring those providing healthcare as well as consumers access accurate and timely information. Health information professionals should take more proactive roles in ensuring this is achieved."

Nasra's message was exemplified by Maïmouna, from the host institution ENDA. She had arranged for two different national TV channels to include a feature on health information to mark the workshop. With interviews on two different shows one being broadcast in the evening and the other early the following morning the potential audience reach was significant. Maïmouna and Philippe Colomb were interviewed for some twenty minutes about the forthcoming workshop and were able to promote the importance of public access to reliable health information and the valuable role libraries and health information specialists/librarians should play in delivering this. It also stressed the interest of journalists, as information professionals, to work with librarians and help them make information accessible to the general public.

The workshop participants were drawn from a wide range of health information specialists and librarians working in hospitals, higher education, government and NGO institutions across the capital. Following introductions and sharing of experiences relevant to the topic it was clear that this very high calibre group had a great deal to learn from each other and we agreed that the workshop should include plenty of time for plenary and small group discussion.

Philippe set the scene on the opening day giving an overview of the purpose of the workshop and of all the learning materials the participants had been given. He then spoke on the work of the FAIFE Committee of IFLA and the principle of intellectual freedom especially in relation to health information. Ibrahima followed looking at what libraries can do to spread health information especially through partnership working. A plenary discussion followed and the level of engagement amongst all participants was high and the quality of contributions during discussion was also excellent. Stories shared included:

- Questions about privacy and health information: how to give information without generating stigmas?
- A participant from an NGO working on reproductive health and having, from time to time, to deal with suicidal fear
- PAHI should not be dependent on the good will of individual librarians but should be seen as part of a code of good professional practice for the librarian; recognised difficulties of getting procedures in place to achieve this
- The need to train users (including doctors, academics and university professors) and encourage good practices in information searching

The beauty of the PAHI workshop structure, especially with experienced facilitators, is that it is a very flexible format. The materials are a catalyst round which to deal with the topic and it is possible to respond to the participants needs and wishes quickly e.g. through extending discussion periods, introducing practical exercises and sharing of experiences thus encouraging maximum learning opportunities relevant to the local context and needs. A modification on the first day was to agree that topics identified by participants during discussion should be investigated further during the afternoon session. Taking advantage of the availability of computer terminals with internet access participants were asked to work in pairs researching and evaluating websites which were relevant to their topic. Informal feedback provoked a lively discussion and the question was raised about the role of evidence-based medicine in public access to health information. Indeed it was clear that for some participants this was a topic on which they were keen to have further training. We explained that evidence-based medicine underpinned public access to health information. The role of health information specialists/librarians was vital in providing health information literacy (how to find organise and use health/medical information) training for users (e.g. Pub Med database, HINARI journals database). However the focus of this workshop was on ways that they as health librarians could improve public access to health information. Participants were keen that we should understand that they felt their own access was limited due to the poor availability of many French publishers on HINARI. Clearly an issue requiring further investigation in which the good offices of IFLA might be invoked.

The facilitators and Shane reviewed the first day in some detail and it was agreed to modify Group work on the second day. During the evening short scenarios were written by Philippe and Shane for group discussion aimed at stimulating the expertise of participants towards practical outcomes. The second day opened with a creative thinking exercise followed by a short presentation about HIFA2015. Participants then discussed different scenarios in small groups. Very lively feedback followed. The method proved very popular and a second set of scenarios was also discussed. At the request of the participants a short Sen-AHILA meeting was held during the afternoon at which reports on AHILA 12 in Burkina Faso were given by the three attendees from Senegal. Ibrahima Bob spoke about localising the AHILA strategy which had been adopted in October 2010 by the AHILA General Assembly in Burkina Faso. It was agreed that the French version of the strategy would be given to all participants. It was also stressed that a key plank of AHILA strategy was encouragement of those in Country Chapters to closely work with Public Libraries and other stakeholders to ensure that access to health information reaches communities, especially those in rural areas, or who are otherwise disadvantaged as regards access (through poverty, illiteracy etc).

The workshop closed with the facilitators summarising the experiences of the last two days and lessons learnt and shared. Certificates of attendance were then presented and we were deeply touched by the kind presentation of beautiful handmade gifts to us both on behalf of the participants. Our wonderful hostess Maïmouna spared no effort to ensure the smooth running of the workshop and it closed with a magnificent traditional cocktail party greatly enjoyed by all.

The success of the workshop was confirmed by the positive evaluations and was encapsulated in the quote below (from Maïmouna).

Bonsoir tout le monde,	Good evening everyone,
<p><i>J'espère que Shane et Philippe sont bien arrivés à Londres et à Paris ? et que les autres [participants] ont bien repris le travail après ces deux intenses jours de travail et d'échanges.</i></p>	<p><i>I hope Shane and Philip have arrived in London and Paris? and the other [participants] have returned to work well after those two intense days of work and exchange.</i></p>
<p><i>L'atelier a été très instructif et bénéfique car nous a apporté de nouvelles connaissances et savoir faire. Je crois que le réseau Sen-Ahila ne peut qu'être revigoré et renforcé. [...]</i></p>	<p><i>The workshop was very informative and beneficial because we brought new knowledge and expertise. I think the Sen-Ahila network can only be invigorated and strengthened. [...]</i></p>
<p><i>Encore une fois tout nos remerciements aux formateurs en particulier à Bob qui a eu la bonne idée de proposer notre pays pour ce premier atelier en Afrique francophone.</i></p>	<p><i>Once again our thanks to all trainers in particular to Bob who had the good sense to provide our country for the first workshop in Francophone Africa.</i></p>
<p><i>Merci Astou la réussite de l'atelier est à l'actif de tout le monde.</i></p>	<p><i>Thank you Astou the success of the workshop is to the credit of everyone.</i></p>

We are also indebted to Maïmouna for writing a detailed record of the proceedings, including the minutes of the SEN-AHILA meeting (full report and detailed appendices will be available shortly).

Thank you Maïmouna, Ibrahima and colleagues in Sen-AHILA for your warm welcome and hard work during the workshop. We look forward to keeping in touch and hearing how you are building on the ideas from the workshop on expanding public access to health information in your local communities. As AHILA's President said *'The importance of health information professionals involvement in Public Access to Health Information cannot be over emphasized...'*

Philippe Colomb, IFLA & Shane Godbolt, Phi, 8 August, 2011

