Books change lives

BookLinks
Sharing information across libraries in Africa and beyond

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Welcome

Dear partner,

As always, I am very pleased to welcome you to our bi-annual newsletter for libraries, BookLinks. This issue of BookLinks is particularly special as it marks the launch of our Vision 2020 Where Books Change Lives strategy for 2017-20.

A major focus of our strategy will be on ensuring that the books we provide reach the most marginalised individuals who need books. We know that many of you are already reaching vulnerable people in your own communities, such as those living in conflict areas or refugee camps and pupils struggling to learn in schools without books.

We look forward to working with you in reaching these individuals so that we can ensure that the books we provide reach those who are most in need.

Our new strategy does mean change. In addition to reaching out to new communities, we will also begin working beyond Africa for the first time in many years. However, we remain committed to our on-going projects and programmes as well as our existing beneficiaries and you, our partners.

You can read more about the details of who we hope to reach, our vision and our plans by visiting www.bookaid.org/aboutus/our-vision-for-2020/. This is a very exciting time and we cannot wait to move forward together. Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Wishing you all the best and kind regards,

Alison Tweed
Chief Executive
Book Aid International

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Inspiring Readers wins prestigious award

We are delighted to announce that Inspiring Readers has won a 2017 London Book Fair International Excellence Award in the category of Educational Initiatives.

Inspiring Readers aims to create school libraries for approximately 250,000 African school children by 2020.

The London Book Fair awards celebrate excellence in 16 categories, including international publishing, academic and scholarly publishing, children’s publishing, literary translation and digital innovation. In each award category, the judging panel was comprised of experts in that sector. They had the following comments on Inspiring Readers:

“We were impressed by the commitment to local communities shown by the training programme and by the emphasis on building relationships between libraries and schools. The book box scheme has a clear and positive impact on children’s lives by doing something straightforward yet innovative; and by creating a culture of reading for which the impact will be long-term and wide-reaching.”

The recognition of Inspiring Readers is a huge compliment to all of the schools and librarians making the programme possible in Kenya, Cameroon and Malawi. We would like to thank all of our Inspiring Readers partners for their hard work.

Find out more about the programme by visiting www.bookaid.org/inspiring-readers

We would also like to thank players of People’s Postcode Lottery for funding Inspiring Readers in Kenya and Malawi.
The role of libraries during Ebola

We spoke with Sallieu Turay, Chief Librarian of the Sierra Leone Library Board (SLLB) to find out how libraries in Sierra Leone served communities during the epidemic.

Were all of the services you ran during the crisis health related?

No, we also continued to run our library programmes like quizzes, dramas, reading promotion activities and the like. We wanted to try to close the gap. Most children were at home doing nothing and we believed that making our doors open within that period would give them something to do, somewhere to go.

Some people might not think there is a link between public libraries and Ebola. How did you see the two as connected in your country?

There is a link because libraries have a role to inform society about contemporary issues.

During the Ebola period, schools were closed, colleges were closed, some public offices were closed but all our libraries nationwide were open. We motivated our staff to make sure that they continued to deliver the relevant library and information services to the public.

Our libraries ran a lot of outreach services for their communities. We did book programmes and lot of user education, especially on health issues during the Ebola period. We were the first to bring on board traditional healers all over Sierra Leone to educate them on issues related to Ebola prevention.

Staying open must have been difficult – surely the librarians were taking personal risks and faced many challenges?

It is true that there was a risk of interacting with people during that period, but we took precautions and we did not have any infection.

We also faced challenges around travel. There were a lot of restrictions in terms of movement from one point to another. But we were travelling all over the country trying to distribute books, distributing other educational items to the public.

To move from one point to the other, you had to make an application for permits to travel. Without those permits you couldn’t travel from one point to the other. And you had a time frame you were allowed to travel within – you couldn’t travel outside of that set period.

Tell us your story

The work of the SLLB highlights the vital role of libraries during times of crisis both in terms of education and by providing bridging services when education is disrupted. Today, the SLLB’s libraries are continuing important work in the community, helping pupils get back to learning and supporting the country’s institutions as they rebuild.

If your library is providing services during crisis or helping a community you serve recover following a challenging period, we would love to hear your story.

Our return to Sierra Leone was funded by players of People’s Postcode Lottery.
Our partners use books in settings ranging from established national library networks to rural community libraries to NGO–run libraries in slum communities. George Wambugu is a librarian for the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) in Kenya. He manages the group’s four libraries in the Mathare slum.

We spoke to him about his own history, how a difficult start motivates him today and what being a librarian means to him:

“I was brought up in a slum by my mum after the death of our dad in 1990. Putting a meal on the table was a big battle that we had to fight daily. Growing up in a family of ten with no one to rely on apart from our mum gave us strength as we saw her working harder every day.

School fees, uniforms and books were some of the things that I never even wanted to hear anyone mention as they left me thinking about whether I would be at school or on the street. Sometimes we also spent lots of hours and days away from school just hunting to feed ourselves.

Then in 1997 I got the chance to work in MYSA. MYSA offers room for empowerment to many youths living in Mathare slum through sports programs as well as other community development programs like photography, libraries, music, art and education, to name but a few.

In 2003, I became a library attendant. With different opportunities coming my way I grew bigger and better and became who I am today. I am now able to speak, encourage, support and offer guidance to many, especially those from less fortunate backgrounds.

I am proud to work in MYSA’s slum libraries. The presence of the MYSA community libraries creates havens for children and young people, offering them an alternative to idling on the street where they are vulnerable.

We have many high-quality books donated by Book Aid International that meet the needs of a high number of users and soon we will even have Children’s Corners in two of our libraries. This project will create a transformation in our libraries and will help us to focus our work in order to make them even more welcoming and engaging for children.

I enjoy every moment when I give hope to children and young people who I come across. Being in charge of the libraries in MYSA gives me so much happiness.”

Do you know a librarian, volunteer or user who inspires you?

We would love to feature their profile here in BookLinks and on our website. Please get in touch and tell us about the individual you would like to profile.
Features of an award-winning library

Every year Kenya hosts the Maktaba Awards, a ceremony that celebrates the best and the brightest libraries across the country.

Winners from 2016 as well as past years tend to share defining features which can be used as inspiration for librarians across the African continent and worldwide. Our Africa Representative, James Kimani, has identified six characteristics that great libraries tend to share.

Relevant and diverse collections

One of the key features of an award-winning library is the quality and diversity of its collection. Books that suit users of all ages, backgrounds and ability levels can be borrowed and returned and information is available in a number of different formats, including books, magazines, newspapers and journals. Where possible, information should also be available on tablets, e-readers, and computers. Titles that are no longer relevant, due to their age or subject matter are removed and replaced with more up-to-date material. This diversity makes the library a useful place for users of all walks of life to access information.

Organised and engaging environment

The physical layout of the library is important in ensuring that the library is a success. Libraries should have enough space for different areas for different types of user. Each area should display the resources users are looking for and be clearly labelled. For example, some of the winners of the Maktaba Awards had special areas designated for children, known as Children’s Corners. These areas were decorated with brightly coloured murals that are attractive to children, filled with child-sized furniture and stocked with high quality, colourful children’s books.

Wide-ranging and stimulating activities

Having a range of activities available for library users is an excellent way to make the library an exciting and appealing place to be. Examples of activities include book clubs, storytelling, drawing, reading and writing competitions, music and theatre. These activities promote literacy among children and community engagement more broadly.

Strong relationships with local communities

Award-winning libraries tend to position themselves as central to the community and have excellent relationships with a range of community groups, from schools, to prisons, to parent–teacher associations. This builds ownership among communities and also creates goodwill that generates support from community members. For instance, through a partnership with the Millennium Village Project and the Department of Education in Kenya, the Kisumu KNLS library organises reading tents, medical camps and training programs for school librarians.

Dynamic, knowledgeable and creative librarians

A library without a librarian is just a room full of books! It is the librarians in these award-winning libraries that make their spaces dynamic. Librarians need to have the right knowledge and a range of skills to support different people, such as children, people with reading impairments and adults who may not be used to reading.

Reaching out to disadvantaged groups

Programmes that help to integrate everyone in the community including disadvantaged groups are very important. For instance, the Kisumu KNLS library has a special programme which supports children with dyslexia. Children are helped by librarians and fellow readers to learn how to read and write using tablets, e-books and picture books. Narok KNLS library staff take books to Manyattas (Maasai settlements) where children do not go to school.

Learning lessons in your own library

While not all of these characteristics may be replicable in your own library exactly as described here, many of the key lessons can be considered whatever your circumstances. The desire to reach out to specific members of the community, for example, can generate creative ways to engage people and develop your library services to meet needs.

Ideas can be realised on a small scale and often do not require additional resources. Read on to find more ideas for community engagement which can help put your library at the heart of the community.
Running short on time to brainstorm ideas on how to entice people to read? Use these ideas from libraries across Africa to attract new readers.

To engage the entire community, libraries must find innovative ways to invite people in, help them discover their library and provide services beyond books to help communities thrive.

But with so much to do, it can be difficult for librarians to find time to brainstorm ideas. This article presents a few examples to fire your thinking from Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda and Zambia.

**Start a creative storytime**

Storytime led by a librarian reading a book can, of course, be a great way to invite children into your library, but for the most reluctant readers adding a creative twist to your story time can help children engage with books for the first time. A re-thought story time can also benefit the larger community as well.

At the Lilongwe headquarters of the Malawi National Library, children flock to the library to listen to traditional Malawian folktales told by elderly storytellers from nearby villages every Saturday. This activity helps the children reconnect with an age-old African tradition of oral storytelling and introduces children with reading difficulties to the library space through stories. It also provides older members of the community with a sense of purpose.

The Kenya National Library Service (knls) has a ‘Stories on the wall’ project in its library in the Kibera slum in Kenya. Rather than simply reading a story, knls partnered with a local NGO to project stories visually onto a wall. They then asked the children to write their own stories. The result is a rich, vibrant space which creates a sense of community and identity.

**Host a reading group**

The Malawi National Library runs Women’s Reading Clubs. Women visit the library together to read and put their learning into practice. For example, women read about different recipes and then practised the new dishes and compared notes. When another group read ‘Wine Making’ they agreed to start making banana wine to sell.

These activities can both entice people to read and provide a wider community benefit as local residents work together and learn new skills.

**Arts and crafts**

The library isn’t just about books, reading and information. In some libraries in Tanzania, women’s groups meet to make handicrafts that they can sell. In Uganda, groups use worn out books to make jewellery.

**Offer computers and IT training**

The Zambia Library Service offers internet access for its users in the city of Chipata. This service both tempts people into the library and supports users’ research, study and communication via email. Other libraries, particularly in Uganda, also run internet cafes which provide affordable internet access for the community and help the library generate income.

The Luapula Provincial Library in Zambia offers training for children in basic computer skills, particularly for grade seven pupils who will need to demonstrate computer competence in grade 8. The library only has four computers but manages classes of up to 12 by encouraging learners to share. Participants learn key skills like typing and using a mouse.
Keep your users up to date

Providing access to newspapers and magazines offers people the opportunity to keep up with current affairs and can act as a gateway to reading. In Malawi, the inclusion of newspapers had a particular benefit for older people, business people, graduates, parents and school learners who come to use the papers for debate and other educational purposes.

Community radio

Radio is still the favourite medium for information exchange in Africa. The Nakaseke Community Library in rural Uganda houses a local community radio station in addition to a popular children’s library and an ICT-connected adult library. Originally set up by UNESCO, the radio station broadcasts regularly, covering all sorts of topics from farming to education. The library is powered by solar energy and there’s even internet access.

Cultural heritage

Libraries are important places for the documentation and conservation of local heritage. The Anne Gabonay Library in Kumba, Cameroon, collects and displays local artefacts.

How do you engage your community?

If your library has a new approach to engaging your community, we would love to feature it here in BookLinks and on our website.

Introducing Study Hubs

For pupils around the world, exams are a time of intense study and libraries offer crucial places to study in peace.

Passing exams is critical to allowing young people to find jobs and succeed in their future endeavours. Support to help students do well in their exams can have life-long effects. Librarians are already hard at work around the world supporting exam takers, but all too often they are forced to operate without the books they need or specialist knowledge of how to support students.

Our newest project, called Study Hubs, aims to increase the support libraries can provide for students who are preparing for exams by:

- Providing grants for the purchase of locally published curriculum books
- Donating supplementary texts and revision guides for English, Maths, Science and other subjects
- Training librarians in how best to support users who will soon sit exams, equipping librarians to run exam preparation sessions in local libraries
- Setting up a new Secondary School Outreach service which will loan revision materials to the school library.

Librarians will also receive copies of a special booklet that we have created for students who attend exam preparation sessions at the library. It will include advice on how the library can help with their studies and tips on preparing well for exams.

Together, these services will increase support to local students as they prepare for exams and position the library as a centre for learning support.

Project pilot

Thanks to funds from players of People’s Postcode Lottery, the Study Hub pilot is being run in Zambia from four provincial libraries in Kasama, Choma, Solwezi and Lusaka. We look forward to the programme starting in June and will provide updates on its progress here in BookLinks.
Learnings from International Literacy Day 2016

In 2016 we piloted a Reading Promotion campaign with selected partners around International Literacy Day.

The aim of the Reading Promotion campaign is to support libraries’ efforts to strengthen their local reading culture and increase use of books and reading materials from the library. Participating countries opened their library doors to members of the community, including parents, teachers, senior citizens and children, to celebrate and promote reading, especially amongst children.

In all countries the event was supported by local dignitaries and the media who shared key messages about the value and importance of reading throughout the country. Each country event was successful in its own unique way.

You can see reports on how individual countries celebrated International Literacy Day by visiting www.bookaid.org/2017/05/20/reading-promotion-2016/

The key lessons from the day, summarised below, can help you make a splash in your own library’s reading promotion events in 2017.

### Key learnings

- **Invite local or national government leaders to your event.** High-profile dignitaries like the Mayor or Minister, the local Councillor or policy makers from Education and local Government departments are valuable supporters. Give them a tour of the library and explain the services you offer so that they appreciate your contribution to the community. They will then speak well of your library to the media.

- **Use the events to motivate your staff and volunteers.** Many library personnel who took part in 2016 found the community event motivating, especially when they received positive feedback about the library.

- **Focus on children.** The events were particularly useful in helping children realise that reading can be fun and isn’t just about school work.

- **Invite the media.** The media allows you to show and tell the wider general public what the library offers.

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**Your news here**

We are always looking for news, updates and stories from libraries which we can include here in BookLinks and on our website.

BookLinks aims to share innovative examples of how libraries are supporting communities, tips for improving your service and library news across thousands of libraries across Africa and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

If you believe that your library has something to share, we would love to hear from you. Specifically we are always interested in:

- Profiles of inspiring librarians
- Stories about your work overcoming challenges
- Lessons learned from your work
- Innovative ways of developing your library and engaging readers

**To share your story:**

- Email judith.henderson@bookaid.org
- WhatsApp +44 7438 626344

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**About our charity**

Book Aid International is the UK’s leading international book donation and library development charity. Every year, we ship around one million books to thousands of libraries in communities where people have very few opportunities to access new books.

We work with an extensive network of libraries, schools, hospitals, NGOs and other partners to ensure that the books we send reach those who face the greatest barriers to accessing books. In addition, we also run library development projects which build the capacity of librarians to support readers and communities.

We only send books at our library partners’ request. These books are carefully selected by our UK team led by professional librarians to ensure that they meet the needs of local communities. All of the books we send are donated by the UK book trade so they are all new.

To find out more, visit www.bookaid.org.

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International Literacy Day activities, Ethiopia

Librarians in Malawi attend Inspiring Readers training
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