Books change lives

BookLinks

Sharing information across libraries in Africa and beyond

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Dear partner,

Welcome to our Winter 2017 issue of BookLinks, our partner newsletter.

BookLinks aims to provide information, inspiration and useful news for libraries of all types. Whether you are a volunteer librarian, an NGO supporting informal libraries, a teacher-librarian using books in your classroom or a professional librarian, we hope that BookLinks helps you support your readers and gives you ideas for the future.

This issue includes details of how we are working with new and existing partners to reach out to new readers, an opportunity to recognise the readers in your library through the Royal Commonwealth Society Essay competition, key learnings from the recent International Federation of Librarians conference and learnings from our school library support projects.

I hope you enjoy this issue of BookLinks and if you have any suggestions about how BookLinks could better support you, I would be happy to hear from you.

Wishing you all the best and very kind regards,

Alison Tweed
Chief Executive
Book Aid International

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Cover image: A librarian in a community library in the Mathare slum, Nairobi, Kenya.
Expanding to new countries and territories

Our new strategy will see us reaching out to those who face the greatest barriers to reading throughout and beyond Africa.

In line with our new strategy, we are working with our existing partners to reach out to the most vulnerable readers in countries where we already work and expanding our work into new places.

We are working with new partners across Africa to reach more vulnerable people. In South Sudan, we’re working with the Windle Trust and the University of Juba to ensure that more people can access books and succeed in their educations. We are expanding our work in Somaliland as well.

In October, we sent our first shipment of books to Rwanda, where the books we send will support the Kigali Public library, community libraries and NGOs working for a peaceful future. We will also shortly send a shipment to Liberia to support the country’s on-going recovery from the Ebola crisis.

In addition, we are working outside of Africa to reach out to people who have been forced to flee their homes. In 2017, we have been steadily increasing our support for displaced people, including many Syrian refugees, in Greece, where the books we send can help people of all ages continue their education. Finally, we have recently sent books to Syrian refugees currently living in Lebanon.

We would like to thank players of People’s Postcode Lottery for funding our expansion into Rwanda.
Our vision for 2020

Over the next four years, we will focus on ensuring that our books reach the communities where the challenges to accessing books are at their greatest.

While our Vision for 2020 will see us change, we remain committed to our partners, beneficiaries and the promises we have made to our supporters. We know that many of our partners may have questions about our new strategy and what it means for our relationship with you.

This article contains a list of frequently asked questions we have received from our partners. It covers the key facts that you need to know about the new strategy and how we can work together to ensure the books we provide help the most vulnerable readers in your communities.

What is new in this strategy?

While we remain committed to ensuring the widest possible access to the books we send, we also recognise that some people and communities face particular challenges.

From 2017 to 2020 we will focus on ensuring that our books are much more accessible to those who face the greatest barriers to reading. In future, we will prioritise reaching five particular groups:

- **Displaced people and people living in fragile states** need books so that they can keep learning. States struggling to re-establish public services after a prolonged period of conflict, epidemic, natural disaster, political crisis or economic downturn are also in particular need of support to rebuild their information resources.

- **Healthcare professionals and medical students** need up-to-date medical texts so that they can receive current information and provide quality medical care.

- **Out of school learners** often struggle to find educational opportunities outside the classroom. Books provide a vital source of information and the chance to continue an interrupted education.

- **Pupils and students in poorly-resourced schools** rarely have access to the books that could improve the quality of the education they receive.

- **People who are marginalised or excluded** from the mainstream often find it very challenging to access the books which might enrich, improve and change their lives. Whether marginalised by disability, gender or ethnicity or excluded by imprisonment or discrimination, these individuals have a particular need for books so that they can create a more positive future.

Left: A student nurse in Zimbabwe studying from a donated medical text.
What about your existing programmes and partners?

Our new strategy does not change our commitment to existing programmes, partners and beneficiaries. We will continue to execute our programmes and moving forward, will work with our partners to ensure that our work reaches the communities where books can do the most good.

Are you still partner-led?

Yes! We will work with our existing library, NGO and government partners to realise our Vision for 2020 as they are the experts in how to reach the most marginalised in their communities. As we expand our work to reach new groups and new areas, we will seek new partners who have the people we help at the heart of all they do.

Is where you work changing?

We will continue to work in our current countries of operation, but we will also be open to working in new areas if there is a genuine need for the books we can provide and an opportunity to reach our priority beneficiary groups.

How will you fund this new work?

We will seek to fund our expansion by raising more funds, not by reducing funding to existing programmes and partners. This means that to realise our Vision for 2020, we will need more support and we are working hard here in the UK to increase the levels of funding we receive.

Does this mean you will be looking for books in new languages?

At the moment we are still focusing on places where there is a need for books in English. We do receive a very small number of books in other languages and recently we have been able to secure a large donation of books in Arabic, but our main focus remains on English language books.

We also continue to provide small grants for our project partners to purchase books in local languages where we can.

How can I find out more

You can download our full strategy document or read more about our work online by visiting www.bookaid.org/aboutus/our-vision-for-2020.

We also want to hear from you about how we can work together to ensure that the books we provide reach the most vulnerable readers in your community. Please don’t hesitate to contact us directly to tell us about how you support the people in your community who may struggle to read or new ideas you have for ensuring that the books we send reach those who need them most.
Maha, a school librarian in the West Bank

Maha is the school librarian at St Joseph’s School in Ramallah, a city in the West Bank area of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We sat down with Maha to discuss the unique challenges she faces and how books are helping young Palestinians build a brighter future.

“Our school takes girls from three to 18 years old, both Christian and Muslim. We have around 800 pupils and I have been the librarian here for seven years.

The political situation in our country means that we live with a lot of insecurity and uncertainty. One hour it could be quiet and the next everything could have changed. Travel restrictions make it difficult for us to move between the West Bank, Israel and Gaza. Checkpoints, the separation wall and roadblocks in the West Bank mean that we feel imprisoned in our own land.

I want to give my own children and the children at this school more chances than I had in life. I finished school during the violence of the First Intifada and saw lots of people killed in front of me. That experience was very hard and I would never want my children to see what I saw. But they have already seen more than I did.

It is tough living here – we are not living a normal life. Despite these fears, people are trying to raise their children in love and hope. The library is part of that hope.

Before Book Aid International started supporting our school three years ago, getting hold of books was virtually impossible.
It is not just that they are really expensive – they are tricky to get hold of at all. There are not many publishers here and because of regulations, we cannot have mail delivered directly from any other countries.

Books in English are really valued. Parents encourage their children to learn English so that they can get good jobs and children love to learn it because it makes them feel connected to the outside world.

Books open up the world and allow us to travel in our imaginations, even if we cannot travel in reality. They give the girls in our school an insight into what is going on elsewhere and provide them with hope and ideas for the future. One student even asked me if she could be an astronaut because of a book she had read about the moon.

Reading can open up opportunities for young people – the more knowledge you have, the more choices you have in life. I try to mix reading with fun so it’s not an obligation and it will become something natural and normal for them.

For example, we do reading contests. I made a tree out of wood with a carpenter and cut green paper leaves - whoever borrows a book will get a leaf. So, each class has a branch on that tree so the more they read, the more the branch has leaves and the branch with the most leaves wins! They put the pictures of the winners on the school website and all the school classes were like ‘how come we didn’t win, we read more books than they did!’ I told them ‘go and check how many leaves they have!’ Even the teachers have a branch. They didn’t win - they have so much work to do.

I always keep the library open and all the grades come. I do different activities with each class. Like for first graders, we do fun things, not reading because they don’t know how to read very well yet. Sometimes I give the fourth and fifth grades scientific books. We have these in Arabic and English. So they read and each one presents something new to the class, a new idea, new information about the things she had read. So they exchange information and knowledge.

The girls here are thirsty for knowledge – they just need the books to channel their learning. When the children hear that I have had new books delivered, they rush to the library.

Our hope for the future is to have peace and to feel secure. The books give the young people insights of what is going on in the world - they give them hope."

We are very proud to have supported inspiring librarians like Maha in The Occupied Palestinian Territories since 1998 and we wish her all the best in the future.

If you know an inspiring librarian who we should feature here in BookLinks, please don’t hesitate to contact us directly.
Evaluating the role of books in Community Schools

In July 2017, we completed the final evaluation of the Zambia Open Community Schools project.

The project aimed to improve the quality of education in community schools in Zambia by providing books and teacher training. Over the course of 12 months, 15 schools received a total of 22,500 UK donated books and 4,500 local curriculum books. 100 teachers were also trained to provide support for improved literacy in the classroom. The final evaluation report has now been published and its key findings included:

**New Reading Periods established:** One of the key points discussed during the training of teachers and head-teachers was the importance of having a regular library period in the school timetable. Literacy improvement research recommends lots of reading practice to improve key elements like fluency and vocabulary, so we were delighted to see that three out of five schools included in the report incorporated a reading period in the school timetable. These teachers are likely to see their pupil’s reading improve.

**Lending books to children:** Three out of five schools visited enabled children to borrow books from the new library stock. This will allow children to practice their reading at home and to share with siblings, so it’s great news. However, lending numbers were low due to the teachers’ fear that the books would not be returned. This is a common concern.

**Increased knowledge and skills in library management:** Teachers reported an average 191% increase in their knowledge of library related matters since the project began. This means that the knowledge of the teachers has almost tripled since receiving the training. Increased knowledge often leads to greater confidence and improved teaching practice that benefits children.

**Teachers are using books in the classroom to teach multiple subjects:** One teacher reported using a science book called ‘The Human Body’ to teach biology, another used a book about volcanos to teach a geography lesson and another used story books that included counting and numbers to teach maths lessons. These examples show that books are helping to enrich the teaching and learning taking place in the project schools, which will positively affect the quality of education that the pupils receive.

**Teachers are using creativity to improve learning environments:** With a chronic lack of space in the schools, some teachers have used maize sacks to create book pockets on their classroom walls. Drawing children’s attention to books generates interest and can lead to more reading. We love these ideas!

These are just a few key points. You can read the full report by visiting www.bookaid.org/2017/10/09/zambia-open-community-schools-project-report/
Outcome of *Inspiring Readers* Pilot in Kenya

*Inspiring Readers* is our award-winning schools programme that establishes school libraries and promotes reading by strengthening the link between schools and public libraries.

The *Inspiring Readers* pilot programme ran in Kenya and the final evaluation has now been conducted. In addition to the increased confidence shown by pupils, key findings of the Kenyan pilot demonstrated change amongst librarians, schools and in the reading culture.

**Librarians are more skilled, confident and motivated.** Librarians were able to use the skills they gained from the training to orient teachers on how to establish school libraries, manage their libraries and promote reading among pupils. The librarians gained a better understanding of how public libraries and schools should work together.

> The training gave me an opportunity to be more hands on. I now understand the link between public libraries and schools. It has improved interaction with pupils and teachers and gives us reason to work in the library every day.

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Sarah Ogembo, Hub Librarian, Kisii.

**Schools have vibrant new libraries:** All the twenty-five schools in the project have set up their libraries. Before, most of them had book stores that were not well arranged and had very outdated books. Two schools in the project managed to create library space that was not in place before the project. The books are current and suitable for use in schools. As a result, pupils are busy reading, reducing idleness and improving their reading skills at the same time.

> The school library is very important. Having seen the fruits of reading story books there is need for more books. Reading affects performance in a big way.

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Sheila Yegon, Deputy Head teacher, Visa Ashwal Primary school, Kabarnet

**Creation of library lessons in the school:** All the 25 schools in the project have established library lessons. Each class in school has a reading lesson of 35 minutes per week. The book donation has encouraged the teachers to actively implement these lessons.

> I used to struggle to get story books and was looking for newspapers. Now there are resources and I don’t have to struggle with the library lesson.

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Tabitha Mwenda, Teacher, OMC Primary, Rumuruti, Kenya

**A reading culture among pupils is developing:** There is improved attitude towards reading and a reading culture among pupils is developing.

> I take a book on Saturday, and when grazing cows over the weekend, I sit under a tree and I start reading.

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James, Class eight, OMC Primary, Rumuruti

We would also like to thank players of People’s Postcode Lottery for funding *Inspiring Readers* Kenya.
Ensure your readers’ voices are heard

The Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition offers all Commonwealth youth the opportunity to express their hopes for the future, opinions of the present and thoughts on the past.

This year, the organisers of the competition particularly want to hear from talented young African writers from a variety of backgrounds – such as those in your schools and libraries! We spoke to Anja from the Royal Commonwealth Society about the awards and why you should encourage your readers to take part.

Can you tell us a little bit about the awards?

The Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition is used by individuals and teachers to build confidence, develop writing skills, support creativity and encourage critical thinking, using literacy to empower young people to become global citizens.

The competition is open to all citizens and residents of Commonwealth countries, and to residents of Zimbabwe. That means if you are under 18 and from Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia or Zimbabwe, this competition is for you!

Obviously you’ll get lots of entries and they can’t all win! What are the benefits to entering for those who don’t win?

This competition is a fantastic way for pupils to develop their writing skills outside of schoolwork. We guarantee that every young writer who submits their entry correctly will have their piece read by a judge somewhere in the Commonwealth and will receive a Certificate of Participation.

You will also have the chance to win a Gold, Silver or Bronze Award (which will be shown on your Certificate) - a great confidence boost and perfect for job or further education applications.

Why are you so keen to have entrants from Africa?

The talent of African writers is undeniable; from Kenya’s Grace Ogot to Sierra Leone’s Ishmael Beah, there are so many amazing authors out there.

Every writer started out as a young person with thoughts in their head, dreams in their heart and a pen in their hand. We want to take the African potential and turn it into the next generation of brilliant writers. We want to be part of that journey.

How can teachers, librarians and young people find out more?

The competition will open in November and close on 1st June 2018 and will focus on a theme related to the Commonwealth values. The theme for this year has yet to be decided, so stay tuned!

To find out more or get your readers involved, visit https://thercs.org/youth-and-education/the-queens-commonwealth-essay-competition/
Lessons from IFLA

In August 2017, The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) launched the new Development and Access to Information (DA2I) report.

The report has been developed in conjunction with the Technology and Social Change Group (TASCHA) and is part of IFLA’s advocacy and capacity building activities. The report sees access to information as “a driver of progress across the board which empowers people and communities, laying the foundations for equality, sustainability and prosperity.” It also shows that “meaningful access to information is not achievable without libraries.”

Four key dimensions are identified by the authors as required for meaningful access to information:

• Information and communications access infrastructure
• Positive social context
• Sufficient capabilities in communities and their members
• A favourable legal and policy landscape

This is the first of a series of annual reports, produced to draw the attention of UN member states especially and a range of stakeholders to the contribution that access to information makes to development.


Meet an African winner

19 year-old Zambian student Esther Mungalaba was the 2016 runner up in the Commonwealth Essay Prize. Here she explains why she thinks more young writers from across Africa should apply:

“To quote Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The best part of writing is not the communication of knowledge to other people, but the acquisition and synthesizing of knowledge for oneself.”

Writing, especially competitively, pushes you to dig for information on subjects that you may have otherwise never thought to look for on your own. This is great because as part of the process, you begin to form valid opinions on so many different things and adopt well informed views of the world, the importance of which, cannot be overemphasized.

If you have heard about the competition and have thought that you could never write anything good enough to be appreciated or noticed, chances are you are grossly underestimating yourself. Write it out. Write that poem, write that essay, write that article. Amazing things just may come of it. You might discover a talent or a passion that will forever define who you are and what your contribution to this world is.”

Your news in BookLinks?

We always want to hear from partners with news, ideas and stories that we can share with librarians around the world. To share your story:

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