BookLinks

In focus: Supporting education in rural schools in Kenya
Exploring digital potential in children’s libraries
Running a reading promotion event

Books change lives
Welcome

Welcome to issue 22 of BookLinks – the Book Aid International newsletter for our library partners.

In this issue you can find a report on how we are supporting rural education in a Maasai community in Kenya as well as a report on a recent project to introduce digital content into children’s libraries. We meet inspirational children’s librarian Vivienne Moyo from Zimbabwe and we have an update on our return to supporting Sierra Leone.

8th September is International Literacy Day and we are encouraging our partners to celebrate! Get all our hints and tips on planning a successful event on page 10.

We really hope you enjoy this new issue of BookLinks. We welcome your feedback on the content - please email judith.henderson@bookaid.org with your comments.

Inside this issue

- In focus: Supporting education in rural schools in Kenya 3
- Profile: Mrs Vivienne Moyo, Children’s Librarian 4
- Exploring digital potential in children’s libraries 6
- New countries of operation: Sierra Leone 9
- Running a reading promotion event 10
- News 12

BookLinks is published with the support of a grant from the Unwin Charitable Trust. Established in 1914 by Sir Stanley Unwin, founder of George Allen and Unwin in the UK, the Trust supports a range of activities and we are delighted to be among its beneficiaries.

Cover image: A young boy reads in Tschabalala Library, Zimbabwe
Kiwanja Ndege Primary School sits on the outskirts of DolDol town. There are 351 children who attend the school. Most of them are Maasai – from a community that is traditionally nomadic, but has become more settled in this area.

Schools in remote rural areas, like Kiwanja Ndege, are the most under-resourced in the country and have the poorest results. Book Aid International has been working with Africa Educational Trust (AET) to assist schools in the DolDol area to improve local language teaching in Maa and to improve students’ academic performance.

One day, as AET staff were sitting down with the staff from Kiwanja Ndege over tea, one teacher spoke passionately about the desire for a library in the school. The school had a room for ‘reading materials’ and even had timetabled library lessons but there weren’t any proper books.

AET contacted Book Aid International, with whom they had partnered previously to support library projects in Somalia, Uganda and South Sudan. With Book Aid International’s support AET was able to equip the library with donated books in 2015 and a second shipment will be arriving shortly. They also provided training for teachers so they could properly care for and use the library.

Now when we visit the school we find upper primary students reading in the library during their breaks. The children say that reading the books is helping with their English - they are learning new words and gaining more confidence. Teachers also say that the students are reading better. During one visit, AET staff got to sit in on a lesson where the class read out loud. After reading, the students were all able to answer some simple questions about the story. Teachers say that the library has helped improve lessons and students and teachers are communicating better.

Everyone hopes the library will grow. Currently the books are housed in a lockable cabinet, but teachers and students have a dream of a room filled with books, where everyone can come and share the joy of reading.
Mrs Vivienne Moyo, Children’s Librarian, Zimbabwe

Our Head of Programmes Samantha Thomas-Chuula interviews a dynamic and passionate children’s librarian in Zimbabwe.

One of the highlights of any field trip is to put faces to names. So I was very excited to put a face to the name Vivienne Moyo during my recent trip to Zimbabwe.

I had the pleasure of meeting Vivienne on my trip to conduct the baseline surveys for the Open Doors Children’s Corners programme in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. She escorted me to the libraries and supported me in my work. However it was watching Vivienne in action that I began to see a truly passionate librarian at work.

This gregarious and talented former teacher has a visible love for children. I watched as she skillfully managed a group of 50 children during ‘storytime’ back in her place of work – Edward Ndlovu Memorial Library, Gwanda. I became intrigued about where such energy and creativity came from. I asked her...

Who is Vivienne Moyo?

I am a teacher by profession holding a Teacher’s Certificate, Bachelor of Education and a Master’s degree in Education. I am currently a schools programme coordinator at Edward Ndlovu Memorial Trust which runs Edward Ndlovu Memorial Library in Gwanda, Zimbabwe. I coordinate activities that promote a reading culture in rural community schools. I have a passion for reading and I believe reading can change people’s lives for the better. As well as that I am a wife to Dr J. P. Njini Moyo, I am a mother of two – a son and a daughter and a proud grandmother of three.

What is it that inspired you to become a librarian?

Information is power. I love to share information. As a librarian, being visible and positive everyday makes a difference to the users. It’s fulfilling to see children getting to learn something new every day and this is the bigger picture of being a librarian.

How did you get to where you are today?

It’s been a roundabout journey for me. As a teacher my last post was as a Better Schools Project Coordinator. This involved a lot of research into what teachers needed. In most cases, what they needed was more reading so as to improve performances. I then undertook training so that I could work as a librarian. Edward Ndlovu Memorial Library has given me new inspirations and increased my passion for reading and helping library users to get information.
How did you get into training?
Who do you train in what?
I train teacher librarians in the rural schools we partner with on developing reading skills and teaching reading.
Recently I had an opportunity to train 15 Bulawayo City Council librarians where Book Aid International’s Open Doors Children’s Corners will be established. The librarians were trained on how to refurbish their libraries outside and inside the best they can, sourcing, stocking and organising their resources. Of particular interest was the child safety issue.

What is the most exciting part of your work and why?
My strengths are creativity and presentation. Training is exciting for me as I deal with different clients and give them information according to their needs.

The role of the librarian is changing. What aspect has seen the greatest transformation?
At the mention of a library one immediately sees books and a stern librarian with a ‘no noise’ sign behind her desk! But that scenario has changed since I joined the library. One major change is the advent of ICT. Librarians find themselves involved in new ways of delivering information needs to clients. Libraries then demand that the librarian should teach information literacy skills and research skills for clients to get the right information.

How has the change affected you professionally and personally?
It’s taught me to be ahead with changes in ICT and how to handle different clientele whether they want traditional books or online information. Personally I have changed to be a computer literate librarian following the trends of the demands in librarianship. Today’s clientele is very busy and may need information fast. That means I need to be able to respond fast!

If you had one wish for libraries in Zimbabwe - what would it be?
Librarians are driven by passion for giving information. My wish would be that they are recognised at national level and that we have sufficient resources to do our jobs well.
Exploring digital potential in children’s libraries

In 2013 Book Aid International and Kenya National Library Service (knls) launched a two year project aimed to improve children’s access to high-quality reading materials in selected public libraries. The project also aimed to pilot use of digital devices for learning in public libraries.

We worked with 22 libraries, 12 of which already had an established Children’s Corner. In the other 10, we worked with the librarians to set up new vibrant spaces where children can read, play and learn. Each of the new Children’s Corners received new books, training for the librarians and a grant to refurbish their space and make it appealing for children. In the 12 established Children’s Corners we provided brand new books to keep their shelves full of appealing and relevant material for young readers. In four of the libraries we also provided tablets and e-readers for the children, along with specialist digital training for the librarians so they could help young readers get to grips with the new technology.

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The libraries now run activities for children both inside and outside the library including visits to children in hospitals and juvenile homes, orphanages, and HIV/AIDS workshops for children. Libraries have also developed programmes for children with special needs in several libraries and these have proved especially effective in the libraries with digital provision. The libraries all report increased library attendance and membership by children. Children are more confident to use the library, and to express themselves in front of others.

“The library has many story books that have helped me improve in English grammar and composition. With the wide variety of books I never run out stories to write.”

Isaac Mukabwa, a pupil at Holy Trinity Primary School, a frequent user of the Kericho library.

Libraries have started school outreach programmes and are working with teachers by training them on reading promotion activities. Some libraries have supported the provision of a ‘School Library in a Box’ to schools and provided training on managing the school library.
The library has helped me improve my performance in school, finish my homework and improve my vocabulary. The library is very beautiful. I now come with my small brother who uses the children’s corner as I do my homework.

John Musyoki Ngei, a pupil at Mwingi Primary School who uses Mwingi library regularly.
Teachers have reported improved academic performance among pupils since schools have become involved in the library. Children’s vocabulary and self-esteem are reported to have improved.

“This project is the best thing to have ever happened not only in Mwingi Branch but in all the 22 knls branches involved in the project. Much respect and freedom is now accorded to the children. [they] are allowed to freely browse through the shelves and choose what they want to read.”

Patrick Mutta, Librarian, Mwingi Branch Library, Kenya

The project has given the libraries an opportunity to develop strong partnerships with government departments, schools, companies, religious institutions and other stakeholders in the community. Some libraries received additional community support such as donations of chess boards, water tanks and computers from local firms and organisations. Once people can see the difference the project is making, they want to get involved!

The Children’s Corners have also been influential in conflict resolution and bringing peace to communities. Rumuruti library has worked with children on peace and conflict resolution activities through ‘peace circles’ for children that promote harmonious co-existence of communities.

Piloting digital devices in Children’s Corners

The project piloted use of tablets and e-readers in four libraries: Kisumu, Meru, Isiolo and Wajir. A total of 180 tablets and 25 e-readers were provided. Librarians were trained on using the tablets and e-readers, how to take care of them, and helping children learn how to use them. Knls ensured that all the branches had electricity and internet connection.

Meru and Kisumu libraries have developed an impressive programme of activities including the ‘Tab Wizards’ club, where older children help their younger peers to get used to the new devices. The libraries run outreach programmes to primary schools, serving some of the poorest children in the locality as well as children with hearing impairments, autism and dyslexia.

“I feel I have migrated from analogue to digital after serving knls for 36 years. I am very happy that Kisumu was selected to be among the libraries in the digital project.”

Mr. Tobias Oganda, librarian in charge of the e-health section at Kisumu Library

Training the trainers

One of the aims was to develop the skills of knls staff to provide future training. Caroline Kayoro and David Kangogo from knls co-facilitated the workshop with James Kimani from Book Aid International.

“The co-facilitation works so perfectly. I am now able to follow up on project issue with participants. I will be with them as they implement.”

Caroline Kayoro, Kenya National Library Service

“I am so excited that participants rated us higher than previous workshop and expressed it openly. We are still learning and in future, we shall polish. It makes me feel part of the project.”

David Kangogo, Kenya National Library Service

As a result of the project, Book Aid International and knls now better understand how to provide appropriate e-resources for children. In fact, knls has now developed a model for integrating e-resources into children’s library services.
We have not worked in the country since 2007 due to changes in funding but last year, as the Ebola crisis came to an end, we were able to make links once more with the Sierra Leone Library Board (SLLB) and look for ways we could help the country to rebuild after a difficult few years.

English is the official written language and medium of instruction in Sierra Leone, meaning that our books will be appropriate at all reading levels. It is also a country in which the need for our support is immense. Its infrastructure has suffered two episodes of severe destruction: the brutal 11-year civil war which ended in 2002, only to be followed by the recent Ebola crisis, during which thousands died and education was interrupted as most schools and colleges were closed for over a year. The public libraries run by SLLB continued to function during the Ebola outbreak providing a vital service for children, students and adults who wanted to continue their education.

At the end of 2015, with the worst of the epidemic over and travel restrictions lifted, Alison Tweed, Director of Book Aid International, travelled to Sierra Leone to investigate the possibility of resuming book provision to libraries there. She found a nation busy restoring its health and education infrastructure and eager for new books to help with its development. We have recently dispatched a consignment of 38,226 books to Sierra Leone, our first in nine years.

Many of these books will go into SLLB’s network of 20 public libraries, ranging from children’s books through to higher education texts. 1,300 high-quality, up-to-date medical textbooks are also on the way to SLLB’s libraries, many of them going to the central library in Freetown where they will be used by students at the nearby College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences. SLLB will also distribute books to schools, colleges, hospitals and prisons. The University of Sierra Leone’s Institute of Public Administration and Management will receive 292 books for their library.

There are many international NGOs involved in the rebuilding of Sierra Leone, and Book Aid International is proud to be able to support some of them with book donations. These organisations include Save the Needy, Practical Tools Action and PLAN International which support schools, hospitals and prisons including the Women’s Central Prison.

“The intervention Book Aid International is making at this critical time with a shipment of 38,000 relevant books to Sierra Leone for distribution and reading promotion activities is a great boost to the education sector as more users, pupils, students, and educators will be exposed to books (the most important resource in education) that will enhance teaching and learning in Sierra Leone.”

Sallieu Touray, Chief Librarian of the Sierra Leone Library Board
This gives the community the chance to learn more about the role and value of the library. Here are some hints and tips for making your event the best it can be:

**Choose your location with care**

You will need a space that is large enough to fit around 100 people (or more). If your space is outside, think about a plan B in case of bad weather and make sure that books are protected from the rain and wind. Also think about how accessible your space is. Can people with disabilities use the space? Consider choosing somewhere that is central or busy so that passers-by can join in the fun.

**Reach out to different people**

Make sure you invite people from all groups and walks of life. Invitees could represent groups of teachers, head-teachers, local medical staff, parents, students, members of district education committees, and academics from local universities. Creating promotional posters can inform people about the event and inspire them to come along. Go and visit different groups and encourage them to attend. Your local radio station might also be able to help you promote the event.

**Invite motivational speakers**

Inviting key community leaders and other people of interest to speak at your event will help to inspire people and teach them more about the value of reading and the power of books. Ministers working within the district ministry of education, the head of the library service, and local celebrities are all figures that can offer inspiration to people by sharing why reading is important to them, and even telling personal stories of how books have helped them in their careers.

**Run engaging activities**

Planning and implementing a variety of engaging activities is important. Try to arrange activities that suit multiple ages, such as young children, teenagers and adults. Remember that books and reading should be at the heart of your activities. Ideas include: storytelling, read-alouds, acting out a book and finding a specific book among the library shelves.

**Motivation and rewards**

A bit of friendly competition can help to motivate the attendees to take part in reading activities. Prizes for the most dedicated reader, the fastest reader or the best read-aloud can be very useful in getting people to participate. These prizes could act as positive reinforcement for those who participate in reading activities and demonstrate a particular enthusiasm and dedication to reading throughout the day.

**Involve the media**

Inviting representatives from the local newspapers and radio stations will help to boost the publicity of your event and help to spread the message of reading and its value to other communities. This will help to expand the reach of the library and promote the library, its resources and its work to a wider range of potential users.
Monitor interest

Learning from your event in terms of attendees’ feedback is a valuable exercise as it enables you to design strategies for reaching out to your community. Surveys are a good way to measure people’s experiences of the event, so that you are better informed in the future. You can then use this learning in the planning of a similar event or outreach activity.

Have fun!

Perhaps the most important part of the reading promotion event is having fun. Lots of games and prizes to be won will give your event a light-hearted spirit and provide your attendees with fond memories of reading. Reading is an enjoyable activity, let’s make sure this message is heard!
News

The future of African public libraries.

Earlier this month our Head of Programmes, Samantha Thomas-Chuula, attended two library conferences in Swaziland – Exploring opportunities for aligned action to strengthen the African public library field hosted by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Global Libraries initiative and the 2nd African Public Libraries Summit hosted by The African Library and Information Association & Institutions (AfLIA). Here is Sam’s report of the events.

Both events focussed on the future of African public libraries: what the vision is for them and how, through collective action and partnerships, we should all seek to work towards that vision.

The vision was put forward by AfLIA and shifts the library service focus from books to responding to community needs. It is a vision of a vibrant network of libraries which contain books and information that are relevant and useful for the whole community, regardless of language or level of education. These libraries offer their users a range of services and respond to the information needs of their local communities and are places which don’t just house books but also computers and other ICT with high-speed internet access. Through an innovative range of outreach activities the libraries contribute to improved lives in their communities. People find space in the library to have community meetings and it is a place where they are encouraged to share skills and plan activities. Libraries become the pride of their communities and this attracts sponsorship and partnership opportunities for individuals, and increased interest amongst young people in becoming a librarian because of the key facilitator role that this position now holds in the community.

There was a focus at both events on partnerships and the need to collaborate to achieve the African public library vision. We discussed what it means to collaborate and that we should not work in silos. We agreed the kinds of support necessary to achieve the positive change described in the vision. This included leadership training and capacity building for librarians.

Our work at Book Aid International is already highly collaborative as we work with in-country partners to ensure we send books which most closely match the needs of their library users. We also provide innovative customer-focused programmes for children in public libraries and schools. Finally, our training workshops develop librarians’ skills, particularly in working with children and providing health information to the community. Our ‘Train the Trainer’ workshops focus on enabling librarians to pass their skills and knowledge to colleagues and develop a network of expert librarians.

As Book Aid International looks forward to its next strategic period 2017-19, we need to seek to develop new ways of working to identify and understand the range of community members’ needs for responsive programmes and projects. It will also involve sharing those needs with our book donors and supporters so that we increase donations of the books to support these programmes and community aspirations.

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