Strategy 2014-16

Vibrant libraries • Inspired readers • Empowered communities
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About Book Aid International

Who we are
We are the UK’s leading book donation charity supporting the development of libraries in sub-Saharan Africa. Established as the Ranfurly Library Service in 1954, the organisation has, to date, donated over 30 million books to libraries worldwide.

Every year we aim to distribute a minimum of 500,000 quality, new educational and general books, donated by the UK publishing industry. We also manage projects which include librarian training, refurbishment and local book purchase in addition to book provision.

Why we work with libraries
For so many people in Africa, in both urban and rural areas, a public, community or school library is the only point of access to books for pleasure, study or information. Increasingly, libraries are also becoming centres of connectivity and community activity. But access to books is still the major service that they offer.

How we work
Book Aid International works with a range of library partners: national library services, international and national NGOs and community library networks, setting up and improving already established libraries and developing new library services. We do not construct library buildings, although we may contribute to establishing a new library in an existing building.

Where we work
Book Aid International distributes books to public, community, school, university and specialist libraries in Africa. We believe in supporting as wide a range of partners and libraries as resources allow, offering the books we receive from UK publishers to those libraries best able to make use of them.

“I’m sure these books will do something this community will live to remember.”
Immaculate Mutabaire, Founder and Manager Gayaza Family Learning Centre, Uganda
Setting the scene

In the previous strategic period, 2011–13, we worked to consolidate our established book provision programme in 12 partner countries in sub-Saharan Africa: Cameroon, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Namibia. We also have a small book provision project in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. From 2011–13 we developed our project base, providing services for children in public and community libraries, mobile libraries for rural and urban slum areas, school libraries in a box in Zanzibar and on mainland Tanzania, health information hubs in public libraries in Kenya. In the previous strategic period we also worked to expand our training programme for librarians.

We learned much from these projects: most importantly, that training and support for librarians and monitoring and evaluating projects greatly improves the impact of the book donation work that we do.

In 2012 we consolidated this learning with a broad review of our work in five countries: Talking to users (published on our website). The findings from this review form the basis for much of the thinking behind the next strategic plan.

Our vision

Our vision is of vibrant libraries that inspire readers and empower communities.

Our mission

To work in partnership with libraries in Africa, providing books, resources and training to support an environment in which reading for pleasure, study and lifelong learning can flourish.

Our values

We believe in:
- The potential of books to change lives.
- The power of skills development and capacity building.
- The value of working in partnership with organisations that share our vision.
- The right of access to information for all.

“All the books we received were relevant, current and in good condition. The only problem is that the books were just a drop in the ocean.”

Pilate Chewe, Collection Development Librarian, University of Zambia

Training children’s librarians, Namibia
Books are still very scarce in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Libraries are often the only place where people can access books and resources. Access to the internet and to digital resources is in high demand, but delivery is often problematic.

Public libraries are often run by local government authorities. They tend to be small and can be dark and very crowded at peak times, such as prior to school examinations. Often they contain mainly empty shelves or old books and are not a welcoming environment for the community. Students use them as a quiet place to study and they may bring their own materials in rather than using outdated library materials. Children are frequently not offered their own space or appropriate books and may be actively discouraged as a disruptive element in the library.

School libraries Most government schools, particularly at primary level, do not have libraries. The introduction of Universal Primary Education has seen large increases in the number of children enrolled in primary school, resulting in much larger class sizes and the few available text books shared between even more students.

Secondary education is also expanding with overcrowded buildings and no budget for library book purchase.

Community libraries are frequently run by volunteers and vary greatly, from small huts in rural areas to multi-roomed premises in urban and peri-urban areas. The better-resourced community libraries can offer a range of services such as literacy classes, IT training and internet access and services to support income generation.

The higher education sector is expanding rapidly in sub-Saharan Africa. Many of the newer universities rely exclusively on book donations to stock the library. Core texts are usually in very short supply and may be unavailable for general purchase in bookshops.

Health information libraries, where they exist, generally consist of a few out of date books managed by an administrator as one of their many duties. This void of current health information is one of the many factors relating to poor health outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa. Medical textbooks are very expensive and usually beyond the reach of practitioners, students and university libraries.

Libraries in sub-Saharan Africa are currently faced with a number of ongoing challenges and opportunities. The challenges are many: access to resources (both books and electronic), lack of skills for library workers and increasing demands on the services available.

The better-resourced libraries, however, are working to create hubs incorporating a range of information services for their communities, including outreach to schools, reading clubs, storytelling, internet access, IT training and support for income generation activities.

"First, as a librarian I thought I was a person whose work is to arrange books. I discovered I am very powerful person in the community. A library is not about books alone. It is about what you are doing to the community. Libraries are making inroads in many areas that people had never thought about."

Moses Imbayi Mwandahi, Kisumu Library, Kenya
Our priorities 2014-16

In the next three years we will seek to increase our book provision work and to create project sustainability through local training initiatives and relationships with national publishers. We will engage actively with developments in digital resources and seek appropriate ways of building digital provision into our projects. We will support libraries by delivering a greater number and wider range of projects in more countries. And we will build our local presence through more in-country project managers and partnerships with international and national NGOs.

Strategic goals 2014–16

To maximise opportunities for reading, study and lifelong learning for all through increased access to books and other resources in public and community libraries.

To improve educational opportunities through greater access to learning materials and more trained staff in schools.

To support professional capacity development through the provision of quality information resources in the higher education and medical sectors.

To support partner organisations in Africa in their development of vibrant and inspirational library spaces.

To promote sustainability in our work through training librarians and involving other stakeholders in our book donation and project activities.

What we aim to achieve by the end of 2016

We will have increased the number of books we send to libraries every year to 700,000.

We will have developed up to 60 Children’s Corners in six countries through our Open Doors project, contributing to a total of 107 children’s library projects in eight countries.

We will have developed a set of quality training resources and a cadre of skilled trainers in-country with a particular focus on children’s services.

We will have developed partnerships with a range of complementary organisations to strengthen our school library book provision.

We will have an electronic inventory system, giving partners the tools to select books at the title level, thus empowering our partners and ensuring the relevance of the books we send.

We will have refined our monitoring and evaluation framework to provide the evidence to continuously improve the work we do.
Our supporters

Throughout our 60 year history we have enjoyed outstanding support from individuals, trusts, companies, community and other groups through gifts and grants, book donations and volunteering.

We operate in an extraordinarily competitive environment; nonetheless, we continue to achieve success in recruiting new supporters for our work. For the last five years we have achieved year on year growth in our overall income.

For the period of 2014–2016 we will build on our successful fundraising programme in all areas.

We will focus on developing our individual giving profile, investing in donor recruitment and donor communications, continuously improving the cost efficiency of this work and growing our database of individual donors.

We will seek new funding from grant-making trusts and foundations and companies in the UK, Europe, the USA and Africa.

We will use our 60th anniversary to engage existing supporters in helping us win support from new companies and individuals.

We will invest in developing our communications with supporters across all channels: social media, film and newsletters, enabling them to understand the life-changing impact of their donations on individuals and communities.

We will continue to strengthen our volunteer base, providing opportunities for people to support us in a variety of ways: in day and evening volunteering in our warehouse, with community fundraising initiatives and helping us in research and office functions.

Our partners

““If we want to go fast we go alone – if we want to go far we go together.””

African proverb

Partnership is the key to developing sustainable projects.

We aim to be partner-led in both our book provision and programme development. Monitoring and evaluation of our book provision and project work is undertaken by both our partners and Book Aid International staff. This enables us continuously to improve the way we work and to measure the outcomes of the joint work undertaken.

Our partners fall into three categories. Distribution partners, usually the national library service or an NGO, work with us to distribute books to libraries in their own country.

Recipient partners receive selected books from our distribution partners; these books are provided to their broader networks.

Project partners work in conjunction with us to deliver library development projects.

Book Aid International is constantly seeking new strategic partnerships with organisations that can increase the impact of the books we are distributing through complementary programmes.

“I always have a picture in my mind of the end product arriving. Perhaps at an isolated school somewhere one day, a battered truck bumps along the ruts in the road, pushing up clouds of dust as it goes and it stops outside this school and they unload perhaps three of our boxes, and just think what it would mean to the teacher.”

Jean Galsworthy, Librarian and Book Aid International volunteer
Key areas of focus 2014-16

Our programme strategy has two distinct but complementary areas of work: book provision and project interventions that add greater value to the books we distribute in order to ensure the best outcomes for libraries and library users.

Book provision

Book provision is central to the work that we do. During this strategy period we will continue to improve our book distribution systems to ensure they best meet the needs of our partner libraries.

We will strengthen relationships with UK publishers and provide them with regular feedback on where and how their books are being used to encourage them to increase their donations.

We will liaise with publishers in sub-Saharan Africa for book purchase and donation to promote sustainable relationships between libraries and publishers in the region.

We will enhance monitoring and evaluation of the book provision programme by both Book Aid International and partner organisations to ensure books are relevant and well used.

Programmatic work

There are four main components of our programme strategy: children’s services, schools, health information and community libraries.

Children’s services

Over 40% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa is under the age of 15; these children are the future of this region but most public libraries currently cater mostly to older students.

Book Aid International will work in partnership to develop strong children’s library services in public and community libraries. To achieve this objective we will:

- Create 60 new Children’s Corners in public libraries.
- Create training resources for professional training of library staff working in children’s services.
- Create a cadre of trained trainers who can continuously develop training and promote the importance of library services for children of all ages.
- Change the perception of children in libraries to one in which children are welcomed and seen as the future of the library and of the nation.

Schools

Our research indicates that simply donating books to schools is not sufficient to create a library promoting a reading culture; there also needs to be training of teacher-librarians on managing the library resource.

Book Aid International will engage in partnerships to develop services to school libraries that promote better learning outcomes.

To achieve this objective we will:

- Create strategic alliances with dynamic partners.
- Undertake monitoring and evaluation of how the books are used to tailor our book provision programme, or task our partners to do so.
- Phase out general distribution of books to schools in favour of distribution only through partners who can value add with teacher-librarian training.
Create training modules to facilitate professional training for teacher-librarians in setting up a library and running activities to support children’s reading and learning activities.

Create a cadre of trained trainers in the region who can continuously improve the training and share learnings.

Share experiences to promote the importance of school libraries in improving educational outcomes.

Health Information

The availability of relevant, up-to-date health information is a contributor to better health outcomes, and we recognise the potential of libraries to provide access to information to health professionals.

Book Aid International will support selected libraries to provide up-to-date health information to health professionals.

To achieve this objective we will:

- Develop partnerships to deliver resources and training to health libraries.
- Support medical training colleges through the provision of quality medical textbooks.
- Support the health information sector through participation in relevant networks and conferences.

Community libraries

We recognise the potential of community libraries to empower communities and drive change.

Book Aid International will support the development of community libraries, particularly those in vulnerable communities.

To achieve this objective we will:

- Identify and support community library networks.
- Provide relevant books across a range of levels and subjects.
- Provide training through partner organisations in areas related to library management and children’s services.

There is a school in Banket some 80km from Harare where there was literally nothing. Book Aid International books enabled the school to start up a library and encouraged the pupils to develop a reading culture. The writing and reading skills of the pupils increased tremendously.”

Yeukai Chimuka, Harare Distribution Committee, Zimbabwe
**Geographical focus**

Our geographical focus has always been, and remains, broad, currently focussing on 12 countries in sub Saharan Africa. Our partner relations in-country are key to our work and some are very well-established. However, while we see the benefit in these long term partner relationships, we will be prepared to review and phase out of sectors and countries as conditions change, and seek partnerships in new sectors and countries.

**Digital opportunities and implications for our work**

Digital information has the potential to revolutionise access to information and published materials; however, there are many barriers in much of sub-Saharan Africa. The cost of hardware and internet access and the availability of a constant electricity supply and reliable broadband continue to deepen the divide between those who have access to information and those who do not.

We will work with our partners to contribute to the digital revolution in Africa as much as we can, while recognising that for many of our partners books will remain a key resource for the foreseeable future, and that demand for print materials will continue to grow alongside demand for digital resources.

**Conclusion**

We are a small organisation of 20 staff, but our reach is wide: over 3,300 libraries received a total of 563,424 books donated by us in 2013, and based on the estimate of each donated book being read by five people this suggests that nearly three million people will read a book that was donated by Book Aid International in 2013.

We want to continue this work and also build on this foundation a programme that maximises the impact that reading and access to information can have on people’s potential to change their own lives.
Currently the only new and in good condition books you will see in our library collection are from Book Aid. Furthermore, it has helped our medical practitioners advance in their careers as they read up-to-date information from Book Aid books and pass their medical board examinations.

Yeukai Chimuka, Harare Distribution Committee, Zimbabwe

The books from Book Aid International are fantastic and have worked magic. They have brought in an academic transformation to the Government High School in Aduk. The teachers and students have now developed a new sense of consciousness and crave for excellence... You can see what the books have earned for us. I am a proud man.

Peter Ayuk, School Principal, Aduk High School, Cameroon

I wish to thank Book Aid International for organising the training. It came at the right time for me. I am empowered to do my job well. I am sure to be able to live up to the task and to contribute my best to improve the standards in the library.

Nche Caroline Nchang, Librarian, Bamenda City Council Library, Cameroon