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### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forewords</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive summary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The project at a glance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project design</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital element</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library locations</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning point 1: Great training is essential for expanding new library services</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning point 2: Libraries can be excellent extensions of the classroom</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning point 3: Librarians can envision and embrace a new role for themselves and the library</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning point 4: Investing in children’s focused library services with books and digital devices leads to more children interested in learning in general</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning point 5: Attracting children to the library can lead to wider community groups being attracted to the library</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning point 6: Many factors influence visitor numbers</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning point 7: Digital has unique challenges</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Reader,

Book Aid International was established in 1954 as an organisation that supported under-resourced libraries through the provision of library books. More than 60 years on, we are proud of the progress we have made as libraries have continuously changed the lives of their users in dynamic and ever changing ways. This project has proven how successful our Children’s Corners projects can be, especially when they are coupled with a digital element. Through the provision of both print and digital resources, this project has increased the number and diversity of children, young people and adults entering the library, given librarians confidence and skills to deliver activities for children and helped children to develop their literacy skills and practise learning in new and exciting ways.

Our partnership with Kenya National Library Service (knls) has helped both organisations achieve our strategic objectives to increase and improve service provision for children as well as making information available in digital form.

We aim to continue working with our local partners to support libraries across Africa through book provision, training and digital development in order to help achieve the same successful results as those we have seen in this project.

Alison Tweed, Director of Book Aid International

Dear Reader,

We at knls are delighted to have taken part in this project that has given over 75,000 children the chance to develop their reading and learning through the provision of high quality, brand new, carefully selected books, e-readers and tablets. This project has seen a rise in the number of people visiting the knls libraries, as well as increasing the confidence and skills of our librarians. We have seen the librarians take the library outside of the physical space and into schools and communities who are keen to learn how to use this new technology. Children who wouldn’t otherwise be able to access information through our libraries, such as children with disabilities, have been able to use the tablets thanks to special features and applications that help them overcome their impairment. We have also seen children with more confidence and vigour who are no longer passive receivers of information but are instead seeking out their own stories from the books and e-readers and lessons from the tablets.

Our partnership with Book Aid International has been a long-standing success and we will continue working together in the future to fulfil our shared vision of empowering our users through dynamic and effective library service provision.

Richard Atuti, Director of Knls
Executive summary

The *Children’s Books and E-learning Project* is a joint project by Book Aid International and Kenya National Library Service (knls). This project focused on 23 public libraries, training librarians on working with children, developing new Children’s Corners that provided dedicated areas for children in 10 libraries, working with 12 public libraries that had established Children’s Corners and providing them with top-up books. In five of these public libraries, children have been given access to e-readers and tablet computers, using them to develop reading, research and basic ICT skills.

Librarians have noted an increase in the confidence and curiosity of children as they explore the variety of stories, games and applications available to them through the use of the e-readers and tablets. Relationships between the librarians and children have also improved as the children have been able to use the tablets to create short films, interviewing their teachers and re-defining the dynamic between teachers and learners. Tablets allowed children to teach themselves using the educational apps and games available to them. This has shifted the dynamic of children being passive receivers of information, enabling them to become inquisitive researchers who can learn independently, as well as teach themselves and each other new skills.

The presence of technology in libraries has contributed to a large increase in library visits, with Kenyans of all ages wishing to use the e-readers and tablets. Membership and lending of books have also increased.

Some of the main challenges reported during this project include unreliable internet connections, a lack of varied religious texts to suit the religious diversity of some areas, the need for more hardware to satisfy the numbers wanting access and problems with procurement of tablet covers.

Despite these challenges, the response to the project has been overwhelmingly positive and there are opportunities for knls to further sustain the momentum through government intervention. A local member of parliament has expressed an interest in replicating the project in schools, asking the libraries involved in this project to submit a proposal for a possible roll out across Kenyan schools.

This learning paper comprises of:

1. A summary of the project’s design
2. Key learning points that have derived from interviews with librarians and pupils
3. Conclusion on the most successful approach (books only or books with digital devices) in getting younger library patrons reading.

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1 The *Children’s books and e-learning pilot project* was supported by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation with additional support from Afren plc, the Marangu Family, Fresh Leaf Foundation and other donors.
In total the project has worked with:
23 libraries,

- enabling 10 libraries to set up new Children's Corners,
- providing 12 libraries which had established Children's Corners with books, resources and training,
- enabling four project libraries and one additional library to become digital sites.

A total of 64 librarians from all the project libraries took part in training in children’s library services.

Over the two years of the project Book Aid International provided a total of over 44,400 UK publisher donated books worth an estimated £315,000.

We gave grants that enabled knls to purchase a total of over 19,550 locally published books and to purchase a total of 180 tablets and 25 e-readers.
This project is the best thing to have ever happened... in all the 23 knls branches involved in the project. Much has been shared in various forums, trainings and even social media. Innovation, incorporation of ICT, improved performance, general readership and also creativity in service delivery to children in the library. 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.

- Librarian, Mwingi Branch Library, Kenya
Introduction

The *Children’s Books and E-Learning Project* tested the use, function and adoption of e-readers and tablets in public library settings, and compared the difference between the libraries that contain print material only with those that have digital resources alongside books. Getting young library patrons reading was the project’s primary driver, as reading opens up a wealth of information and helps develop young readers into capable and informed citizens. This three year pilot project was implemented by Book Aid International and Kenya National Library Service (knls), working with 23 public libraries. 12 of these libraries, where we had already set up Children’s Corners through our previous partnership projects, received new books and additional training for librarians. Five of these branches also received digital resources.

Training was an essential feature from the beginning of the project and training workshops have enhanced the skills of the librarians, enabling them to establish better services for children through training in how to support children’s reading choices and learning in the library.

In total, Book Aid International provided over 44,400 newly-published books from the UK, knls was given grants to purchase over 19,500 books locally, including local language Kiswahili titles, and to purchase 180 tablets and 25 e-readers. Tablets were preloaded with 94 books each and e-readers preloaded with 100 digital book titles. Librarians took part in training in children’s library services and the incorporation of ICT into children’s services.

The project included ongoing monitoring and research in order to understand the impact of Children’s Corners on library attendance, lending and membership, as well as the confidence of the librarians and the children in their reading and support of reading. Monitoring efforts have also focused on the challenges faced during the project, the solutions to those challenges, and the opportunities for the future. A focus on the difference between libraries that received only books and those that received digital devices and books, forms the basis of this learning paper.

This project’s baseline report, made in October 2013, outlined these main findings:

- Despite children attending the knls libraries in high numbers, very few librarians have training in children’s library services.
- The lack of infrastructure suitable for children to read inhibits their reading experience and librarians find supervising them challenging as they do not have their own library space.
- Only some of the libraries have access to the internet and this access is often limited to adult use.
- Some libraries are already providing outreach to schools such as sensitisation trips and the running of school book clubs.
- All librarians without Children’s Corners expressed a need to allocate and decorate a specific space for children to read, play and learn.
The project’s final report discovered that:

- The project has increased respect between teachers and school students.
- Children are now more confident and capable of browsing for their own materials.
- The project has seen a steady increase in library attendance, lending and membership.
- Activities within the libraries have increased, meaning librarians are becoming more creative and confident in running activities with children.
- Libraries are reaching out to a diverse range of community groups, increasing inclusivity and community bonds.
- The project has increased the demand from older library users.

**Background**

Across Africa the demand for books and printed information is enormous and there is increasing recognition of the role that public and community libraries can play in supporting literacy, education and development. As noted during the “Africa Writes” conference in 2013:

"There is great excitement around the prospect of a 'digital revolution' and its potential impact on the way that children learn and enjoy their leisure time. E-readers, tablets, and mobile phones offer new, cheaper ways for digital information to be transmitted, opening up the possibility of a continent-wide culture of reading for pleasure and information."²

Books remain essential to support literacy and education but the rapid advance of information technology is changing the way that libraries work. People in Kenya and other African nations increasingly use computers, smartphones or tablets to find up-to-date news or information and for education, training or employment. Children need to develop reading skills and information retrieval skills that enable them to make well-informed choices from the vast amount of information that is available digitally.

**The Kenyan context**

Kenya has the best and the worst performing districts for educational attainment in East Africa, with 89% of children in urban Nairobi Westlands achieving desired levels of literacy compared with just 7% of children in East Pokot in Rift Valley³. Recent research looking into the progress of Kenya’s primary education system tested thousands of children’s literacy and numeracy levels. The results showed that children are not achieving as they should and that, as in many other countries, problems are particularly acute in the poorest rural areas.

With 84%⁴ of Kenyan children of primary school age enrolled, many schools face a lack of basic textbooks and little or nothing in the way of supplementary reading. Statistics from December 2015 found that 20,000 Kenyan primary schools are without libraries⁵, meaning only 2% of Kenyan schools have access to a school library.⁶ Children cannot easily develop the habit of reading and, lacking this basic foundation for their education, struggle to learn. Drop-out rates in school are high with only two thirds of the 1.3 million children who enrolled

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³ [http://www.uwezo.net/](http://www.uwezo.net/)
⁴ World Bank, 2012 net primary school enrolment statistics
at the start of free primary education in 2003 staying in school to standard 8\(^7\). For many children in Kenya, public libraries are the only place where they can regularly pick up a book and have space in which to read.

**Project design**

The project involved four main strands of activity. The project:

- piloted the use of tablets in four selected knls libraries with established Children’s Corners and in one additional new Children’s Corner set up in 2015 at Thika Library (the original aim was to work with three pilot sites but cost savings enabled more libraries to take part)
- set up new Children’s Corners in 10 selected knls libraries
- provided additional books and resources for 12 established Children’s Corners
- provided training for librarians in children’s library services and the incorporation of ICT into these services.

**Project activities - year one**

- Assess refurbishment needs and children’s book needs.
- Identify children’s library services training needs for librarians and provide training to meet those needs.
- Provide children’s books and reading material in English from donated stock at Book Aid International’s UK warehouse.
- Make small grants for local book purchase, including local language titles.
- Make small grants to create colourful, child-friendly spaces in libraries, including the purchase of educational toys, child-sized furniture, murals, bookshelves and games.
- Monitor and evaluate project outcomes.

**Project activities - year two**

Everything as in year one and in addition:

- Producing learning paper.
- Produce children’s participatory video.

**Digital element**

The project included digital hardware to develop reading and learning skills in the library and in the local community. Throughout the lifecycle of the project, digital resources trialled were:

- Samsung tablets preloaded with Kenyan curriculum linked content from eLimu
- Worldreader e-readers
- BRCK Kio Kits - 40 tablet computers in a secure and sturdy box, preloaded with eLimu content, designed and prototyped in Nairobi, Kenya.

The original decision as to whether e-readers or tablets should be included in the project was informed by advice from other agencies working with young children in public libraries and schools. As this project targeted children in younger age groups (c.6-12), tablets were

\(^7\) http://www.nation.co.ke/news/education/Primary-schools-dropout-rates-Kenya/-/2643604/2930304/-/akb2h9z/-/index.html
deemed more suitable than e-readers, as they are more interactive and can offer a variety of learning tools such as sound, video and educational games. 3D animations help children understand complex ideas, and quizzes and games help develop their thinking skills. This content is also more suitable for children with learning impairments, further enhancing their appeal.

However, for older pupils and more confident readers, the inclusion of e-readers in year two also brought value to the project by allowing them to access a wide range of titles in multiple languages and based in both local and international contexts. The project purchased a total of 180 tablets, including those in the Kio Kits, all loaded with eLimu content, and 25 e-readers from Worldreader.

**Project activities for the digital pilot sites**

The activities that took place in the libraries taking part in the digital element of the project were to:

- identify and purchase appropriate devices for work with younger children (aged around 6-12 years) to trial in three selected libraries
- assess children’s requirements for digital devices and use of books in digital format, including curriculum content, fiction and leisure reading
- identify specific ICT needs of girls, children with disabilities and other disadvantaged children
- assess librarian’s capacity to use digital devices, ICT training needs and provide training to meet those needs
- identify potential e-book resources, including local (African) publishers and UK publishers, and secure suitable e-resources
- work effectively in collaboration with local experts and other partners, such as local publishers
- determine potential for scaling up the digital project to other knls branches
- monitor and evaluate the progress of the project mid-year and end of year.

**Project outcomes**

The intended outcomes of the project are as follows:

- Knls librarians are confident and knowledgeable about books and resources and are able to engage effectively with children.
- Librarians in digital sites have training, confidence and resources to provide relevant e-books and other e-learning materials.
- More children using the libraries involved in this project.
- Increased use of digital devices and increased reading by children using both books and e-readers.
- Project partners develop model to integrate e-resources into children’s library services
- Enhanced understanding within Book Aid International and partners of access to and availability of e-resources from publishers in the UK and in Africa.
- Enhanced partnerships and shared learning between project partners.
Library locations

Children’s Corners

Book Aid International worked in partnership with knls to select libraries in their network that would set up new Children’s Corners as part of this project. These libraries were selected because of the enthusiasm of the librarians and because they had sufficient space. The libraries taking part that had already set up Children’s Corners received additional top-up books. Selected libraries became pilot sites for access to digital resources and training.

A full list of these libraries is included in Appendix A.

E-learning sites

Five knls branches were eventually able to benefit from digital provision, as opposed to three originally planned in the project design. This was made possible after making significant cost savings in year one as the cost of the tablets dropped considerably, none had to be replaced due to damage, as well as cost savings on behalf of knls monitoring trips.
Learning points

Learning point 1: Great training essential for expanding new library services

Training

The training element of this project has been very successful in achieving the outcomes in that it has motivated librarians to work with children in a confident and effective manner. Training included basic, advanced and digital training workshops with a total of 64 librarians and covered a range of topics relating to children’s librarianship and how to make the most of both print and digital reading and learning materials. Librarians learned about children’s reading development, how librarians can support reading, action planning, strategies for community outreach, passing on skills learned and knowledge gained to their colleagues and project monitoring and evaluation.

The training workshops helped librarians discuss the issues that their libraries face and advise one another on possible solutions. Feedback from the initial, advanced and digital training workshops was positive overall. The only criticisms recorded were that that digital training needed to be longer so as to allow librarians to acquire more knowledge and confidence with the technology. Librarians also expressed a desire to invite teachers to attend their own training sessions as they could also greatly benefit from exploring how the tablets work.

Children’s Corners basic training

What the project team learned from the feedback from the basic training was very positive, with librarians remarking on what they liked most:

- Topics are practical and easily implemented.
- It was clear how and why we need a child centred approach in libraries.
• Learning about children’s developmental stages was interesting and highly valuable information.
• Increased understanding of why children are such important visitors to our libraries.
• Realising that children’s needs are different from the needs of adults.
• Learning about the role of the 21st century librarian, including the digital aspect.
• Learning how to bring books to life through activities and games.
• Learning how to use available resources to make the library child-friendly.

At the end of the basic training workshop, librarians created action plans where they mapped out what they were going to do to improve their libraries going forward.

The librarians described how their libraries’ work had been improved thanks to the training they received. They stated that the training had helped them to:

• increase their confidence on how to work with children in a library setting
• promote reading using games and activities
• better understand children’s book-related needs.

One librarian observed how the training had effected a profound change in the library staff:

“Mwingi branch staff have a visible change of attitudes towards serving children. Much respect and freedom is now accorded to the children. A big about turn is evident with involvement in many activities involving children”. – Librarian, Mwingi Library Branch.

Children’s Corners advanced training

The advanced training centred on the librarians’ experiences of implementing the project in the first year. The librarians discussed progress toward achieving goals and actions they had planned for their libraries in the basic training.

It also covered new topics such as child protection and child rights, working with children with special needs, gender issues in library service delivery, and mobilising local resources to improve library services for the community.

Feedback from the training made it clear that librarians went away from the workshop feeling inspired due to the discussions and support they had received. They particularly liked the participatory nature of the workshop activities, as these gave them the chance to air ideas and issues regarding their libraries in a supportive environment where ideas for solutions were abundant.

Some of the ways that librarians have developed their skills thanks to this training are:

• They now know how to work with children and communities.
• Their confidence, self-esteem and job satisfaction has increased.
• They are now encouraged to further their professional development.
• They have increased community recognition as carriers and disseminators of knowledge.
• They have an improved ability to interact with people.
• They now recognise how important the role of the children’s librarian is in the development of a strong civil society.
• They now understand that a children’s librarian is not a majority female role.
• They are now more able to talk to parents, teachers and the wider community about the importance of the library.
• They are better able to manage their library collections.
• They now know how to encourage children with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups into the library.
• They are now able to share what they have learned with their colleagues.

What librarians say

“The training woke something up in me. I have changed as I feel I am more able to interact.”
− Librarian, knls Nakuru Library

“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 e.g. working with the mentally challenged and caring for them, holding medical camps in collaboration with health workers.”
− Moses Imbayi – knls Kisumu Library

The comments made by librarians are testament to how well-received the training was and how it has positively affected the development of children’s library services in Kenya. This form of intervention can contribute to enabling librarians to be more engaged with children that use library services and help improve children’s life chances through engagement with learning materials.

What teachers say

“This has been a great day for us, some schools like ours are slum based. This service will greatly motivate the learners and a point of attraction for the children.”
− Mr Okongi, Kaloleni Primary School visiting Kisumu Library
Digital training

Digital training was another high-impact activity, instrumental in the successful introduction of the digital devices into libraries. This training was designed to enable librarians to work with children on how to use the devices provided and was co-facilitated with eLimu, the Kenyan company that has provided some e-resources for the tablets. The training workshops brought together librarians from the digital pilot site libraries, and covered a variety of topics, including sessions on an introduction to tablets, Google play store apps, eLimu application, Kids Place, and other educational apps. It also included a session on online communication and a practical session with children. All sessions were participatory and practical, with ‘learning by doing’ emphasised and each participant working on their own tablet. The practical training session included children from local primary schools, accompanied by their teachers.

Feedback from both the librarians and the children during these workshops was positive.

Comments included:

"The fact that I went to the workshop without knowing much about the tablets and what they are able to do and then came out with much knowledge and more confidence to use them makes us happy".
- Kisumu librarian

"This workshop was actually one of the best I have attended".
- Kisumu librarian

After being trained on the use of the tablets, on day three of the workshop librarians worked with a group of children from age 8 – 13 at the libraries themselves. Out of these groups, the majority of the children were touching tablets for the first time.

"I’m so excited. I feel like a fish swimming in the ocean".
- Pupil from CCM Township Primary, class 6

"I am very happy, it is my first time to touch a tablet. I will teach my friends how to use the tablet. I thank god for this opportunity".
- Pupil from Meru Primary School, class 7

Thanks to this training, the librarians are now confident in how to use the tablets themselves and in training children on how to use them and very positive about the effect the project has had on the libraries. Other outcomes of the training identified by the librarians themselves included:

- a boost to their confidence in working with children
- improved relationship between librarians and children
- children have been given the ability to use the tablets to improve their reading and learning
- librarians have been given the confidence and creativity to reach out to wider groups outside the library, including disadvantaged groups
- librarians have learned how to care for the devices
• librarians have learned how to oversee the children using the tablets to ensure their safety
• librarians have an increased understanding of how to work with children and how to promote reading.

Learning point 2. Libraries can be excellent extensions of the classroom

Effects of providing new resources

The libraries taking part in the project were delighted to have the opportunity to improve their library services through setting up new Children’s Corners and the libraries that already had Children’s Corners welcomed the new books and resources they received. Libraries selected to trial digital devices were particularly enthusiastic about being given the opportunity to discover how they could be used to work with children to enhance their learning within and outside of the library.

Children have expressed happiness when they visit their new library spaces thanks to the new resources that they have received. They remarked on how many books they now have available to them, and how pleased they are with this choice and the ease of being able to read and borrow whatever they chose. Their enthusiasm for the printed reading materials is still strong, despite the forward looking digital focus in the country. Children requested “more books as we have read most of the books already.”

The books were highly appreciated but the tablets and e-readers drew greater attention and excited the recipients far more. This is due to their novelty in part but digital reading and learning devices can also offer interactive educational content that can be particularly engaging to young library users.

As one child remarked:

“I can’t spend two days without coming to the library. It is helpful to come and read, story-telling, comedies, helps me laugh when I read some funny books. I love it. The
library has helped me a lot. I read science books, social studies. It has helped me in my education and my improvement. Some books teaches you to be a good child and helps me to be a good child in the community. My brother persuades me to come with him to the library to play with toys. I love those books.”

– Pupil, Kenyatta Primary School

Children with mental health problems have also benefitted from interacting with their new books. Libraries in areas prone to violent conflict, such as Rumuruti, a region that is home to many marginalised communities, mainly nomads and pastoralists, and where local communities are involved in disputes over land, offer children a safe and quiet place to gather, read, learn, socialise and discuss strategies for peace. Special peace circles have been set up which give children the space to discuss their feelings about the violence in their communities. The librarian at Rumuruti library remarked at how her own training in children’s librarianship, along with the calm and inviting nature of the Children’s Corner, has helped the children’s mental health:

"At home they are used to being harassed, hence they fear adults. They have learned we are friendly, feel loved and want to be close”.

– Librarian, Rumuruti Library.

This has been a powerful experience for both parties, who have found new ways to interact with each other and the learning materials in the library.

E-learning inside and outside of the library

The presence of a digital element in this project has sparked a wave of renewed and brand new interest in libraries, invigorated the notion of children’s library services and bolstered children’s confidence and librarians’ self-esteem and satisfaction in their work. It has also inspired many children to want to learn and take control of their learning in new ways that have never before been available to them.

Children in all of the project libraries have remarked that using the digital resources has helped them to become more engaged with their learning thanks to the interactive nature of the tablets in particular. Educational games that use videos and graphics have helped them learn and understand topics much more easily and concepts previously considered difficult can be brought to life.

The tablets are being used to engage children with dyslexia, as librarians were inspired by their training on working with special needs children. The children are now enthusiastic library users and their reading has improved considerably.

Librarians are also using the tablets as part of their school outreach programme, taking the equipment into schools and encouraging teachers and children to visit the library in return.

A librarian from Kisumu library discusses how this project has helped the library connect with a more varied and vulnerable set of members from 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 e.g. working with the mentally challenged and caring for them."

– Librarian, knls Kisumu Library
Learning point 3: Librarians can envision and embrace a new role for themselves and the library

Changes in librarians’ attitudes and working practices

Librarians are now more in tune with the children in the library and have a greater understanding of their needs. They are now able to assist children in their search for a particular book or subject, as well as orientate them around the tablets and e-readers. They are also now much more likely to interact with the children using activities such as read aloud.

Reporting on the increased confidence librarians now feel as a result of the project, one librarian said:

“I am so motivated... it has lifted my self-esteem and I look forward to working. Before, being allocated duties at the junior section felt like a demotion, but now everyone wants to be in the junior section. I relate better to my kids. I am reading books to my toddler at home. I have encouraged neighbours to come and read at the library”.

Changes in library usage

The project has had positive effects on the way that the libraries are now being used. In both the digital and the non-digital sites, the librarians are recording record numbers of pupils visiting the library, borrowing books and becoming members.

This graph shows increases in child membership at just three of the non-digital library sites. Every library has seen an increase in the number of children registering to be members, with an average increase of 38%. This increase in membership suggests that children are becoming more attached to the library and want to invest their time and energy into it by registering as members.

It is interesting to compare the percentage increase in membership in the libraries that received books shown above with that of two of the libraries that received books and tablets and e-readers.
Although the percentage increase in Meru library is high, at 67.8%, the percentage increase at Isiolo library (20.7%) is lower than that of Griftu (75.9%) and Dzitisoni (39.7%) - libraries that received books alone. The higher percentage of membership increase in Meru library when compared with Isiolo is a result of various differences.

Meru took part in the project as the first digital pilot site in the first year, (librarians trained in 2013), whereas Isiolo was included in the second year and librarians were not trained until late 2015). The second difference between the two libraries is the geographical location and socio-economic demographics of the two places. Meru is home to more settled and economically stable communities, in comparison with Isiolo which is a more socially deprived area with a more nomadic community. The third difference could be the result of the confidence, capabilities or free time of the librarians as to whether they organise book-related activities in their libraries. As Isiolo librarians attended training much later, we could expect their library activities and outreach to increase in future and thus their child membership also.

This data suggests that the more innovative and energetic the librarians are with the tablets, such as setting up student sharing groups (the Tab Wizards) and taking the tablets out on outreach into the community with them, the higher the child membership rates. The data therefore suggests that multiple elements combine to encourage children to register as members, such as the activities that are run by librarians inside the library and the outreach activities they organise. Resources alone (print, digital, or both) cannot be the main driver for children becoming members of the library. In fact, this data shows that the libraries with the highest percentage increase of members since the project began, are both print (Griftu – 75.9% increase) and digital (Meru – 68.7% increase). Despite the fact that librarians report that children are more excited by the prospect of using digital resources in the library, it is not guaranteed that this excitement alone translates into increased membership.
Learning point 4: Investing in children’s focused library services with books and digital devices leads to more children interested in learning in general

How the project has improved library services for children

The project has helped improve the availability and quality of children’s library services in a variety of ways.

Improvements in the library for children include:

- having their own space where they feel comfortable and supported
- having librarians who are now more familiar with their particular needs and know how to work with them to encourage reading and learning at their own pace
- activities involving the books and digital devices such as book clubs, reading aloud, creating reading trees and reading competitions
- access to toys and board games
- access to reading materials offers opportunity for an improvement in school work, particularly literacy
- access to the opportunity to practice their ICT skills such as interaction with the technology, ability to search for games and creating their own videos, interviewing each other and their librarians.

Teachers have reported improved academic performance among pupils since schools have registered as members of the library and been involved in reading promotion activities such as story-telling and reading competitions. A class teacher in standard 4 at St. Xavier Primary School, Nakuru reported that the mean score in her class had improved from 318 marks in first term to 370 in second term. Book clubs were formed in her school through Nakuru library in the beginning of the school year.

"I have seen a lot of improvement on the curriculum side. They are able to answer questions better, they can read, interpret and answer questions because they have developed that interest of reading books in the library".
– Teacher, St Xavier Primary School, Nakuru

The First Lady of Meru County launches a reading club at Meru library
Children interviewed supported this view that the library has helped improve their skills in schools. When we asked children about their thoughts on the new aspects of their library, they remarked:

"The new story books help me to write better in competitions and to understand."
- Child visiting Isiolo library

"The library expands my knowledge through reading different types of books in the library and gives me easy time during study. I like coming to the library because it has such interesting books."
- Child visiting Isiolo library

"The library has helped me improve my performance in school, finish my homework and improve my vocabulary through reading many story books. The library is very beautiful. I now come with my small brother who uses the corner as I do my homework."
- Child visiting Mwingi library, from Mwingi primary school.

These statements suggest that children who previously visited the library and those that have been attracted to the library since the project began are now more positive about themselves as readers and discoverers of new information, and feel a sense of ownership thanks to having their own designated children’s space.

Comments by children support this idea:

"The librarians are very warm and welcoming. They make sure that we get the reading materials we want. I have learned that reading is fun..."
- Child, Murang’a Library Branch.

These comments suggest that the investment in the space for children as well as focused training for the librarians on how to welcome and work with children has paid off. This child now recognises the value of the library as a space of support and fun and views reading as an enjoyable activity.

Learning Point 5: Attracting children to the library can lead to wider community groups also being attracted to the library

Working with the community

Wider and more varied groups of people are now visiting the libraries to enjoy the reading and learning materials that they find there. Regular interaction with local primary schools has encouraged pupils to come and visit their local library and enjoy reading and borrowing the print and digital materials that they can now find there.

This outreach into the community is a positive step towards community cohesion and an appreciation for libraries as tools for civil society to develop and thrive. A librarian describes how the project has helped people to come together and share the resources in the library:

"We have really changed. The community never used to know the library. Because of the activities we have started, the children now want to come during weekdays, weekends and holidays and talk about it at home. Their children also bring their friends along. As a librarian, I feel so good as I have achieved a goal."
- Librarian, Isiolo Community Library
Learning Point 6: Many factors influence visitor numbers

Lack of space and resources

The popularity of the Children’s Corners has attracted more children to the libraries and some are now experiencing issues of insufficient space and the need for more furniture, games and toys to cope with increased numbers. Expanding library space is often impossible for financial reasons.

One potential solution could be to organise a timetable for different groups of children to visit the Corners at set times. This would help the librarian to manage the numbers of users to keep them at a manageable level, whilst enabling all interested groups to access the resources at designated times.

New library charges

In April 2015 knls revised its library fees. For children, this means that there is free access to the library and for reading within the library but they are now required to pay five Kenyan shillings (approximately £0.04) for every book they borrow. In areas where people live on or below the $1.25 a day poverty level this will disadvantage poorer children and librarians have questioned this decision.

Evidence from Meru library has shown that the introduction of this charge has suppressed borrowing, leading children to read books in the library rather than borrow them and take them home. Between April and June 2015, 39,441 books were read in the library compared with only 731 books borrowed. This means that the books, which could have been shared with parents and siblings, are now less accessible to families. This challenge could be mitigated by introducing fees on a sliding scale according to the income level of families, enabling the children from the poorest households to borrow books for free.

Family and community challenges

For some parents who do not have a reading culture of their own, the value of children using libraries and reading is not well understood. Poverty is a factor and they may discourage their children from borrowing books from the library for fear of their children losing them and having to pay. This can make children feel uncomfortable about using the library.
In several library localities with large nomadic communities, parents may have to move to other areas in search of work and pasture for their animals and sometimes leave children with grandparents who may be too elderly to take children to the library or to help them practise reading. Some children also drop out from school to follow their parents. This results in varying numbers of children in the library from time to time. Librarians are also reluctant to lend books to such ‘mobile’ populations as they may shift to other locations before returning the books.

School-based changes

In 2015 the Kenyan Ministry of Education (MoE) implemented changes to the school timetable which has effectively increased the school day. Some schools have also introduced Saturday classes. This means that the time that children have available to visit the Children’s Corner has decreased. Mitigating this challenge could involve librarians working together with schools to suggest a library lesson during the school day where local schools could visit the library to read and use the tablets and e-readers (if available) or librarians could take the books to school through their outreach programme for use during library lessons. This would ensure that children still get regular access to the resources available in the Children’s Corner, whilst adhering to the new school timetable.
Learning point 7: digital has unique challenges

Digital challenges

Introducing digital resources into libraries for the first time inevitably poses challenges. The tablets provided as part of this project need to be charged almost daily after use although e-readers can be used for more than a week. To effectively exploit their potential, reliable internet connection in the library is needed to allow for access to online content. Preloaded content can be enjoyed by children but downloading new content can sometimes be difficult. Knls recognised this issue and connected electricity to Isiolo library branch that had none before. The relatively small number of tablets means that when they are taken to schools – where some classes are more than 40 pupils – students are encouraged to share.

The project training included child protection and child safety but there is an ever present challenge of guiding children on what content to access and protecting them from accessing inappropriate content. Tablets have features that restrict children from accessing other content while it is more difficult to restrict them on e-readers. One solution to this challenge could be working together with Worldreader to create a lock on books that are inappropriate for children to read.

Another challenge is that the devices are expensive and libraries had to ensure their security by acquiring a safe to store them when not in use. Library staff do use them for outreach but sometimes feel insecure when travelling with the gadgets and have to use car transport which incurs a cost.

Adult users have felt excluded by the project as they would also like to learn how to use the tablets and e-readers, and also access books yet have not been prioritised. However, some libraries have recognised this desire from adult users and incorporated activities into their libraries. One example is promoting reading through Vitabu mtaani (books on the streets) which is an initiative engaging motorbike riders and taxi drivers. This initiative has worked well in Nakuru library and boda-boda (motorbike) riders and taxi drivers now bring their children to the library.

UK publishers

One of the main aims of the Children’s Books and E-Learning Pilot Project was to identify and seek to secure potential e-book resources, including local (African) publishers and UK publishers. Digital rights management proved to be our biggest hurdle. Two major challenges inhibit access to UK material: UK publishers are very nervous about providing access to their electronic content, given the impact of electronic access on the music and film industry and concerns about the book industry; when we first started discussions there was no model for the provision of children’s e-books to British libraries, let alone donations to African libraries.

Managing content also presents difficulties. We would need to develop a content management system to distribute the content to all the tablets we had purchased. Depending on the length of the rights negotiated we would need to remove the content at the end of the pilot if required. Alternatively we could purchase content – but it would need to be downloaded onto each of the ninety tablets, and usually paid for ninety times. It is possible that in the near future some of these problems may be resolved and publishers may be able to help us.
Conclusion

Ultimately, this project has demonstrated that UK donated books, locally purchased books and content provided on e-readers and tablets all have intrinsic value to libraries and the communities that use them.

Children enjoy using their refurbished spaces and are enthusiastic about their new resources, which has led to an increase in library attendance. Their new digital resources have helped them to learn through apps and games, as well as attracting a wider range of users into the library which has helped to build community.

Librarians now have greater understanding of children’s needs and are therefore more motivated, and has also helped increase child membership as children like their new libraries because it is a place of their own, and their librarians make them feel comfortable and supported. They like the new activities using books and digital devices and can see an improvement in their studies (especially literacy).

Branch libraries outreach programme helped to popularise the services offered by the Children’s Corners, while the books for Children’s Corners were useful to the libraries outreach programme. Librarian’s interaction with schools helped to offer opportunities for pupils to read for leisure and improve their performance. The additional books and education resources as well as advanced training helped to re-energise the 12 original libraries.

The tablets and e-readers have also helped the children improve their interpersonal skills through photography and film. Several factors affect visitor numbers, with challenges such as a lack of space and resources, meaning there is often not enough space to house all of the visitors.

The training has been well-received and has helped to increase confidence of librarians in working with children, promoting reading using games and activities and understanding children’s needs. This has led to increased job satisfaction and an increased understanding of the librarian’s role within their community. The librarians are now better equipped to work with a range of children including those with disabilities, as well as being able to use devices with children safely and effectively. Advanced training helped librarians to learn on ways of working with children with special needs hence improving their service of a vulnerable section of the community.

Involvement of knls staff in training their own peers helped to develop the confidence among librarians further. This was all made possible by working closely with other partners such as eLimu, BRCK education and Worldreader who helped to provide much needed content and technical support to librarians during implementation of the pilot.

Other challenges such as library charges, lack of family and community support, nomadic lifestyle of some communities, community conflicts and school timetabling also effects when and if children can visit. Some challenges are unique to the digital project sites, such as a lack of reliable internet, trouble downloading new content, child protection issue with the e-readers, and librarians feeling insecure when travelling around with tablets and e-readers outside of library.

Despite these challenges, the children’s books and e-learning project has still experienced major successes, and these learnings can now be used in the design of future projects seeking to improve public library services using print and digital resources.
Appendices

Appendix A: List of libraries included in the programme

As noted in the report, Thika Library set up a new Children’s Corner in 2015 through funding secured through our Open Doors Children’s Corners programme, launched in 2014, and benefited from Kio Kits. The libraries listed below are the 22 original project libraries.

Libraries setting up new Children’s Corners

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Libraries with established Children’s Corners receiving top-up books and resources

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### Libraries with established Children’s Corners

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