



## Cameroon Reading Promotion 2016: Outcomes and learning

In 2016, Book Aid International piloted a reading promotion programme. The charity provided funding, marketing materials, advice and support to allow libraries to hold reading promotion events on or around International Literacy Day 2016.

Each participating library prepared a report on their activities, learning and impacts as well as their hopes for future reading promotion activities.

The following report was prepared by the staff of Book Aid International partner in Cameroon, Education Information Services International (EISERVI).

### Description of participating library

EISERVI's Yaoundé library serves the community of Yaoundé as a multi-purpose education and information services provider. The library has adults' and children's sections with more than 3,000 children's' books and more than 5,000 books of different disciplines for adults. We also have classrooms and a computer laboratory to promote the teaching and learning of English language for French learners and pilot reactive and online education programmes in the community.

Yaoundé is the political headquarters of Cameroon. The community and cosmopolitan setting is made up of a diverse category of publics that fit perfectly in the geo-social context of the Cameroonian culture. The people live a subsidiary socio-economic life that engages a greater number of the people in the informal sector and a lesser percentage in the government.

There's a continuous effort by the government and other institutions to improve the level and standard of education but there's a boat rocking problem of poverty that makes it difficult for some parents to provide good educational materials or conditions for their children. Amongst others, it is common to find most children not attending school and even for those that attend, there is a high percentage of drop outs especially among girls. Materials especially curriculum books used in the classroom are scarce and it is common to find a class of 150 children with only five curriculum books – that is 10 children crowding around a text book in class.

While some of the children succeed to get through school, a vast majority of the youth population that is unemployed, find refuge in informal activities such as petty trading, mechanics, hawking and handicrafts.

## The reading promotion event



The reading promotion event held in Yaounde

The event which started at exactly 9:30 am began with a welcome address to the Divisional Delegate of Basic Education, the Inspectors of Basic Education for Yaoundé VI and the Representative for Secondary education. The pupils, students, staff and all in attendance gracefully sang the national anthem and warmed up with games and plays to set the ball rolling for the events of the day. As the guest speaker for the day, the Divisional Delegate for Basic Education gave an elaborate speech on the objective and purpose of the event.



The Director of EISERVI makes a speech at the event

This was closely followed by the speeches of the Representative of Secondary Education and the Director of EISERVI who presented the key message of the event and implored all the people to join in the campaign for literacy in Cameroon. During the tour around the EISERVI library and its premises, the children and adults rippled with joy and excitement at the sight of a world of books in the beautiful well-arranged shelves.



Some participants received prizes



All who attended the event received books

At 10:30am, competition began and the children and adults from the primary and secondary schools and orphanages, participated with great enthusiasm and zeal for success. They took part in a spelling bee, a read aloud and a read and tell a story. There was also a debate and songs and poems to celebrate the event. At the close, the best participants and schools were given prizes and all who came received book gifts, pencils, balloons and a heavy reception to feast for the success of the day. Testimonies from some of the participants reveal that the event was worthwhile and the messages were firm and timely for an education revolution in the country as literacy is key for any economic growth and meaningful development. International Literacy Day 2016 in Cameroon was nothing but the best. One could see this from the smiles, merry making and exchanges the children and teachers shared amongst themselves.

## Media

Media in attendance included: Vision 4 Radio and TV stations, BBC Radio, The Post, The Sun, The Star, The Guardian Post and the Voice newspapers.

## Feedback

The dignitaries and children were quite warm and excited to see such a masterpiece and collection that reflected the totality of educational wealth for all levels and age groups brought together in a well-structured and organized set up. They mused at some books and the general view revealed satisfaction and an eager expectation to return to the library after the event.

The Guest of Honour was Mr .Ngelle Ayong Paul, the Divisional Delegate of Basic Education and Mrs Ebot representing the Divisional Delegate of Secondary Education.

Amongst others, the delegate's message accompanied the theme of the day and kept focus and orientation of the event as the people took it straight to heart and joined in the celebration.

Some people gained awareness of the importance of reading from the key messages presented by the Director.

Others were quite satisfied and lauded this initiative of Book Aid International in partnership with EISERVI.

## What has changed?

Amongst the staff there's been no significant change except for the fact that it has created anticipation for better event planning and risk management on subsequent occasions.

Amongst the local children there's a general spirit of excitement to visit the library even after the event. This is possibly a direct effect of the celebration. Moreover, the celebration has created an indented need for the propagation of the key messages of literacy in Cameroon given that many more people have received information about the event in Cameroon.

### **For whom has the change occurred?**

The most immediate change on the ground is the buzzing life and light that this event has brought to the children of the community. A good example is for the Dan and Sarah orphanage the children are confined to themselves. This celebration gave them an opportunity to celebrate with other children and also get more books for their small library at the orphanage. The joy in the children's faces was enough to tell the story of the change the International Literacy Day 2016 brought to their lives.

### **Has the change been significant?**

It is actually significant given that some of these children suffer from inadequacies in books and educational materials necessary for their education at homes and schools. The event however gave them access to some good educational materials for free, thanks to the support of Book Aid International. Some of the children were having a new book they can call their own for the first time. It is phenomenal!

### **What has led to the change?**

The change here is directly related to Book Aid International's initiative to celebrate International Literacy Day in Cameroon and the availability of partners to support the event. This makes all the difference. Although this day has been celebrated in Cameroon in other years, the twist this year was different, from the attendance to the gifts: all were classic and added value.

### **How would you seek to improve this intervention?**

We would take the next session to a local community in a typical village setting to spread our reach and effect of literacy in Cameroon. Statistics reveal that the rates of illiteracy are higher in the rural areas and we see this as a perfect opportunity to celebrate and develop the levels of education in the grass root communities. We would also ensure libraries in the communities and councils celebrate this day no matter the dimension or level they observe it, but something should be done.

### **Find out more**

To learn more about Book Aid International's work, visit [www.bookaid.org](http://www.bookaid.org)

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