Learnings from phase one of Book Aid International’s *Inspiring Readers* programme in Kenya
Executive Summary

School libraries form an integral part of the school learning environment yet most primary schools in Africa do not have functional libraries. Book Aid International's Inspiring Readers programme seeks to address the need for books in under resourced schools in Africa by establishing Book Box Libraries in schools. This paper presents key lessons learnt from implementing the programme in Kenya.

Since the Millennium Development Goals were set, Kenya has made great strides. In 2003 the government rolled out a Free Primary Education policy, which provides eight years of primary education. Since then, primary school enrolment has increased to 84%\(^1\). However schools struggle to provide adequate resources and books are often in short supply.

*Inspiring Readers* Kenya is a partnership project between Book Aid International and Kenya National Library Service (knls). The programme runs from 2016 to 2018 and works with selected libraries with established *Children’s Corners*, enabling librarians to work with local schools to support children’s reading.

Five hub libraries within the knls network (Kisii, Lagam, Kabarnet, Nyeri and Rumuruti) are working with ten local primary schools each to help teachers establish and run school libraries and promote reading among pupils. Twenty-five schools took part in the first phase in 2016/2017 and 25 schools will take part in the second phase in 2017/2018.

Key findings from the project show that all 25 phase one project schools now have well organised and accessible libraries managed by enthusiastic teachers who have been trained and supported by confident librarians. Head teachers also took part in the training and have created regular reading times in their schools’ timetables. Teachers report increased reading, improved confidence, improved discipline and better academic performance among pupils. The relationship between the hub librarians and teachers has been enhanced and the libraries have become more visible in their communities, giving librarians the confidence to advocate for library services.

Some challenges reported include the need for more locally purchased books, especially in Kiswahili; heavy course workload; other school programmes disrupting scheduled reading times and library lessons; inadequate library space for children to access books and to read. Insecurity is some parts of the country also hindered follow up visits to schools. Despite these challenges the overwhelming message from the schools and libraries taking part is that the *Inspiring Readers* programme is changing attitudes and teaching practices and helping schools and local communities to recognise the value of literacy and reading.

**Project description and design**

The first phase of *Inspiring Readers* Kenya ran from April 2016 to October 2017 and worked with five knls libraries and 25 primary schools. Ten hub librarians, 25 head teachers and 50 teachers were trained in school library development and reading promotion. Teachers then passed their skills to their colleagues. Each school received approximately 1,150 UK donated new books and 200 locally published new books, a cupboard to store the books in and two plastic storage boxes to transport them around the school. The project reached 14,920 pupils and 456 teachers. The overall goal of the project was to establish book-rich school libraries staffed by confident, capable and supportive teachers, attended by children who enjoy regular reading and supported by regular outreach from local librarians.

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\(^1\) World Bank, 2012 net primary school enrolment statistics
Key learning points

*Inspiring Readers* has contributed to teachers’ understanding of the role of well-organised school libraries in promoting reading, librarians have enhanced their school outreach service and communities now have a better understanding of the importance of literacy and reading. This section describes some key learning from the project.

**Lesson 1: Access to books in schools encourages schools to create scheduled reading times for pupils.**

The newly available books encouraged teachers and head teachers to create time in the school’s timetable for leisure reading. Scheduled reading times, library lessons and book borrowing systems were put in place and head teachers came up with innovative ways of ensuring that all pupils read. For instance, AIC Kabartonjo Primary School introduced a daily 40-minute reading time for the whole school after lunch. Pupils borrow books and read in the compound under the trees and in the playing field.

All 25 schools established a library lesson for their classes. Each class has a reading lesson of 35 minutes per week. Some schools have two lessons per class, one for English and one for Kiswahili. The new books encouraged the teachers to implement the lesson. “I used to struggle to get story books and was looking for newspapers. Nowadays there are resources and I am very happy that I don’t have to struggle with the library lesson.”

– Tabitha Mwenda, Teacher, OMC Primary School, Rumuruti.

Schools now have reasonable numbers of story books and the opportunity to receive more through institutional borrowing from their respective knls library hubs. Pupils can borrow books to read over break time, prep time, at home and in the school compound. Before the project began pupils did not have access to supplementary reading materials. Now, pupils are reading for pleasure and not just for curriculum work, books are regularly used and some are already worn out. Pupils are requesting more books. Collins Wakaba, the School Pupil President of Temple Road Primary School in Nyeri said that he has read all the books in the cupboard and asked for more “When grazing cows over the weekend, I sit under a tree and I start reading. I take a book on Saturday when I go grazing.”

– James Ekwam, Class 8, OMC Primary School, Rumuruti.

**Lesson 2: Training changes attitude of teachers and librarians**

The programme contains two training sessions; one for librarians and the other for teachers and head teachers. Training is key to developing vibrant school libraries, establishing a reading culture among pupils and developing an effective public library outreach service. The training has impacted positively on the attitudes of both teachers and librarians. Librarians are now confident in training teachers and implementing the project and have recognised their
valuable role in promoting reading in schools.

Teachers’ attitudes towards the value of a school library have been transformed. They now have a clear understanding of the role of supplementary reading, of the importance of well organised school libraries in education and learning and have been trained to promote reading among pupils.

Below are comments from a librarian and a teacher on how the training impacted them.

“The training gave me an opportunity to be more hands on. I now understand the link between public libraries and schools. It has improved my interaction with pupils and teachers. Pupils recognise us even in town.” – Sarah Ogembo, Librarian, Kisii library.

“Now I am fond of the library. Before, I never wanted to see the hub librarians. Seeing them come to the school used to make me feel angry and irritated. For me this was additional work. All this has changed.” – Agnes Thairu, Teacher, DEB Primary School, Rumuruti.

Lesson 3: Involvement of head teachers in the training is critical

Head teachers were included in the training to ensure that they have knowledge of library management, reading promotion, tracking project progress and resource mobilisation. This training has helped them to oversee and monitor the establishment of the school library and reading promotion activities. Their new knowledge has also enabled head teachers to encourage their teachers to run the libraries, undertake reading promotion activities in schools and to grow the initiative through local resource mobilisation.

“I used to see supplementary books as irrelevant and could not encourage pupils to read them. I thought it was an absolute waste of time. I saw the relevance of the books after the training when the children started interacting with them. I also used to run a library in my former school. I have just realised that I didn’t know what I was doing. I used to mix up everything and didn’t know the importance of accession number, author and publisher of a book.” Moses Keverenge, Head teacher, AIC Kabartonjo Primary School, Kabarnet.

“I never thought I could hammer a point in class while teaching a subject using the supplementary books. Our minds were so limited and focused on course books only. I learnt how helpful the books are as teaching aids. I am now encouraging all the teachers to use the books in class.”
Sarah Kaburugu, Head teacher OMC Primary School, Rumuruti.

“We are grateful to Book Aid International. The library is on course as building is complete. The shelves will be put in place soon. The outgoing Member of Parliament for Nyeri Constituency – Ms Murugi has promised to donate books to the schools. Donations have been received from Lion Club of Kenya. The school is also planning for a book harvest and we have sensitised our people including parents.”
Nicholas Gathemia, Head teacher, Nyamachaki Primary School, Nyeri.

Lesson 4: Reading for leisure greatly contributes to improved discipline in the school

All teachers reported improved discipline as a result of pupils reading during their free time. Pupils now manage their time well, noise has reduced in class even when the teachers are not present and schools are also reporting fewer cases of absenteeism. Both Kandutura and OMC Primary Schools are located in areas where the community is mainly nomadic pastoralists. In the past children could be absent for several days as they accompany their parents to seek pasture for their livestock. Teachers from Kandutura Primary School reported that pupils love the library lesson and whenever there is a library
Lesson none of them are absent. At OMC Primary School, parents are keen to ensure that their children go to school daily so that they benefit from the book donations.

“We have children who don’t go home for lunch and before the books were received they were disruptive in the school compound. Nowadays they are quiet and engage in reading over lunch hour. Discipline in the school has improved.”

– Jane Okero, Teacher, Getembe Primary School, Kisii.

“The books are easing my work as a disciplinarian and curriculum developer. Children are engaged and not idle. I can brag that the school is now coming up and improving because of the library.”

– Wilfred Miruka, Nyanchwa Adventist Primary School, Kisii.

Lesson 5: A vibrant school library raises the profile of the school in the community

The project has raised the profile and reputation of the schools in their communities. Parents are happy that their children can access a variety of story books within the school. Before the project these schools had book stores with old outdated course books and few story books. Now, more parents want to enroll their children in the project schools and teachers from other schools are asking how the project schools managed to get into the Inspiring Readers programme. In addition the smaller project schools are gaining recognition through the project as they share their books with the neighboring schools.

“At least we now have a voice among other schools since we are a small school in the area. As we lend them books they have to listen to us. More children are transferring to our school because of the books.”

Cyrus Nderitu, OMC Primary School, Rumuruti.

“The change is transformational because even parents are sending their children to borrow particular books. The illiterate parents are bringing their children to school because they have heard that there are books in the school. They are keen to see that all their children get access to the books. They feel there is something going on in the school that all children need to benefit from the new experience.”

Lucy Nderitu, OMC Primary School, Rumuruti.

Lesson 6: Follow up by hub librarians to schools is critical for the success of the project

Only two schools in the project have employed full time librarians. The other 23 school libraries are run by the teacher librarians who are also busy with teaching duties. Regular follow up by the hub librarians has helped them to stay on track and provided much needed technical support that boosted the confidence of the teachers.
“The librarian has been visiting us and guiding us on the arrangement, recording of books and reading activities. The children fondly refer to her as ‘mama vitabu’ (The mother of books).”

Lucy Nderitu, Teacher, OMC Primary School, Rumuruti.

Lesson 7: Schools grow their libraries when they see the benefit among pupils

Seeing the positive impact of books on pupils has led head teachers to increase their book stock through a variety of resource mobilisation efforts including fundraising, book harvesting and institutional borrowing from the hub library. The training on resource mobilisation included various ways to build up library stock and seek space and support to set up libraries. The head teacher of Nyamachaki Primary School has now renovated an old toilet block into a library and sourced 3,000 additional story books from parents and well-wishers.

“I didn’t know that children love reading story books and that parents can support the library. I have asked them to bring books from home and asked the Board of Management to support various aspects of the school library and the response has been very good.”

James Njoroge, head teacher, DEB Primary School, Rumuruti.

Lesson 8: The public libraries and librarians have become more visible in the community

Hub libraries were marketed widely through Inspiring Readers. Local communities are now showing more interest in the library and younger children now have confidence to approach librarians. Frequent visits to schools by librarians means that pupils and teachers now have a better understanding of the role of the public library in the community. Children in project schools have become great advocates of the public library. They talk about the libraries and bring their friends from other schools. Schools also organise pupil visits to the library during library lessons, after school or for a whole day library visit.

Some parents are supporting their children to register at the knls hub libraries after seeing the difference reading books is making for their children. Librarians are well known in the community because of the frequent visits to schools. Children from the project schools that are located near the hub libraries visit the libraries more regularly although those from project schools that are located far from the hub library have challenges visiting the library due to distance. However, even these children visit the hub library over the school holidays and on Saturdays.

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Book Aid International is a registered charity in England and Wales
Charity number 313869 and company number 880754
Lesson 9: Proper record keeping and storage facilities minimises loss of books and wear and tear.

Teachers are now able to record and report on the books in their school. The training on keeping library records has helped to minimize unexplained losses. “I am able to maintain an accession register and trace movement of the books in the lending register.”

Hillary Wachira, Teacher, Muringato Primary School, Nyeri.

Pupil librarians and class prefects transport books between classrooms using the plastic boxes. This saves time and is a safer way to carry many books. Books are well protected and will last longer.

Lesson 10: Vibrant book rich school libraries contribute to pupils’ intellectual, academic and moral growth.

As a result of the Inspiring Readers programme, teachers and communities now have an understanding of the link between supplementary reading and intellectual, academic and moral growth of children.

Schools are noticing a correlation between academic performance and well-organised, book-rich school libraries. In Muringato Primary School, the score in Kiswahili improved from an average of 48 % to 54 %, English from 48 % to 50% and Science from 45% to 52% in the first term exams (end of March, 2017). At Nyamachaki Primary School, performance in English has improved from an average of 38%
to 56%. Temple Road Primary in Nyeri received two trophies, in recitals and music in the recent regional competitions.

Teachers attribute their success to increased confidence of pupils through access to a variety of books in the school library. In addition, teachers reported that pupils who use the library have improved in both written and spoken English, are writing better and longer compositions and are able to comprehend what they read. At Visa Oshwal School in Kabarnet, the books have enabled teachers to identify pupils with reading difficulties and they have set aside a room to assist pupils with reading materials to help them improve. These children are making tremendous progress.

“I was able to convince pupils to give me votes to be the Head Boy because I can now communicate well in English. At the beginning, I was given two lower primary books by Teacher Jane and I saw that they were so good. And from then on I have never stopped reading.”

– Joseph Kagwa, class 7 School Head Boy, Getembe Primary School, Kisii.

The books are exposing pupils to different cultures and life lessons. Some of the project schools are located in marginalised regions, such as OMC Primary School where children are predominantly Turkana and Samburu. These children now feel cared for. Their morale has been boosted because they thought only the rich can afford to read books.

“Reading books opens people’s minds in many ways. Once the children’s minds are open it is easier to manage and guide them. Books are helping the children become better children for tomorrow. Children are able to accept each other’s strengths and weaknesses and able to tolerate each other more as they read and learn.” Sarah Kaburugu, head teacher, OMC Primary School, Rumuruti.
Emerging issues and recommendations for the future

i. The project has demonstrated the important role that a well-organised school library can play in a school and the community. Learners in the project schools are developing a reading culture and many will soon finish reading all the titles so libraries will need to be replenished. To keep pupils interested in reading, the head teachers need to undertake resource mobilisation in order to replenish and build the library collection as in the example of Nyamachaki Primary School referred to in this report. All the head teachers need to work towards ensuring that pupils maintain a reading habit through continuous development of their book stock. In addition, the schools can borrow books from the hub libraries on a regular basis.

ii. Vibrant school libraries can benefit the wider community. Most remote and marginalised regions in Kenya do not have public or community libraries. Primary schools are spread all over the country and are closer to the people. This project has shown that schools can open up their libraries to the wider community. A good example is Murkutwo Primary School where adult learners and their teachers use the school library for learning purposes. At other schools such as Muringato Primary School, parents are allowed to borrow books from the school library.

“I asked a child for a book she had borrowed and she told me her father was still reading it.” Lucy Kaburu, Muringato Primary School, Nyeri.

Opening up school libraries to the local community can help to promote a reading culture in the school community and the wider community. This would require involving the community in running the library.

iii. The teacher training component in the project yields broader benefits to teachers. A teacher in the project was promoted after presenting the certificate received in the teacher training workshop. “I presented the certificate we were given in the library in an interview at Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and I was asked questions in the area of the library matters. I managed to respond to all questions and was promoted from job group K to L. I can therefore say that as an individual I have gained from the training economically because my pay has improved due to the promotion”. Kilonzo Gichana, teacher, KARI DEB Primary School, Kisii.

iv. Involvement of the Ministry of Education (MoE) is crucial in acceptance of the project. The Nyeri Central Sub County Director of Education, Ms. Mary Kamuruia requested to be involved. She asked both Book Aid International and knls to share the project reports and to involve her office in monitoring visits. The Sub County Curriculum Support Officer in Chesongoch participated in the two day training workshop and was keen to understand the project. Officials from the MoE e.g. Curriculum Support Officers could also be included in the training so that they can monitor use of the books as they conduct official visits to schools. This would provide an avenue for further collaborations between knls and the MoE.

v. Most of the project schools lack proper buildings therefore the priority is the construction of classrooms and not school libraries. However, head teachers are now including the school library in their plans to expand amenities in the schools. Before the Inspiring Readers programme, the participating schools had not included libraries in their plans.

The school library should be treated like any other important required building in the school and should appear in the school building plans. Further to the infrastructure the school management
can also employ a full time librarian, which will increase access to the books. Teacher librarians are often busy with other teaching duties and may not be available to serve children in the library throughout the day thus limiting access.

vi. The schools have implemented the programme in different and unique ways according to their individual circumstances. Towards the end of the programme, there will be a need for a workshop bringing all the schools together to look at lessons learned and for teachers to share their experiences and learn from each other.

vii. Some marginalised communities in Kenya face challenges with insecurity arising from cattle rustling. This was experienced in project schools in Lagam in the Rift Valley. The hub librarians were unable to visit the project schools frequently because of restricted movements in the area. However the schools are in dire need of the books and the librarians will need to work closely with the security forces in order to visit the schools more frequently when it is safe to do so.
Conclusion

Reading promotion in schools depends on books being readily available and accessible. A knowledge among school staff of establishing libraries and promoting reading is also required. Teachers and head teachers need to complement this with a conducive environment in school, including opportunities for pupils to read. Books play a key role in supporting literacy, education and study. Through its Free Primary Education Programme (FPE), the Government of Kenya has provided course books for the schools. The schools therefore have course books but a very limited number of supplementary books and readers. The Inspiring Readers programme has shown that giving pupils the opportunity to read for pleasure by supplying supplementary books helps to promote a culture of reading among pupils and discipline in the schools.

The schools which participated in phase one have greatly benefitted but there are many more schools without books or libraries. There is much more to be done to see many more schools, pupils and teachers benefit from having access to brand new books and the resources and expertise of a local library.