Inspiring Readers Sierra Leone: Phase one
In partnership with the
Sierra Leone Library Board
Final evaluation report, January 2019
1.0 Executive Summary

This evaluation assesses the extent to which the first tranche of the Inspiring Readers programme in Sierra Leone has met its aims and objectives. It examines the changes and outcomes occurring in primary schools and public libraries as a result of programme activities. It examines the successes and challenges of the programme and draws lessons for future programme planning.

Launched in April 2018, Inspiring Readers in Sierra Leone aimed to increase primary school pupils’ access to reading materials and to promote reading, with the goal of improving children’s confidence and learning. The programme targeted five Sierra Leone Library Board (SLLB) branches and 25 primary schools.

Each of the 25 schools received 1,150 new, high-quality English books and approximately 100 locally purchased books. Schools were provided with a lockable book cupboard to safely store the books in and two book boxes to transport the books around the school. Two librarians in each of five SLLB branch libraries across Sierra Leone were trained in library development and reading promotion by Book Aid International staff. The librarians then shared this knowledge amongst 50 teachers and 25 head teachers through a teacher training workshop in each branch. Teachers, head teachers and librarians then worked hand-in-hand to set up cupboard libraries in each of the schools and to integrate the use of books into school routines over the course of the year.

Findings at final evaluation showed that the programme was successful in achieving all planned objectives, as well as further positive outcomes. Core resources provided as part of the programme (the UK donated books, local purchase books, cupboards and boxes) provided a strong foundation for successful school libraries. Teacher training, head teacher buy-in and ongoing support from librarians then ensured effective management and use of books in schools.

Teachers learned new library management skills, became more confident in teaching reading and English and broadened their teaching methods more generally due to their ability to use books as teaching aids. Head teachers improved their library spaces within their schools and embedded the use of books within their schools systems. They promoted and shared knowledge gained in the programme training workshop with their school staff and held teachers accountable for proper use of the library. They were also able to engage the community in plans for the school libraries to garner additional support.

Children’s interaction with relevant, good quality books vastly increased during the programme, as teachers now had the resources, skills, knowledge and motivation needed to set up lending systems and library lessons and to enrich curriculum lessons using books. This increased interaction with books has led to improvements in children’s learning and reading habits. Children now read more regularly and enjoy reading more. Their reading confidence has improved as have their reading skills, wider literacy skills and cross-curricula learning.

Public librarians provided an invaluable source of encouragement and support for schools to get their libraries up and running. This additional layer of support and accountability was key to the success of the programme and was coordinated effectively by the programme manager at SLLB.

More widely, the programme worked to promote both schools and the public library service by raising their profile in the community and through media coverage. There was also evidence that the programme reached more schools; librarians are offering their outreach services to others and more schools had heard about the programme and had started to visit the Children’s Corners at the public library branches.
Few challenges arose throughout the implementation of this programme and those that were raised were mainly due to lack of additional funds to expand school libraries further. The programme had spurred schools into envisaging larger library rooms with furniture, more shelving, a full-time librarian and more time available in the curriculum for library use, but they are not in a position to achieve this as yet. However, in some cases where head teachers have already raised funds for refurbishment of classrooms and for the purchase of additional shelving.

Overall, this tranche of *Inspiring Readers* has shown that the model of linking schools and public libraries from an overarching national library service works to build strong and effective partnerships. This has clear benefits for schools and the library service, as well as those within them - librarians, teachers, head teachers and children and the communities surrounding them. At the centre of this is an improved culture of reading and therefore, an improved environment for children’s learning.

Pupils with their new books at FAWE Primary School, Makeni.
2.0 Background

Sierra Leone’s primary schools suffer from an extreme lack of resources. They often lack the number of classrooms needed to accommodate all pupils, so combine two classes in one overcrowded room. School budgets, as well as teachers’ salaries can be severely delayed and Head Teachers often have priorities for spending on basic necessities such as sanitation and building repairs. This means that teaching and learning resources are scarce.

Schools usually only have government-issued curriculum textbooks, which are often old, in short supply and in poor condition. Books are often stored in badly organised store rooms which are not easily accessible. There are a small number of levelled storybooks in some schools that are part of the curriculum and provided by the government. However, it is very rare to find any supplementary books for reading.

3.0 Programme description

The Inspiring Readers programme in Sierra Leone ran from April 2018 to January 2019. The programme targeted five Sierra Leone Library Board branches and 25 primary schools.

The programme aims to improve children’s access to books and enjoyment of reading in Sierra Leone through the distribution of books and the promotion of reading in primary schools. This affords primary school children the opportunity to grow an interest in and habit of reading through regular access to a well-stocked library cupboard containing child-friendly, age-appropriate materials. Teachers also have the opportunity to use a range of books to support reading in English and local languages, to use for leisure reading during library periods, lunchtime and for borrowing and to use as reference materials when teaching a range of subjects in the curriculum. Teachers and Head Teachers are trained before receiving the resources, so that they are able to effectively manage and use them.

Inspiring Readers aims to build on Book Aid International’s successful work already undertaken in the Children’s Corners, where spaces were set up for children in public libraries, providing a range of children’s library activities. It aims to enhance the school outreach capacity of these libraries. The public library where the Children’s Corners are based acted as a ‘hub’ to distribute books, procure a book cupboard and book boxes as well as train, support and monitor teachers in five primary schools in each of their areas.

4.0 Introduction

Book Aid International partnered with SLLB to deliver this programme. SLLB selected five of their library branches with established Children’s Corners to take part in the programme: Kissy Lowcost Library, Bo Regional Library, Segbweme Branch Library, Makeni Regional Library and Port Loko District Library. Each public library then selected five schools in their area to participate in the programme. These schools fit specified criteria, including being government-run and suffering from a shortage of books. Table 1 (below) shows details of the libraries and schools, along with the estimated number of pupil beneficiaries.
Table 1. Hub library and school details, including number of pupil beneficiaries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hub library</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>#Pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Makeni Regional Library</td>
<td>St Francis Primary</td>
<td>597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fawe Primary for Girls</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bombali District Council Primary</td>
<td>442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Church of God Primary</td>
<td>1,254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practising Primary</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo Regional Library</td>
<td>Anzarul Islamic Primary School</td>
<td>933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saint Pious Primary School</td>
<td>756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United Methodist Church Primary</td>
<td>655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sierra Leone Church Primary School</td>
<td>1,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Islamic Call Society Primary School</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Loko District Library</td>
<td>FAWE Girls Primary School</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R.C. Primary School</td>
<td>579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practising Primary School PLTC</td>
<td>515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Movement Of Faith Primary School</td>
<td>507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wesleyan Primary school (WCSL)</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segbweme Library</td>
<td>Methodist Primary School Segbwema</td>
<td>658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kailahun District Education Centre</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provincial Islamic Primary School</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St.Peters (R.C) Primary School</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mahaad Aali Islamic Primary School</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kissy Branch Lowcost library</td>
<td>Islahiyat Islamic Primary School</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quarry Community Primary School</td>
<td>674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sierra Leone Muslim Community</td>
<td>1,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Police Primary School Kissy</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St.Michael's Primary School</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL number of pupil beneficiaries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>14,748</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 29,305 high quality UK English language children’s books and 2,500 locally published books were donated to be divided between the 25 schools. 25 cupboards were procured to store the books in (one per school) and fifty plastic boxes (two per school) were procured for transporting the books around the school. A partner grant was provided for SLLB to purchase appropriate local books in consultation with the schools.

Nine hub librarians were trained in facilitation skills and techniques, as well as school library development and reading promotion. The hub librarians, with the support of the SLLB programme manager, trained 25 head teachers and 50 teachers on school library development and reading promotion. A partner grant was also provided to hold reading promotion events in each school. These were organised in partnership between the hub libraries and the schools.

Sally Victor, Programme Manager at Book Aid International and Yusif Kamara, from the Finance team at SLLB (and programme manager for Inspiring Readers Sierra Leone) conducted final evaluation visits for this programme from 21st to 29th January 2019.

All five hub libraries and 16 of the 25 participating schools were visited as part of the evaluation. Interviews were conducted with nine librarians, 33 teachers and 17 head teachers who had participated in the programme. Focus groups were carried out at each school with groups of eight children mainly between classes four and six and an equal mix of girls and boys. The number of children that participated in focus groups was 112 in total. Data collection records that had been filled out on an ongoing basis throughout the programme were collected from the teachers, head teachers and librarians. School libraries, the programme cupboards, boxes and books were also visited at the 16 schools.
5.0 Key objectives

Goal/key outcome: All primary school children enjoy increased access to reading and learning materials and receive increased support from their teachers, who are better able to promote reading. Children grow in their love of reading and their confidence in learning. Teachers and librarians collaborate to support children’s learning.

Objectives

The six objectives of the Inspiring Readers programme are:

1) To increase children’s interaction with new reading material in both local languages and English
2) To develop the confidence and participation of pupils in class through use of reading materials and development of a reading habit
3) To improve the reading levels of children through regular library usage
4) To equip teachers with enhanced skills, knowledge and confidence to support children in reading and learning
5) Head-teachers increase opportunities for children and teachers to use the books in the school
6) Librarians develop skills in running outreach services and supporting teachers’ professional development and promoting reading and access to learning.

This programme addresses the Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunity for all.

6.0 Key findings

6.1 Objective 1: To increase children’s interaction with reading materials in both local languages and English.

   i) Increased and relevant book stock

Children’s interaction with reading materials had greatly improved across all schools visited. Prior to the programme, schools had very few and often old textbooks, with few or no storybooks at all. During the programme 29,305 high quality UK English language children’s books and 2,500 locally published books were donated as part of the programme in total. School records showed that the correct number of books had been received, with minor variations in number per school. One school had a small number of books (approximately 20) stolen when thieves broke into the Head Teacher’s office.

The increased book stock, quality and accessibility of the books had led to children’s increased interaction with books.
Teachers in all schools reported that the books were of an appropriate level and content for pupils. The range of levels meant that all classes throughout the school could use the books. Some schools reported that the larger novels were too difficult for their pupils and had been used by teachers instead.

Pupils said that they liked the books and when asked about their favourite books there was a fairly equal split in terms of preference between local and UK books. 42 children named UK donated books as their favourite and 49 named locally purchased books.

"The books you have given to use has increased the stock we have from government. That has helped us to improve our work." Patricia A. Kandeh, Police Primary School, Kissy.

ii) Increased access through the use of book cupboards and boxes

Schools all had their books well organised in good quality wooden cupboards. This storage meant that children and teachers were more able to access books easily. Teachers and head teachers reported that the cupboards were well-suited for keeping the books secure and in good condition. The majority of cupboards were kept in the Head Teacher’s office for security reasons. Teachers and pupils, however, were given access to the books whenever they needed it.

Several schools noted that the cupboard was too small to fit all of the donated books in, so they had either acquired their own shelving or cupboards, or were keeping extra books in cardboard boxes or the two wooden boxes provided.

Teachers reported that they found the two wooden boxes useful for moving the books from the library to the classroom, as most did not have a library space that was big enough for children to come to. The boxes therefore ensured full use of the books.

iii) Introduction of library lessons

Children’s interaction with books had increased through the introduction of library lessons into the timetable. All schools had embedded library use into their weekly timetable. The majority of schools had timetabled each class to use the library books twice per week and several were using it more frequently. These timetabled slots were usually during language arts and literature lessons.

Mainly, teachers select books from the cupboard library and take them to the class to teach reading. In many cases...
they were using multiple copies of the same text to teach all children at the same time. Some split children into groups and allowed them to read different books.

Teachers found the books a valuable resource for use in reading lessons, as previously they had very few reading materials for children to practise reading with. The books were helping to engage children better and leading to more enjoyment of reading lessons.

“Even sometimes in classes when it’s time for reading they urge you. They say Mr Bangura it’s time for reading now. They are so happy. They have the urge to read for themselves.” Mohamed S. Njai, Teacher, Ansarul Islamic Primary School New London, Bo.

“When they have their library hour they are very happy – their faces!” Head Teacher, Nanah F. Mansaray, Fawe Primary School, Makeni.

iv) Increased use of books within curriculum lessons

Children’s interaction with books through curriculum lessons had also increased. Teachers from all schools were regularly using the donated books to enhance a range of curriculum subjects. The majority of teachers were able to name and show examples of books they had used in subject lessons. They found the non-fiction books particularly useful for this purpose and specific titles came up in many schools. Amongst others, ‘All about Mummies’ in History, ‘At the Dentist’ for teaching hygiene, ‘Handa’s Surprise’ for teaching Agriculture, ‘Topsy and Tim – Our Day’ for teaching maths and ‘Going into Space’ for teaching science came up several times.

These books either had illustrations or relevant information that demonstrated topics being taught. The use of books to enrich curriculum lessons was helping to embed, deepen and broaden children’s learning. Books are also helping teachers to resource their lessons well and develop their teaching methods.

“…there is a certain book here about fruits. When we talk about certain topics in home economics we can take these books and show them the fruit. We can break it down to their level so they know exactly what they are talking about.” Elizabeth Kumba Sesay, Teacher, Roman Catholic Primary School, Segbweme.

“The last time I went to class 4 I was teaching them about time – I used the clock. – ‘Topsy and Tim – Our Day’. When to wake up, when to come to school, when to eat breakfast before coming to school.” Bintu Kamara, Teacher, United Methodist Church Primary School, Bo.

“The programme has helped us to know how to use the materials in terms of reading. We even use those materials to teach other subjects; maths, science and so forth.” Elizabeth Kumba Sesay, Teacher, Roman Catholic primary school, Segbweme.

“These books are very very important actually, because some of them relate to our school curriculum. Most of the topics in these books have a relationship with our curriculum. Like ‘Going to Space’ we use in science. We relate these books to our own school curriculum.” Edward Abu Sesay, Teacher, Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone Primary School, Port Loko.
Elizabeth Kumba Sesay, a teacher at Roman Catholic Primary School in Segbweme shows us how she used ‘Handa’s Surprise’ to teach a Home Economics lesson.

"Especially that which had to do with using books that are not curriculum based – using different books to teach or help without proscribed books. That is how I’ve been able to convince those teachers to use those books. That is one thing I really really liked about the training. So that the children have a broad knowledge base and by deepening the understanding of the children.” Abu Bakar Fofanah, Librarian, Bo City Library.

v) Increased borrowing

Children in all schools now had the opportunity to borrow books to read at home. Lending systems had been set up and lending was being recorded clearly in lending registers. Lending took place mainly as and when children requested. The children would approach one of the teacher librarians when they wanted to take a book home. Usually this took place after school before the weekend and children were expected to return the book after the weekend or after approximately one week. Some schools reported that community members also came to borrow books.

Table 2 (below) shows the numbers of borrowers for each school where data was recorded. This varied between schools. Lending systems and the idea of borrowing books to take home were new concepts for teachers and children so even where borrowing numbers were low, significant progress had been made to set systems up. It was also noted that lending systems were set up some time after the training, most likely due to the time it took teachers to get books processed after receiving them.

Borrowing had motivated children to read more, to read for pleasure and to enjoy reading.
Table 2. Number of book borrowers per school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hub</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of borrowers</th>
<th>Month started borrowing</th>
<th>Average no. borrowers per month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Makeni Regional Library</td>
<td>St Francis Primary</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practising Primary</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo Regional Library</td>
<td>Ansarul Islamic Primary School</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United Methodist Church Primary School</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Loko District Library</td>
<td>R.C. Primary School</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segbweme Library</td>
<td>Movement Of Faith Primary School</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wesleyan Primary school (WCSL)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>November</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Methodist Primary School Segbwema</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kissy Lowcost Library</td>
<td>Kailahun District Education Centre (KLDEC)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St.Peters (R.C) Primary School Segbwema</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>November</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quarry Community Primary School</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“A reading register at Kailahun District Education Committee Primary School.

“Reading makes us feel happy. Sometimes when I read my book at home, when I borrow a book from the library my sister helps me know the words that I don’t know how to pronounce.” Fatmata (below), 11 yrs, Practising Primary School, Makeni.

“Children now love reading. They choose books on their own. They choose to come to the library on their own.” Segbweme librarian, Abdulai Mansaray.
“At first some could not read perfectly, but now since taking them home and reading with their parents, they have gained much from that.”

Head Teacher, Abmami Abu Bangura, Quarry Community School, Kissy.

“Some of them they come and order us to give them the books, because they want to read.”

Abu Koroma, Teacher, St Michael’s Primary, Kissy.

“Whenever I see them at home they call on me – ‘Auntie, the book you gave me was so nice’ and they congratulate me when they see me.”

Elizabeth Kumba Sesay, Roman Catholic Primary School, Segbweme.

6.2 Objective 2: To develop the confidence and participation of pupils in class through use of reading materials and development of a reading habit

i) Increased confidence shown in pupil survey results

Focus groups of eight children in each school (mixed gender and age) took part in an activity to gauge their level of confidence in different areas of reading and class participation. Results showed a clear increase in confidence across all areas surveyed. Figure 1 (below) shows the percentage of children who felt confident at baseline and final evaluation stages. The largest jump in confidence was in ‘taking books home’, an activity which was rarely taking place in schools until the programme was implemented.
ii) Increased enjoyment of reading and the development of a reading habit

Teachers in all schools reported that pupils’ enjoyment of reading had very much risen. This enjoyment had increased children’s motivation to read regularly, they had begun to develop regular reading habits and thereby built confidence when reading in class.

“They have the reading habit. They have that inspiration now. They have developed that reading habit for themselves.” Foday Braima, Teacher, Roman Catholic Primary School, Segbweme.

“The other teachers they are telling us children can enjoy reading now we have these books.” Salamatu V. Koroma, Teacher, St Michael’s Primary, Kissy.

“The book makes me feel happy because the chimpanzees, the monkeys, make me laugh. And it tells you to make up your own jokes. I like this book like ‘Dressed for the Job’ because they show us different kinds of clothes, like the ambulance people. They show us many different clothes for jobs, for school and this is why I love the book and it makes me happy and very comfortable with the books. Sometimes I go to the library and I take them and I sit and read them, like ‘Sid and His Haircut’. I like that book so much.”

Thomas (left), 12, Practising Primary School, Makeni.
“When you are very sad, then you go and take the book and read and you smile again and you feel like playing with your companions every day.” Thomas, 12, Practising Primary School, Makeni.

iii) Increased confidence to read aloud

Many teachers reported a change in children’s confidence to read aloud in class. They stated that children were previously shy, but through the regular use of the books they had built the confidence to read in front of others in class and even in school assembly. Some had gone further and represented the school in reading competitions and events.

“Some can read aloud now. Some that were shy can now read aloud. They all want to be part of the reading.” Elizabeth Songu, Head Teacher, Police Primary School, Kissy.

“Some of them, when they come they will tell you all what inside the book, how they enjoy the story, I can even ask them to come in front of the class and read.” Augusta Isatu Sesay, Teacher, St Francis School, Makeni.

“At first they did not read aloud. But now because of this library they read aloud. They are not ashamed of reading in public.” James K. Sesay, FAWE Primary School, Makeni.

iv) Books building confidence outside of the classroom

There were several stories of children who had engaged further with the books outside the classroom. This had helped them to build confidence in wider learning, speaking in front of others and in terms of communicating about what they read.

We were told of a boy dubbed ‘The Minister of Information’ who would take books home and then come to tell the whole school about what he’d read in assembly the next day.

“There is a boy who by himself goes out and reads information. Then he comes and tells us the information in assembly. Around the town and the school. We have a Minister of Information!” Abdul Francis Conteh, Head Teacher, St Francis Primary School, Makeni.

We were also told of a boy who had used the book Bird Spotter to make his own bird feeder in his garden at home and then asked his teachers to visit to watch the local birds come.

Children from St Francis primary school in Makeni, including Ali (third from right), the school’s ‘Minister of Information’.
“There’s a book called Bird Spotter that has encouraged them to find birds. They have put water and seeds in their back yard, because they have seen a little boy in the book doing that. It’s very interesting.” Mohamed M. Bangura, Teacher, Ansarul Islamic Primary School New London, Bo.

“A boy in Year 6 did that and invited us to come and see.” Mohamed S. Njai, Teacher, Ansarul Islamic Primary School New London, Bo.

Teachers at Ansural Islamic Primary School, Bo and the ‘Bird Spotter’ book that inspired their pupil.

6.3 Objective 3: To improve reading levels of children through regular library usage

i) Improved reading skills

All teachers interviewed felt that children’s reading skills had improved due to the programme and interaction with the programme books. They noted that children’s knowledge of English had improved, they knew more words and spellings, they could pronounce words more accurately, they could use punctuation when reading and their fluency and speed had improved.

Figure 2 below shows results from pupil progress tracking carried out by teachers during the programme. A clear increase in reading skills is shown between assessments made at the beginning and end of the programme cycle.
“The way they were reading before and the way they are reading now is quite different. They can pronounce the words now.” Abu Koroma, Teacher, St Michael’s Primary, Kissy.

“Before this time, to be honest, the children were poor in reading, we didn’t have a lot of reading materials. Since this programme has been in progress they can now read. They have that reading culture in them now.” Foday Braima, Teacher, Roman Catholic Primary School, Segbweme.

“Before this time the children were below in terms of reading, but they have improved, they can read. They come and tell us they want to come to the library and read. Before they didn’t care, they just moved around in the compound. Now they come here and sit down and read certain materials.” Foday Braima, Roman Catholic Primary School, Segbweme.
“The books we have here, some they will read now on their own without you teaching them because they have learned some words. They can take the book now and can read on their own without even the teacher.” Baindu Saffa, Teacher, United Methodist Church Primary School, Bo.

“Theyir levels have changed, because of the way they spell, the pronunciation of the words, using punctuation, commas, their reading has changed.” Hassanatu Kamara, Teacher, Movement of Faith Primary School, Port Loko.

“When I am grown up I will remember those books because they helped me a lot. Some English I don’t even know and when I read that book it enables me to know them.” Angella (left), 10, Practising Primary School, Makeni.

ii) Improved comprehension

Teachers reported that children had improved in their comprehension and understanding of what they were reading due to the use of the programme books. They spoke of how children were now able to better engage in discussion about texts, that they were now able to summarise and talk about what they had read and were more likely to participate when the teacher asked questions in reading lessons. Some teachers said that the pictures in the books were of particular help, because they were able to see and understand better what they were reading.

“Now the teachers are teaching them to be bold reading and answering questions. Their participation level has changed completely. Before nobody could answer if you asked them questions.” Aminata Bangura, Librarian, Kissy.

iii) Improvements in wider literacy skills

Teachers noted that improved reading skills had led to improvements in wider literacy skills, notably in speaking and writing. Many noted developments in spelling and some stated that sentence construction in writing lessons had improved.

Children at Quarry Community School engrossed in reading.
“Usually it’s when children are able to spell that they are able to read. Any time we have given a spelling test we have seen an improvement. I’ve seen a vast improvement in their spellings.” Dominic M. Sesay, Teacher, St Francis Primary School, Makeni.

iv) Improved reading skills leading to improved learning in the wider curriculum

Teachers noticed that improved reading skills had impacted on learning in other subjects. Due to children’s improvements in reading, they were able to read and interpret questions in other lessons and they were able to read notes from other lessons. Children were also now able to read more widely using library books to deepen their understanding of certain topics.

“Before this time, when we set out a question on the board, they couldn’t read, but because of this programme when you put a question on the board they can read it now.” Foday Braima, Teacher, Roman Catholic Primary School, Segbweme.

“Before this time they were not interested in books. They only read their notes and found it very difficult. But because of the library and the reading habit it is helping other subject areas.” Mohamed M. Bangura, Teacher, Ansarul Islamic Primary School New London, Bo.

“Every other subject requires reading and comprehension. We do give notes in class for other subjects. Since they have now developed the habit of reading it has impacted in other subjects. Even mathematics requires some reading skills. Especially in sciences and social studies. Even agriculture.” Dominic M. Sesay, Teacher, St Francis Primary School, Makeni.

6.4 Objective 4: To equip teachers with enhanced skills, knowledge and confidence to support children in reading and learning.

i) Improved library management skills

Library management skills from programme training had very clearly been put into practice by teachers, as well-organised library cupboards, lending systems and accessioning systems were in place in all schools visited. None of the teachers had previously received any training on library management, so this had been instrumental in ensuring accessibility and effective use of the books.

“As for the teachers, we have learned more through the workshop, through the library, through the inspiring readers. We learned how to be a librarian – it was my first time going to the library.” Nahimea Balri, Teacher, Quarry Community School.
ii) Increased confidence in teaching reading and English

Some teachers reported increased confidence in terms of teaching reading, particularly in English. Their own increased interaction with the books had helped them to improve and build confidence in English vocabulary and pronunciation, which was having a positive impact on their teaching. Teachers in one school also highlighted that the teacher guidelines in the phonics books had been helpful in guiding them to teach the sounds and words correctly.

“The type of books we have read have improved our vocabulary. We’ve developed new skills to teach our kids.”
Alex B. Kargbo, Teacher, Practising Primary School-Makeni.

“They changed [teaching methods] by using different methods and upgrading our own language. When we didn’t have those books, we didn’t know much about the words, but now the frequent reading helps us to know new words and vocabularies.”
Josephine A. Conteh, Teacher, Practising Primary School, Makeni.

In addition, several teachers said that it had been useful to learn ideas for reading activities in the Inspiring Readers training workshop. Methods normally used for teaching reading can be narrow, focussing on teacher led reading and repetition. The new activities had allowed teachers to expand their repertoire of activities and engage children with reading.

“Yes, all those reading activities that we have, before this time none of the teachers have any knowledge about that one. We trained them too and they can do it now. Before now we just read the materials from the ministries and we didn’t have any activities.”
Foday Braima, Teacher, Roman Catholic Primary School, Segbweme.

iii) Broadened teaching methods

Across all schools, teachers reported that the programme books had been invaluable as teaching aids. Teaching aids and resources are usually very scarce in these schools, so books from this programme had been used to support teaching in a range of subjects. The books had helped teachers to expand their usual teaching methods by providing concrete examples and pictures to support children’s learning.

“They make a great impact in our teaching methods. Normally we lack school materials, but the supply of these books have helped us to teach key areas of learning.”
Edward Abu Sesay, Teacher, Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone Primary School.
“We use these books in literature and drama and language arts, Science and Mathematics. The books, we use to teach these subjects. Whilst using these books it helps us greatly. With these books we can implement so many methods so that the children can understand.” Sallamatu M. Jah, Head Teacher, Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone Primary School.

iv) Increased personal reading

Overwhelming feedback from teachers and head teachers showed that teachers themselves were frequently using the books for personal use as well as teaching support. Teachers, as well as children, had previously had little access to books and most were not familiar with the public library. Therefore, they were enjoying the opportunity to read the programme books and in some cases sharing them with their families. The non-fiction books seemed particularly popular with teachers, as they felt that they were learning about new and interesting topics.

“Some of them even can help us. Some of the books are very new to us, then when you read it you get new ideas out of the books.” Augustine Jajua, Teacher, Kailahun District Education Committee Primary School, Segbwema.

“Not only children, but our teachers here come to the library to read books. I have learned a lot from this book about famous people like Nelson Mandela.” Titus Momoh Foday, Head Teacher, Kailahun District Education Committee Primary School, Segbwema.

“There are books that I read that has really helped me to learn about other things. Although it is for the children, I have read a lot of them. – ‘All about Mummies – it’s about Egyptian culture. I enjoyed this book a lot, I have learned a lot about it. It’s a very good book.” Baindu Saffa, Teacher, United Methodist Church Primary School, Bo.

6.5 Objective 5: Head-teachers increase opportunities for children and teachers to use the books in the school

i) Improved library spaces

All head teachers had supported teachers to set up the cupboard library, so that teachers and pupils were able to access the books. Most head teachers decided to set up the library within their office due to security reasons. However, a small number had gone further and used part of their school budget or raised funds from the community, to refurbish a room in the school to be used as a separate library. Some schools had also managed to acquire additional shelving to
display the books clearly. Many had plans to expand their library, but had insufficient funds to do so.

“Before this time there was no library here, but immediately after the training I decided to create the library. Even pupils from other schools want to come here because of the school’s library. Our pupils have been telling them about the library and Book Aid International.” Nafiesatu Massaquoi, Head Teacher, Ansarul Islamic Primary School New London, Bo.

ii) Introduction of the library timetable and teacher accountability

All head teachers had embedded use of the library within the curriculum timetable. They then also played an important role in monitoring teachers’ adherence to the timetable across the school. This was key in ensuring that all teachers were familiar with the books, were getting the best use out of them and were putting into practise the training they had received. Head Teachers were often very familiar with the books themselves and this helped them to promote their use across the school.

“No sooner we got the supplies, we arranged our timetable. We allotted every class the library. As a result we also introduced additional teaching. With that understanding, the library books are made use of.” Nafiesatu Massaquoi, Teacher, Ansarul Islamic Primary School New London, Bo.

“I’ve tried to encourage them to use these books. I searched through the books and the topics and tried to find the books that would help children.” Elizabeth Songu, Head Teacher, Police Primary School, Kissy.

iii) Shared knowledge across teaching staff

The vast majority of head teachers had seen the importance of sharing the knowledge that they and their two teachers had gained from the teacher training workshop. They had returned to school and shared the training amongst teaching staff in order to ensure everyone’s understanding of how the school library would work and how to use the books to support their lessons. This had created opportunities for children and teachers from across the whole school to benefit from the new library.
“Immediately after the training I called the teachers to sensitize them of what I learned on the training and all of them were happy about them. Then we tried to engage the pupils and tell them how to make use of the library. Then we organised competitions, debates, spellings.” Nafiesatu Massaquoi, Head Teacher, Ansarul Islamic Primary School New London, Bo.

iv) Community engagement with the library

The majority of head teachers had also recognised the importance of informing the community about the library and had disseminated information about the library in school/parent community meetings and organisations. This had enabled parents to understand how to support their children to borrow library books to take home. In some cases parents were coming to the school library to borrow books for themselves or for their children.

The library had also benefitted schools in terms of raising the profile and reputation of the school within the community. Some schools reported that children were asking to enrol in the school because it now had a school library.

“The school never had a library before and now we have a library, so that is one of the big successes we have achieved…Having a library is wonderful. Even the community and visitors when they come they see the library!” Elizabeth M. Framah, Head Teacher, St Michael’s Primary, Kissy.

6.6 Objective 6: Librarians develop skills in running outreach services and supporting teachers’ professional development and promoting reading and access to learning

i) Trained and supported schools and teachers

The librarians’ support of schools was instrumental to the success of the programme. They played a huge part in getting schools set up and running with the library and with ongoing technical support and monitoring. The commitment of the librarians meant that they went above and beyond the parameters of the programme design, making several additional visits to schools and giving additional support over the phone.
In addition to the learning the teachers had gained from the training workshop, they received continued technical support from librarians in terms of accessioning, sorting, classifying and displaying their books and in setting up the lending system. They were also often called on by teachers for guidance and demonstrations of reading activities.

Overall librarians put in a lot of time to monitor and encourage each school to ensure the effective use of the books and practical application of the training.

“Mrs Bangura, I don’t know if she was a teacher before. She really went down to the grain to make us understand.” Abmami Abu Bangura, Head Teacher, Quarry Community School, Kissy.

“The contact is great because sometimes when they have difficulties they have my phone number and they call me and I go there for a visit and give technical help.” Aminata Bangura, Librarian, Kissy Lowcost Library.

“Mrs Bangura, I don’t know if she was a teacher before. She really went down to the grain to make us understand.” Abmami Abu Bangura, Head Teacher, Quarry Community School, Kissy.

“The contact is great because sometimes when they have difficulties they have my phone number and they call me and I go there for a visit and give technical help.” Aminata Bangura, Librarian, Kissy Lowcost Library.

Left: Aminata and Hafsa, the librarians at Kissy library hub.

ii) Improved and new school/library partnerships

The greatest change that librarians reported since the programme was the strengthening of partnerships between the schools and the public library. They felt that they had developed strong and effective relationships with teachers and head teachers at schools, which did not already exist in most cases. Whereas before the programme librarians had struggled to set up meetings with head teachers, they were now regularly invited to school events and called upon for advice on the library and reading. This joined up working was benefitting pupils’ learning.

“The teachers have come to know that the library is part and parcel of the school system. The library is an extension of the school. In this part of the country, reading culture is a dying thing. This programme is helping and it means something for education. It has helped strengthen the relationship between the library and the school. The teachers have seen the library as a partner.” Abu Bakar Fofanah, Librarian, Bo City Library.

“It has created a relationship between the teachers and the librarians. There is a personal and cordial relationship between us. They know we are there for the benefit of reading. Also the parents, they know now.” Nateh Sessay, Children’s Librarian, Makeni Regional Library.

“The Inspiring Readers programme has also helped to build the relationship between the library and the schools. Compared to the previous time when we did not have the opportunity to move such programmes in the provinces, the schools now know the relevance of the library and they are asking Book Aid International and SLLB to extend the programme to other schools that have not benefitted in the first phase of the programme.” Yusif Kamara, Sierra Leone Library Board.
iii) Improved librarian knowledge and skills leading to extended outreach

Librarians reported great benefits from the Training of Trainers workshop they had participated in. The workshop was a valuable opportunity to refresh and expand their skills and knowledge in working with children and schools. The fact that the programme required the librarians to then train and support schools, meant that they increased in confidence from practical experience.

This had led to changes in library outreach activities, not only in terms of working with programme schools, but through sharing what they had learned with the rest of their library colleagues and with other schools outside of the programme.

Librarians were asked to fill out a self-evaluation tool rating their level of knowledge before and after programme training. Results showed a clear rise in knowledge across all modules that were covered in the training (below, Figure 3).

Figure 3: Results from teacher knowledge self-evaluation tool.
“It has increased my knowledge. As for me I never did library studies, I did community studies. I never did library training. The training has increased my knowledge about library activities. The training was very good. I do training here for the teachers and I also go to the schools to do training. All the training about reading activities that was shown, I have implemented them and I see that this works. I even came back here and trained my colleagues here. They trained together with the teachers here.” Abdulai Mansaray, Librarian, Segbweme Library.

“My training has increased my knowledge. I never did library training. The training was very good. I do training here for the teachers and I also go to the schools to do training. All the training about reading activities that was shown, I have implemented them and I see that this works. I even came back here and trained my colleagues here. They trained together with the teachers here.” Abu Bakar Fofanah, Librarian, Bo City Library.

“That training has changed a lot of things in me. The basic library management helps me a lot in how to handle kids and put the books in order. Most times we don’t have training like that. Especially handling books with kids and allocating the level of book to kids and trying to have passion for the kids. A lot of skills – this training has brought a lot of positive changes in us librarians. Moving to the schools is part of us now.” Nateh Sessay, Children’s Librarian, Makeni Regional Library.

Moving to the schools is part of us now.” Nateh Sessay, Children’s Librarian, Makeni Regional Library.

“After the training they called us to most of their C/PTA meetings. Whenever they had those meetings, we go and tell the parents and they always welcome the ideas. Some parents are really happy about the idea. I was selected as the Chair person for St Joseph’s, because I have been active in the programme. I’ve encouraged them, they now have a library. I’ve told the Head Teacher to apply, I will monitor that, write a letter and take it to Freetown.” Elizabeth Kamara, Librarian, Makeni City Library.

“In the area of staff capacity Book Aid International have done a lot. Even as programme manager, if I am able now to discharge my functions well informed, managing the IR programme, it is because of the trainings I have acquired from BAI. Some staff who also benefitted from the training reported to me that, because of the trainings, they have the confidence to stand in front of other colleagues to teach and also make use of the laptops and programme in the workshops.” Yusif Kamara, Inspiring Readers Programme Manager, Sierra Leone Library Board.

iv) Promotion of the public library service

The implementation of the programme worked to promote public library services amongst children, teachers and communities as well as external organisations. Many people who were not formerly aware of the public library were able to find out about and access their services through

Book Aid International is a registered charity in England and Wales
Charity number 313869 and company number 880754
the interaction of the librarians with schools. The reading promotion events also worked to publicise the library amongst the community and more widely, as the media came along and broadcast the events.

Several librarians also reported that other schools who were not part of the programme had heard about it, had started visiting the public library and were requesting that they also take part.

“Most of the teachers and the kids didn’t have pre knowledge about the library. At least now they do. Some teachers even came to take books from the library after the training. They found out that the library has all these facilities. It was the first time for them to see the Children’s Corner which was amazing for them. When they see how attractive the Children’s Corner is, they want to bring their child here.” Nateh Sessay, Children’s Librarian, Makeni Regional Library.

“It has also changed their mind-set about reading. Some thought the library was just for older people and university students. It is only now that they know even the kindergarten can use the library. The media people are also now interested in promoting this library. That came about because of this programme because they were here for the opening. Now they know the library and Children’s Corner is here. They saw it on TV.”

“I’ve contacted an organisation who have promised some furniture and painting. They came here and saw what Book Aid International did here so that they can do it over there in my library.” Elizabeth Kamara, Librarian, Makeni City Library.

### 7.0 Challenges

Overall there were few challenges with this programme. However, the below points were raised by teachers and librarians in their feedback at final evaluation.

- Most schools did not have a good space to create a full library where children could sit and read. Therefore, the book cupboard was often situated in the Head Teacher’s office and books were used within classrooms. The teachers wanted to set up a more appropriate library room with desks and chairs, but did not have the funds to do so.
- The cupboards provided were a little too small to house all of the donated and purchased books. Some schools had managed to provide their own bookshelves to keep the extra books, but some were using cardboard boxes or the two boxes that had been provided as part of the programme to move the books to classrooms.
- Children found some words and names in the UK donated books difficult to pronounce and understand. Some schools requested English dictionaries, so that they could look up unfamiliar vocabulary.
- Some teachers asked for multiple copies of books, so that they have enough for a whole class to read the same book together during reading lessons.
- Some schools were finding that children were not handling, taking care of and returning the books in good condition.
- Some teachers found the time allocated for reading within their timetable was too short, but they were restricted by government guidelines.
- Librarians had some difficulties where teachers thought that they should be paid to take part in the programme and should be paid to attend the reading promotion event.
- Librarians also had some struggles in terms of getting teachers to adhere to the timeline of the programme and to complete tasks in time for the librarians’ reporting responsibilities.
• Some public libraries reported that schools where children used to visit, now visited less because they had their own school library.
• Quite a lot of teachers had difficulties using the pupil progress tracker to record children’s progress in reading skills throughout the programme. We should therefore review the framework and simplify it where possible.

8.0 Lessons learnt

Librarian support and in-country programme management support is vital.
All hub libraries played a large part in the success of the school library, particularly with regards to helping teachers set up their school libraries. The consistent follow up visits and monitoring meant that books were used effectively. Without this support and with demands on teachers’ time, results would likely have been much slower or possibly would not have been achieved. The programme management and follow up with the librarians from SLLB headquarters was also vital in terms of coordinating this process.

The donated books can be used in a variety of contexts at school if teachers are given relevant training.
It was clear that the donated books were considered of great value as teaching resources and they were being regularly used by teachers both for reading lessons and a variety of subject lessons. The idea of using supplementary books across the curriculum is new for teachers, but if there is clear demonstration and practise during training, they will take it up making better use of the books in school.

Effective library management training transforms book stores into well-used libraries.
At baseline visits to schools, the majority of schools were keeping books in locked store rooms where only some teachers had easy access to them. Books were in poor condition and disorganised. After training, teachers were able to keep books in good condition and both children and teachers were able to access them easily. Skills in library management helps schools to move from a mentality of ‘book store’ to ‘library’ and allows much better access to books and increased reading.

Formalised timetable and follow up ensures use of books across the school.
All schools had formalised the use of books in reading lessons within their school timetables. This timetable was closely monitored by Head Teachers as part of their usual teacher and curriculum monitoring. The fact that the use of the books was embedded into normal school routines meant that teachers were compelled to use them regularly, leading to a positive impact on children across the school.

Training is far-reaching.
Although training for the programme was specified for twenty-five schools, its effects reached further afield. Librarians were able to use the resources and skills they had acquired in the TOT workshop with other schools and teachers were able to share what they’d learned with their colleagues.

Libraries and schools working in partnership can work to enhance reputation and publicise services.
The programme helped to bring about strong relationships between schools and public libraries. This relationship was mutually beneficial: schools built their reputation due to their new school libraries and public libraries were able to publicise their services amongst local communities. SLLB were also able to publicise their services through programme activities.
9.0 Conclusions

This evaluation has demonstrated that all six programme objectives have been met and that the *Inspiring Readers* programme is an effective intervention in increasing access to books and enhancing children’s motivation and confidence in reading in Sierra Leone.

Core resources provided as part of the programme (the UK donated books, local purchase books, cupboards and boxes) provided a strong foundation for successful school libraries. Teacher training, Head Teacher buy-in and ongoing support from librarians then ensured effective management and use of books in schools.

Children’s interaction with relevant, good quality books vastly increased during the programme, which led to improvements in children’s learning and reading habits. Children read more regularly and enjoyed reading more, thereby increasing in confidence and improving with reading skills, wider literacy skills and cross-curricula learning.

The public librarians underpinned the programme by providing an invaluable source of encouragement and support for schools to get their libraries up and running well. Librarians developed school outreach and training skills through the programme, which is also helping them to work with other schools in their area and to promote public library services.

Overall, this tranche of *Inspiring Readers* has shown that the model of linking schools and public libraries from an overarching national library service works to build strong and effective partnerships. This has clear benefits for schools and the library service, as well as those within them - librarians, teachers, head teachers and children and the communities surrounding them. At the centre of this is an improved culture of reading and therefore, an improved environment for children’s learning.

10.0 Recommendations

**Provide a small number of dictionaries in the book donation.**
There were some comments about difficult and unfamiliar words in the UK books, where even teachers had not come across the word before. It would help teachers if we could include at least one dictionary per school in the donation.

**Further advice on lending to be included in training.**
The rate of lending varied between schools and was fairly low in several schools. Most lending is taking place on an ad hoc basis when children requested books from the teachers. It may help schools to increase lending if more focus is placed on when and how to schedule lending during the training workshop. We should also include our newly designed resources on ‘taking care of books’ in the training when possible to help teachers mitigate against damaged books when lending them out.

**Include a session on different methods of organising reading lessons in training.**
The request to have multiple copies of one book for the entire class came up several times during evaluation. This is not practicable for this type of programme, where children need to have a variety of books to borrow and where we have limited stock. It may therefore benefit teachers to learn about different strategies for organising reading lessons without using multiple copies of books, e.g. group reading, paired reading, guided reading, silent reading, etc.

**More training on the use of stories in curriculum lessons.**
Teachers were mainly using the non-fiction books across curriculum subjects, although they had a smaller number of these in comparison to fiction books. There was no feedback that teachers
were reading stories to children. More training on the use of storybooks in school is needed. This could be deepened within the *Inspiring Readers* workshops and included in our training with schools more generally.

**Inform schools about the finances of the programme before/during the training.**

Some librarians experienced a lot of pressure from teachers to receive financial stipends through the programme. There were some misconceptions from the teachers that librarians were getting extra funds and should be disbursing them to teachers. A letter or more detailed explanation of the programme finances during training may be helpful to prevent this pressure. Librarians could also set this out when meeting Head Teachers before school selection and before Head Teachers agree to take part in the programme.

**Capitalise on the work already done.**

There is demand from more schools to take part in the programme, having seen what was achieved in this tranche. We should consider if there are ways to capitalise on the work already done in these hubs to extend our work with more schools.