

# **BookLinks**

Sharing information across libraries in Africa and beyond



# Welcome



Dear partner,

First and foremost, we want to begin this edition of BookLinks by thanking you for your on-going work in supporting reading and literacy in what has been and still are, unprecedented times. We look forward to a new year where, together, we can keep working for a world where everyone has the books they need to enrich and change their lives.

In this edition of BookLinks, we are pleased to bring you news and stories from our partners who have been working in creative and innovative ways to keep children engaged with reading and learning through the pandemic. We also

review how Covid-19 has affected library services, partner organisations and individuals all over the world, explain how our work at Book Aid International has adapted in response and celebrate over 867,000 books that we were able to send in 2020.

We are excited to work with you this year and for the many opportunities and challenges that 2021 has in store for us all. We hope you join us in our eagerness for a new year, new prospects and, of course, many new books.

Best regards,

Alison Tweed

Chief Executive

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BookLinks is our bi-annual publication for library practitioners. Through BookLinks we aim to share the good practice, insights, learnings and knowledge from our project work, partners and the wider library world.

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#### Cover images (front and back):

Student reader, New Juaben Senior High School Library, Ghana Photography ©: Nana Kofi Acquah

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#### **NEWS**:

Handwashing station in use at one of the schools involved in our *Inspiring Readers* project in Sierra Leone



Book Aid International's Programmes team creating videos to support in-country trainers

## Creating videos to be used in trainings

As our Programmes team have been unable to deliver workshops in person, we have had to think creatively to ensure our partners still receive the same level of support. As a result, the team created videos to be used by local trainers during workshops. The videos emphasise key points and give additional information to the participants. Feedback on the videos has been positive, with trainers stating that the videos have given the participants a deeper understanding of the content.

Working through local trainers using a blend of print and digital training materials has proved successful, allowing our project work to continue and ensuring that teachers and children are supported at this challenging time.

### Book Aid International's response to Covid-19

Like many organisations around the world, at Book Aid International we have adapted our work in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, continuing to support our partners in a variety of creative ways.

## Providing handwashing stations and soap to schools

As a result of the pandemic, we all understand the importance of washing our hands regularly to prevent the virus from spreading. Through our in-country partners we have been able to supply the schools involved in our projects with handwashing stations and large quantities of soap. Teachers can encourage learners to wash their hands regularly throughout the day and before and after using books.

#### Delivering trainings online

With travel restrictions in place in many countries, we have had to find new ways to support our project partners. Where we can deliver training workshops and offer support through online platforms we have done so, with successful online workshops for our *Reading is Basic* project in Ghana, *Reading for All* project in Uganda, and *Children's Corners* in Somaliland being carried out this year.

#### Creating a new project - Books to Go

The aim of our new *Books to Go* project is to increase schools' capacity to deliver education during closures and enable learners to continue reading and learning in school and at home. *Books to Go* will provide primary school learners with new opportunities to enjoy reading inside and outside of school. A large collection of English and local language, lower and upper primary fiction and non-fiction books will enable schools to introduce a weekly reading hour into the timetable and a book lending system will allow books to be borrowed and enjoyed at home throughout the year and during anticipated future lockdowns or school closures. Children's reading skills will improve and curriculum lessons will be enriched, extending learners understanding of the subjects they learn at school.



Students at Kalira Primary School in Malawi receiving books and handwashing station

#### Covid-19:

# How libraries are responding to the pandemic

The worldwide pandemic has turned many aspects of our daily lives upside down, requiring rapid and creative responses to constantly changing and challenging situations.

The response of libraries and librarians to the Covid-19 pandemic has been innovative and creative as services around the world adapt to the immediate needs of their communities.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has been keeping an excellent log of the many and varied ways in which libraries have responded to their local situations. The examples showcase the flexibility and ingenuity of librarians, with the needs of the reader at the heart of their ideas. (https://www.ifla.org/covid-19-and-libraries)

Many of our partners have also been exercising their own creativity and responding to community needs, either by re-purposing their spaces or getting books to readers who have been unable to access them during the pandemic.

#### Liberia

Our main partner in Liberia, Monrovia-based We Care Foundation, reported back in May 2020.

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Our work has changed drastically. We can no longer visit the libraries and have postponed the distribution of books to the schools.

Currently, we are working with organisations that are supplying books to children to read and study at home, supplying Covid-19 awareness flyers along with books and other school materials. Books are also being given to our staff to distribute (safely) in their communities.

Before the lockdown, we had established what we call 'Community Bookshelves' in three communities – small shelves built outside to hold books which people can take and read at home. We are still refilling these shelves every week to support the reading hobby of communities during lockdown.

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- Michael Weah, We Care Foundation

#### **Rwanda**

Early on in lockdown, Ineza Foundation based in Rwanda told us:

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The libraries are still closed, but as of today, our library in Shyorongi in the Northern Province is going to be used by local community for early childhood monitoring and support. Basically, mothers with newborn babies, and pregnant women will meet at the centre to receive food and to learn how to prepare complete meals for their babies. This is a great opportunity for Ineza Foundation to promote literacy by providing those new mums with books to borrow once a week, until the libraries are open again.

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- Elizabeth Johnson, Ineza Foundation

#### Kenya

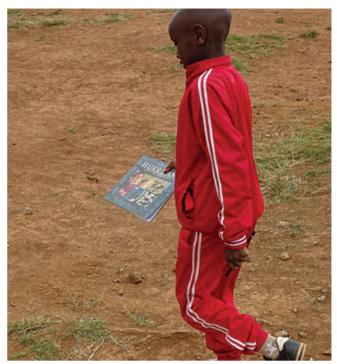
Jane, the headteacher of a remote primary school in Kenya, decided to keep her school library open, even when the school itself has closed down and students remained largely at home. She made sure her pupils could take books home on the day the school closed and encouraged children to come in small groups and exchange books on a regular basis.

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So the good thing is that we know there are a lot of children in homes who are reading those books. Not only the child who picked the books, but even their brothers and sisters from other schools who are at home. Sometimes you see them travelling and they each have a book in their pocket. When they go to graze the animals, they have a book. When they are eating at home, under the tree, they have a book. It is a good sign.

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Child taking a book home in Kenya

#### Top tips for creating a Covid-19 friendly school library

It is important to follow all basic hygiene measures, as provided by the World Health Organization (WHO).

- Ensure you have age-appropriate handwashing stations with soap and water so that borrowers can clean their hands when they borrow books. Encourage frequent and thorough handwashing (at least 20 seconds)
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water (both before and after contact with materials)
- Place hand sanitisers at the school library entrance and other strategic places in the school where possible
- Clean and disinfect the school library or room where books are stored at least once a day, particularly surfaces that are touched by many people (door and window handles, tables, chairs, teaching and learning aids etc.)
- Increase airflow and ventilation where climate allows (open windows, use air conditioning where available, etc.)
- Ensure rubbish is removed daily and disposed of safely
- Post signs encouraging good hand and respiratory hygiene practices
- Social distancing: keep a safe distance while issuing out books to reduce the risks of the virus
  passing from one person to another allow at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself
  and others
- Ensure that you write simple guidelines to be followed by borrowers and display them in the space where you will be distributing your books from. You can do this on a flip chart.
- Take the learners through these guidelines to help them follow them correctly and promote safety of others in school and at home
- Dedicate a place to keep all returned books and bags in a container/plastic box for a wait period (quarantine) of 72 hours before handling the books.

NB: The guidelines are updated frequently, therefore we request you to keep up to date on the latest information from trusted sources, such as WHO or your local and national health authorities. https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public

# National Library of Uganda's experience in the Covid-19 era

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented unique challenges affecting provision of library services around the world.

Libraries are faced with difficult decisions on which services to offer and whether to allow minimal access or full closure.

Our partner, National Library of Uganda (NLU) shared with us their experience on how Covid-19 has affected their library service.

The Ugandan Government announced a nationwide lockdown and curfew to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in March, 2020. The National Library of Uganda and the public/community libraries were closed during the entire lockdown period between March and June, 2020. The Government eased restrictions leading to partial lockdown in June and opening up of most facilities. The National Library of Uganda in Kampala reopened on 8th June, 2020.



Home reading activities, Nyarushanje Public Library

#### Effects of Covid-19 on library programmes and services

The National Library of Uganda operating hours has changed to 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. due to curfew restrictions. The number of library users and library staff is restricted and book borrowing out of the library prohibited.

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Due to social distancing, we had to reduce the number of users by two thirds. Library attendance in the National Library of Uganda and public libraries across the country has reduced. Parents are not allowing their children to visit the public libraries due to fear of Covid-19. Book processing and distribution has also slowed down because only half of the staff are allowed in the office at a given time.

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Raymond Amanyabyoona, National Library of Uganda

All school-related activities and programmes stopped with the Book Aid International *Inspiring* 

Readers project stalled for 5 months between March and August due to lockdown. The project involves five hub libraries and 25 primary schools. Each hub library works with five schools and has the responsibility of training teachers on library management and reading promotion. Before lockdown, teacher training workshops were conducted in three hub libraries. The remaining two hub libraries, Nyarushanje in Rukungiri and Paidha in West Nile conducted the teacher training workshop in September after easing of lockdown and reopening of libraries. Further delays were caused by the fact that staff have to attain clearance and acceptance from the Covid Management Taskforce and the local governments before engaging with the community.

The pandemic will greatly affect the strides made on promoting reading in the country through the national and public libraries.

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Children have been out of school for long and are now losing interest in reading. This is a setback on the reading culture we have been endeavouring to promote over the years. Once schools open, teachers will have a lot of content to cover within a short period so they will be reluctant to implement library lessons for leisure reading. In addition, children will have less time to read for leisure at home due to heavy school work.

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Stella Nekuusa, Librarian, National Library of Uganda.

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Most public libraries have limited space, therefore teachers will not be able to bring full classes for library lessons in the public libraries due to social distancing requirements. Children have learnt to spend their time doing odd jobs to earn money during school closure. They may prefer this to reading for pleasure after schools reopen.

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Raymond Amanyabyoona, National Library of Uganda.

Librarians need to creatively think of different ways of providing library services and sharpen their ICT skills. Library content will have to be digitised to meet the rising demand for digital information.

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In order to fulfil our mandate to train library staff in public libraries we will need to explore how to train virtually. We also need to produce storytelling videos for children to be aired on television stations so that we can reach them at home.

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 $Raymond\ Amanyabyoona,\ National\ Library\ of\ Uganda.$ 



Home reading activities, Nyarushanje Public Library



Home reading activities, Nyarushanje Public Library

### Librarians have come up with different ways of serving the public which include:

**Home/community reading**: Nyarushanje Public Library and Kawempe Youth Center are carrying out home reading activities where they take books to children at home. The National Library of Uganda is providing books for children to read from their homes and collaborating with other stakeholders to organise community reading.

**Radio programmes**: Arua Public Library is providing a radio for children to listen to radio lessons organised by the Ministry of Education and Sports.

**Online services**: The National Library of Uganda is processing ISBN numbers for publishers online. They are also providing guidelines online on how to establish new public libraries.

#### Safety protocols put in place in the National Library of Uganda

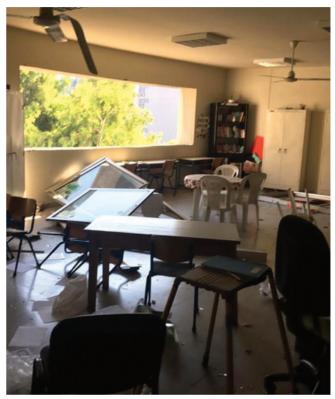
Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) provided by the Government have been put in place. These include handwashing stations with soap and water, temperature screening at the library entrance, hand sanitisers at strategic places in the library, social distancing and wearing of masks.

# Books provided amidst the pandemic

Despite the challenges we faced following the pandemic and the closure of our warehouse for two months, our Operations and Book Provision teams have been able to continue selecting and packing books for our partners in Africa, the Middle East and southern Europe to assist the efforts of partners facing not only the Covid-19 pandemic, but other unprecedented challenges too.

One such partner is Médecins Sans Frontières in South Sudan. At the end of 2013 South Sudan was plunged into a civil war that forced millions of people to flee their homes. These people are left without access to the most basic of necessities such as food or healthcare. Médecins Sans Frontières works in hospitals and clinics that support these internally displaced people, and are responding to health emergencies, including efforts to combat the spread of Covid-19 in these isolated communities.

On the 4th August 2020, Beirut, like many other cities around the world, was experiencing the effects of the pandemic when a large part of the city was destroyed by a chemical blast in the port. At least 204 people died, 6,500 injured, an estimated 300,000 people left homeless and the city suffering damages of about US\$15 billion. Local NGOs were able to mobilise very quickly to re-build some of the damaged infrastructures despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. In response to this, Book Aid International joined efforts with the Assabil Association who operate four community libraries in Beirut, and lost approximately 40% of their book collection in the explosion. Book Aid International has pledged to help replace them, providing over 5,000 books for both adults and children. In addition, Book Aid International also partnered with the Lebanese Board on Books for Young People (LBBY), who are mobilising support and funding for schools damaged in the explosion. They have already selected five schools, and a further 5,000 books are on their way to support the rebuilding of these school libraries.



Beirut classroom damaged by the chemical blast on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2020 Photo credit: Shareen Kreideih, Lebanese Board of Books for Young People

Finally, in recent years Greece has been the destination for thousands of people fleeing from conflict in the Middle East. Many of these refugees are now living in terrible conditions, have very little support and often face discrimination from local communities and government policies. These communities are particularly vulnerable to the Covid-19 virus due to the lack of access to healthcare and poor sanitary conditions. Fortunately, local NGOs are providing safe spaces, support, advice, basic schooling and creative activities. One such NGO is the Amina Women Day Centre in Athens. Their work includes creating reading spaces in their centre so that women refugees, most of whom are homeless and vulnerable to sexual exploitation and gender-based violence, have access to a safe environment and can receive social and moral support.

# A place to read during lockdown

### Books provided by Book Aid International helped to support vulnerable students in Kenya during lockdown

The Dandora slum in Nairobi, Kenya, sits on the edge of one of the world's largest landfill sites. It is home to some 141,000 people who, like the rest of Kenya, had to largely stay at home due to lockdown measures imposed because of Covid-19.

For the children and young people living in Dandora, there is often little space and few resources or books at home for them; therefore, continuing to learn whilst their schools were closed was a challenge.

Local NGO Dandora Dumpsite Rehabilitation Group (DADREG), which operates a centre in the middle of Dandora, opened its doors during lockdown to provide children with a safe place to read and learn using books provided by Book Aid International.

DADREG's Director, George Onyango, and Catherine, a student who regularly uses the centre, tell us more:

#### George

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The closure of schools and colleges has come with challenges for young girls and boys, especially those living in slums. Their homes are often not conducive for studying and they are looking for spaces to do their studies and be taught.

Also, idleness is leading to early pregnancies for girls and for boys, joining gangs. Some research has shown that since the pandemic, in Nairobi alone, over 12,000 schoolgirls have become pregnant and this worries us a lot.

This is the reason why we have opened up our centre – to allow young girls to access reading materials and do their studies. DADREG is providing a refuge to the girls and young boys. We are of course practising social distancing.

What we are doing is that those young men and women that DADREG has supported and continue to support in colleges and universities come to the centre to teach the children. The young men and women are acting as mentors to the primary and secondary school students and it is really helping them.

#### **Catherine**

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Since schools were closed on 16th March, I have had a lot of free time to catch up on where I was left behind. Though I have not had ample time to study at home

But by coming to DADREG to study, I have been able to carefully manage my work schedule. I am able to conduct personal studies here as well as useful group discussions. Here I am also able to attend some online lessons which is not really possible at home

Being able to access books and read while my school is closed has been really helpful. This will help me to improve my grades because I am able to cover a lot in my study areas. Reading and studying at DADREG will surely be fruitful when I get back to school.

I've been reading a storybook called *Once Upon* a *Twist*. It is a great way to relax my mind after a long day of endless studying. The book has also given me the challenge to improve my creativity. It is written in a fashionably creative form making it have much suspense.

I really appreciate the books that Book Aid International has sent to us students!

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Many children, especially girls, are coming to DADREG's centre every day to use books, read and study

# Five reasons why we love libraries

From Pioneer Book Boxes to Voyager Container Libraries and community libraries, if there's one thing for sure at Book Aid International, it's that we love libraries.

We work with public, community, school and prison libraries to ensure the books we provide are available to all. We also work to increase the support available to people as they begin to read, by training librarians and teachers. With many libraries experiencing closures this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, their importance within communities has become clearer than ever. As a result, we are shining a light on a few of the reasons why we're so passionate about libraries.

#### 1. For their brilliant librarians!

Having training sessions for librarians teaches them how to be confident and comfortable running a library.

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Before, we were just doing basic things in the library. But now I understand how to deal with the children and teach them with the books.

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– Wilson, librarian at Mathare Youth Sports Association's library, Kenya

In areas where parents struggle even to put food on the table, learning to read books at home is simply not possible. That's why having engaged, dedicated librarians in community libraries can be life-changing for children. Plus, they can always locate that one book you can't find!

#### 2. Learning new skills

Books are not just entertaining or informative, they are also vital in teaching new skills and knowledge.

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Books have the power to change my future, because the more I read, the more I learn, the more I can become someone.

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- Mary, young student, Ghana



Wilson and his colleagues are now confident in working with children

#### 3. Meeting others

Although a challenge during the Covid-19 pandemic, libraries can be the perfect place to gather and share a love of books. Our *Voyager Container Library* model allows even the most rural of homes to have access to up to date books, bringing people from the local community together to share knowledge, make friendships and read.

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It's all covered so that when it rains, people are sheltered. It's a reading environment that's really attractive. When we come here on the weekend, it's packed. There are so many kids!

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#### - Elizabeth, Ineza Foundation, Rwanda

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has been keeping records on how libraries are supporting people within communities to visit libraries but remain safe in these unprecedented times. Steps such as limiting numbers of visitors, social distancing and ticketing systems are allowing people to meet safely in library spaces. (https://www.ifla.org/covid-19-and-libraries)

#### 4. A safe space to read

In many of the countries we work in, violence, natural disaster and conflict are the norms. The ongoing conflict in Cameroon has led to communities being a target for violence with many homes and schools being burnt down, so students have had to take shelter in Cameroon's forested area.

With the help of local NGOs and our *Pioneer Book Boxes*, students can have a safe space to read, a chance to continue education and have hope for the future.

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Dreams should not end because there is strife and conflict. Education is every child's basic human right and we are committed to giving it to them.

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- Church Bishop, Cameroon

#### 5. The volume and choice of books

Many children and students in the places we work have few or no books at home, so one of the reasons we love libraries is for the sheer choice of books available.

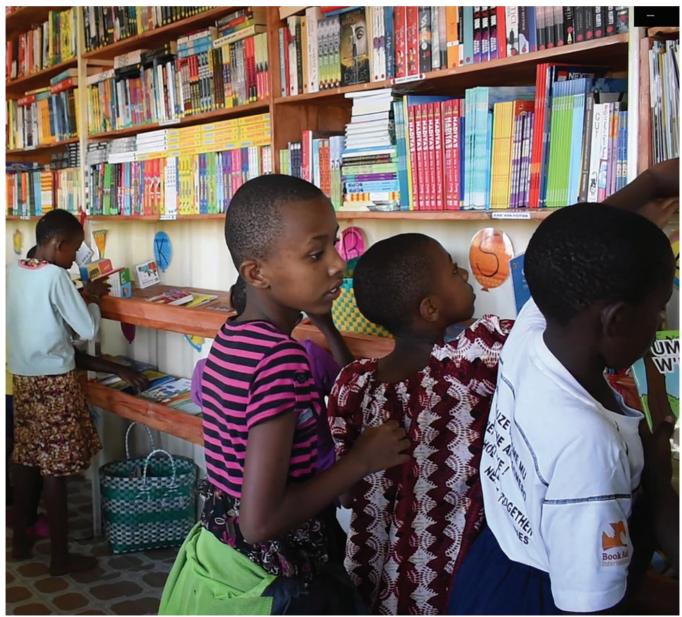
At St John of God College of Health Sciences in Malawi, we've sent 4,708 books to date to their library, allowing students to take books home, rather than loaning for an hour before having to share with their peers. Having enough books and a large range gives students the best possible chance of a good education.

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The value of the books we receive is priceless!

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– Prisca, medical lecturer at St John of God College of Health Sciences. Malawi



Voyager container library in Rwanda

