Books change lives

BookLinks
Sharing information across libraries in Africa and beyond

December 2021 / Issue 33
Welcome

Dear partner,

Welcome to the last edition of Booklinks for 2021. As the year draws to a close, we would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our partners who have worked so hard to deliver books and innovative reading experiences to pupils, patrons and stakeholders around the world during another challenging year dominated by Covid-19.

In this edition of Booklinks, we highlight the impact of our long-running and award-winning programme Inspiring Readers. The programme has strengthened the links between public libraries and schools and since it began in 2016 over 290,000 children now have inspiring books to read and enjoy in their primary schools. The programme will continue into 2022 with smaller projects in Sierra Leone, Kenya and Uganda.

We also feature our container library projects and describe how our partners Ineza Foundation in Rwanda and the Zanzibar Library Service have skilfully renovated shipping containers into vibrant community reading spaces, which provide much needed access to books for readers of all ages.

This year, following an inspiring workshop on gender, the Programmes team have developed a new training module, focusing on gender equality and equity. The module was piloted with staff from the Zanzibar Library Service, and some key tips on how to ensure that girls and boys all benefit from books and activities in libraries are shared on page nine.

Finally, we cast a spotlight onto the amazing work that four of our partner organisations are doing with their book donations, from Inspire Lives Africa based in Uganda, who work with young women on empowerment projects, to Echo100Plus who have supported hundreds of refugees arriving on the shores of Greece.

We wish you all the very best for your vital work in 2022 and look forward to sharing more inspiring stories in next year’s editions of Booklinks.

Best regards,

Alison Tweed
Chief Executive

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.

BookLinks is published with the support of a grant from the Unwin Charitable Trust and we are delighted to be among its beneficiaries.

Photo credits:
Front Cover.  Dunga Community Container Library, Zanzibar
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Page 10.  Inspire Lives Africa

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News

2021 Community Reading Awards

A book club for pregnant teens, a reading space for nomadic communities and a mountain bike mobile library; these are just some of the microprojects awarded grants from the 2021 Community Reading Awards. Reaching communities in need can be challenging for all manner of reasons, there may be transport difficulties, financial limitations or a shortage of books. The Community Reading Award scheme is a new initiative from Book Aid International intended to support small-scale and innovative library outreach programmes. In this first year over 40 proposals were received, and the panel of judges, including Dr. Nkem Osuigwe of AfLIA and Pam Dix, Book Aid International and IBBY trustee chose 14 projects from Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

For the full list of winning projects see https://bit.ly/3d1aawa and follow their progress on our social media channels. Partners will be notified in February or March about the opening of the 2022 scheme.

Kenyan and Ugandan young people win Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition

Every year, we provide information about the Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition for teachers and librarians in Commonwealth countries to use to encourage young people to read widely and have their voices heard by entering the competition.

This year, it is brilliant to see that the two winners are Kenyan and Ugandan! These young people will take part in a special awards ceremony in London attended by royalty. Their wins showcase the huge talent of young people across Africa, and the power of the written word.

While there are only two winners, everyone who enters the competition receives a certificate of participation and hundreds win a gold, silver or bronze award – and the competition wants to hear from as many diverse voices across Africa as possible.

You can find out more about how the competition can motivate the young people you support and how to take part on our website. The page will be updated with 2022 details as soon as they become available: https://bit.ly/3pafV0j
The *Inspiring Readers* programme began in 2016 with the aim of contributing to education in primary schools through setting up cupboard libraries and promoting reading, made possible through a collaboration between schools and public libraries.

The overall goal was simple: to make schools book rich, staffed by confident, capable and supportive teachers who incorporate regular reading into the school timetable and establish regular contact between librarians and teachers.

This was achieved by providing 285 primary schools with a cupboard library, each packed full of 1,250 brand new books, a grant to purchase local books and training for teachers in how to bring these books to life in the classroom. The books provided ranged from picture books suitable for the youngest readers to the fiction, non-fiction and subject books that upper primary school children need to help them develop their reading skills.

**The impact**

In 2016, *Inspiring Readers* was piloted in 25 schools in Kenya in collaboration with the Kenya National Library Service. Results from the pilot revealed that the programme was a success and we went on to deliver it in collaboration with library partners in seven countries: Kenya, Cameroon, Malawi, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and Zanzibar. Overall, *Inspiring Readers* had a positive impact on all participants: for children and their educational development, for librarians who grew their skills, confidence and knowledge, for schools and teachers who were able to access new teaching resources and for the wider communities who have benefitted from a local well-stocked library.

**Impact on children**

Children's interest in reading increased as a result of book rich schools as there was an acute shortage of reading books in schools prior to the programme. Learners were mostly interacting with curriculum materials. *Inspiring Readers* provided a variety of supplementary and storybooks, making learners excited about visiting the school library, increasing interaction with reading materials – leading to the growth of a reading culture in schools.

Children's interaction with relevant, good quality books vastly increased as teachers 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 led to improvements in children’s learning and reading habits. Children read more regularly and began to enjoy reading, with the self-esteem, confidence and reading skills of learners improving as a result.

“We felt very happy when we first saw the books. There was no library in the school before. We only had textbooks and no story books. We are now able to read many interesting stories.”

Madalisto, Learner, 12 years old, Chisitu Primary School, Mulanje, Malawi
Impact on schools and teachers

Vibrant school libraries raised the profile of schools as they became more visible and recognised in their communities. More parents enrolled their children in the project schools with libraries.

Teaching methods have improved since the programme began as teachers have more resources. Before the books were received, teachers across all seven countries spent a lot of time creating teaching aids by drawing on manila paper or the chalkboard. The presence of the books was a big boost as it gave teachers resources to use with their learners. The books have helped to break the monotony of using one book or in some cases no book at all for illustrations and examples in class.

Impact on librarians and libraries

The training helped to develop hub librarians’ knowledge, skills and confidence to implement the project. Librarians stated that they had developed confidence in facilitating training, supporting teachers to establish school libraries and promote reading.

Library outreach programmes were revitalised as a result of the programme. Hub libraries were able to rejuvenate their outreach services improving the relationship with project schools and schools in their regions and librarians reported that teachers became more receptive to library initiatives.

Impact on communities

Primary schools are spread out all over countries and are closer to the people, therefore Inspiring Readers has shown that schools can open up their libraries to the wider community allowing people to borrow books for reading.

Communities were supportive of the programme activities with parents and community members across all countries speaking positively about the Inspiring Readers activities. In some cases, they helped to raise funds to build library rooms, acquire shelving and additional locally purchased books.

With thanks

It’s with great pleasure that we are able to look back on the Inspiring Readers programme and see all that it has achieved.

We see in our work every day that books and reading offer people the opportunity to shape their own futures and this programme has allowed us to see the difference books and library development can make.

But we cannot do our work alone. We rely on not only the dedicated support of our library partners in the countries we work in, who are instrumental in helping to provide sustainable change to the lives of many, but also the UK publishers who kindly donate brand new books to support our work, and of course the generous funders, without whom we simply wouldn’t have the means to reach such a large number of schools around the world with the Inspiring Readers programme. Thank you all for your support and for making this work possible.

Samantha Thomas-Chuula, Head of Programmes
The Community Container Library is Book Aid International’s latest innovation in project design to create new exciting spaces to read. Funded by the People’s Postcode Lottery, the first library in a container was the Rwanda Children’s Reading Corner established in 2019 by Ineza Foundation. Located in the Gasave Public Park, Gasave Village in Kigali, the container library has a core collection of over 4,500 English language children’s books suitable for all ages from babies to teenagers. Ineza Foundation was given a grant to refurbish a 40 foot shipping container and establish an outdoor reading area that is safe and suitable for children to find and read books. They also had a grant to purchase locally written and published children’s books that have a local context and are in local languages. Now over 3,000 children have access to books from the very first public park container library in Rwanda.

The Gasave Public Park is a large plot of land in the middle of a residential area of houses and local shops and cafés. The children use the area around it to play football and other games when they’re not using the library itself. The container is placed on a concrete slab with chairs and tables around the outside edge and a broad roof on top to shelter readers from the sun or rain. There’s enough seating for about 50 children and there are toilets and electric lighting so reading and study can continue after the sun goes down. The container itself is refitted with windows, a sliding door and many shelves. It is painted inside and out in bright colours and eye-catching murals. It really is a magnificent sight. The immediate neighbourhood surrounding the container library is quite wealthy. But just a little further down the hill are many four by six metre homes housing families of six or more. Many of these children’s parents earn only $1-2 a day through informal jobs; mums often selling bananas or cassava on the street. Books are a luxury they cannot afford. It is these children that the library is for.

“...
You can see when you come and you find them doing their homework here and they are using the resources, there is a huge improvement in terms of their grade – it goes up because of the resources they are getting. So giving them this library allows them to go to the next level..

Elizabeth Mujawamariya Johnson, Founder - INEZA Foundation/ Grace Rwanda
Partners INEZA Foundation and Zanzibar Library Services share with us tips to consider when establishing a Community Container Library.

- Assess community need and confirm who will operate and maintain the library daily. Collaborate with an NGO or Government office to provide the land, electricity, water, security and support.
- Make sure budgets have a contingency so that all costs are covered to complete the finished library.
- Make sure you have an engineer or other suitably qualified person to provide drawings and to oversee all fabrication, electrical, plumbing works and painting. Supervision is essential from start to finish.
- Check the container has no rust or holes. They need to be watertight.
- Involve community leaders from the beginning. This leads to community buy-in and will boost patronage of the library as community members will identify with the service.
- Ensure it is a space that everyone can access easily. Put in ramps, widen doorways.
- Ensure there are toilet blocks for adults and children.
- Ensure there is good signage at the container and in the surrounding neighbourhood.
- Carry out regular maintenance so that the container remains in good order for users.

On the other side of east Africa on another large patch of land is the Dunga Community Container Library launched in 2021 under Zanzibar Library Services (ZLS) with support from Book Aid International and the Africa Publishing Innovation Fund (APIF). This community library is made up of three old shipping containers which were previously laying idle in the ZLS grounds. They have been configured and form three separate areas within the library layout. Located at Kati District in Kusini region, the Library has a collection of over 6,500 books, has a children’s corner and an adult section. The container library serves the general community from children to adults in Kati district which has a population of about 76,346 (38,538 male and 37,808 female). For the Dunga community, the library is meeting a great need. The nearest library is 10 miles away and walking that distance is not always safe especially for girls and young women. Because of this, their education has been negatively impacted as they were unable to use learning resources outside of school, unlike the boys and young men who could walk to the nearest library. Now, the library provides learning resources close to home so girls and boys can easily do their homework and revision locally.

We are excited that a library has been set up in our region. This library will help us greatly. We can now access books easily within Dunga area. We used to spend a lot of time and transport money to go to Unguja library. This library is a great relief. We can simply walk or cycle to the library. The library has a variety of books to cater for all age groups. Everyone in the community can find a book to read.

Musa, Head of Administration Department, Kati District
Gender equality, whereby women and girls, men and boys all enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections, is recognised internationally as a basic human right and is a key Sustainable Development Goal (No. 5). Many governments have signed international and regional treaties and agreements stating their desire to work towards gender equality to benefit their citizens.

The world over, women and girls in particular face many barriers that impact their rights, resources, opportunities and protections in daily life, making gender equality a tough goal to achieve. The causes of gender inequality in many countries are complex and interconnected and deeply rooted.

In many poorer countries, female literacy rates are lower than male rates, girls are less likely to be enrolled in primary school, less likely to move up to or complete secondary school, more likely to enter marriage early and more likely to experience pregnancy in their teens.¹

Libraries are well positioned to support and deliver activities aimed at improving gender equality in their local communities. Equal access to resources and services are at the core of a library’s mission and public libraries are usually legally mandated to provide services to all members of the community. Book Aid International staff recently attended a training course on contemporary gender issues to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts and explore how best library partners can be supported with fresh ideas for activities and services that can address issues of gender inequality in their communities.

The focus of the training was to gain a deeper understanding of equality and equity (See Diagram 1)², and to assess where the work of the team sits on a continuum of gender responsiveness from Gender Aware to Gender Transformational (Diagram 2)³⁴.

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¹https://bit.ly/3d0cX94
⁴https://bit.ly/3lm0ocS
The team were able to put their new knowledge to immediate use by running a training workshop on gender issues for Zanzibar Library Service staff. The aim of the workshop was to equip library staff, with knowledge and skills to run inclusive reading and education activities in the new *Dunga Community Container Library* that has been opened in Dunga village on the main island of Unguja. Following lively discussions, some top tips for libraries were identified:

### Top tips

**Staff awareness**
Ensure all staff have an understanding of the gender discussions happening in your country, for example government policies.
A friendly, focussed discussion amongst staff on the experiences of both genders could be a good start in identifying if there are equal opportunities open to everyone and the impact that this can have on girls/women and boys/men.

**Make sure children have access to male and female role models.**
Wherever possible, ensure that male and females are represented for children to see both as capable of doing a range of tasks. This will encourage girls and boys to try new things.

**Library environment**
Make sure spaces are open and safe and everybody feels comfortable.
A welcoming smile and encouraging greetings to girls and boys can make children feel welcome and safe.

**Books and resources**
During reading activities with children, use books with both strong male and female lead characters. Be mindful of gender stereotypes in books.
Remember all play materials are suitable for both and girls, for example a girl might want to play with a football and a boy might want to play with a doll.
Research your book collection and be aware of the gender sensitivity of your books and other resources

**Services and activities**
Provide a schedule of library programmes for girls, women, boys, men.
Design activities to generate opportunities to talk about gender roles and challenge stereotypes in the library.
Collect data that separates out participation, activity by gender as this will help and shape subsequent activities and provide you with evidence that both girls and boys are being reached and are engaging.

**Feedback**
We welcome your feedback on this topic. If your team has undergone gender training and have made or are planning to make changes to your services to achieve gender equality, equity or parity we would like to hear from you. Email to: samantha.thomas-chuula@bookaid.org
Spotlight on partners

In this issue, we turn our spotlight onto four dynamic organisations who are using the power of books to improve the lives of children and young people in their communities in Uganda, The Gambia, Malawi and Greece.

Inspire Lives Africa

Inspire Lives Africa is based in Kampala, Uganda and was launched in September 2020 with the aim of improving the lives of young people, particular girls and young, single mothers, by empowering them to be the best versions of themselves regardless of their past.

The group quickly established a community library in a residential area of Kampala and have been using their recent book donation to stock the library and expand their educational outreach programme to three nearby areas. Ongoing school closures, due to the Covid-19 pandemic have severely disrupted the education of Uganda’s children. The community library project targets children in and out of schools, ensuring they have an equal opportunity to receive formal education and instil in them a reading culture and a love for learning. News of the library has spread and membership is increasing.

Manager, Grace Koshaba says “We have seen our dream of providing free early childhood education to the vulnerable children in our community come to life and for a few months now, since we received the donation, there has been smoothness in the running of our activities, and we have had kids come to study every single day. The parents are grateful for what Inspire Lives Africa is offering, and every day they accompany the children either to the library or reading place and are no longer worried they will outgrow their classes because of the school closure”.

https://www.facebook.com/InspireLivesAfrica/

Echo100Plus

Echo100Plus was founded in 2012 when the scale and intensity of the growing economic and social crisis in Greece became apparent. They began with supporting the many arrivals of refugees on the island of Leros and opened the first community integration centre on the island to help those who were stuck for months.

They work with a combination of hired staff, teachers and volunteers to offer education classes and extra-curricular activities to support mental health, as well as offering language training in English and Greek. They are also looking to expand their work to offer financial literacy courses – looking at things like how to rent an apartment or open a bank account, as well as pathways to higher education and vocational training, such as nursing and caregiving to the elderly.

In September 2019 they opened their second centre in Athens, where they received the first donation of books from us at Book Aid International. This centre’s main purpose is to help fast-track people into employment and help refugees to create a self-determined life. They have now received a total of 2,000 books and have started to build a large library within the centre. https://echo100plus.com/en
Binti International

Binti International has a mission to provide menstrual dignity to all girls, all over the world. This means facilitating access to pads to ensure menstrual health, educating girls about what menstruation is and what to expect and dispelling stigma, taboos, myths and negative perceptions around menstruation. While their focus is to provide menstrual dignity and feminine period pads, they recognize that change can only happen by including boys in the discussion, and therefore also provide an educational element for them to learn more about not only girls' puberty but also their own.

Binti International started their programme in The Gambia in 2018. They recently took on the rebuilding of Latrikunda School in Bakou New Town near the capital Banjul, following a fire. Their very first job was refurbishing the library, highlighting the importance they place on reading for education. Their donation of over 1,800 books will support the work of not only the young people who deliver the Binti Menstrual Education programme, but their peers and teachers.

The organisation plans to work with the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education to run their menstrual health education programme in 300 schools over three years and support a health centre for women.

https://bintiperiod.org

VSO

Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) is an international organisation with a vision for a “fair world for everyone”. They work to “Empower poor and marginalised people to take charge of their own development; share skills and knowledge to create long lasting, sustainable change and build collaborative partnerships that promote innovation, growth and impact.”

VSO programmes across Africa have been using our donated books to support education in conflict affected areas in Ethiopia, in the Bidibidi Refugee settlement area in Uganda, and for children and youth with disabilities in Rwanda.

In southern Africa VSO have created the Southern Africa Network of Prisons (SANOP), which is dedicated to promoting the rights of prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families, facilitating re-entry and successful re-integration into the community. Book Aid International is supporting the network with 4,000 books for education programmes in Juvenile Reformatory Schools, for vocational workshops, supporting young women in prison and pre-school children who are incarcerated with their mothers. Many of the correctional facilities involved in the network do have libraries however their book collections are old and out of date, so the brand new books will be very welcome.

https://www.vsointernational.org/about/vision-values-and-strategy

Book Aid International is proud to support all our dynamic partners who are using our books to make a difference.
About our charity

Book Aid International is the UK’s leading international book donation and library development charity. Every year, we ship around one million books to thousands of libraries in communities where people have very few opportunities to access new books.

We work with an extensive network of libraries, schools, hospitals, NGOs and other partners to ensure that the books we send reach those who face the greatest barriers to accessing books. In addition, we also run library development projects which build the capacity of librarians to support readers and communities.

We only send books at our library partners’ request. These books are carefully selected by our UK team led by professional librarians to ensure that they meet the needs of local communities. All of the books we send are donated by the UK book trade so they are all new.

To find out more, visit www.bookaid.org.