The power of books

Our vision for 2025

“Books give us knowledge and wisdom on how to go forward in education and how to protect ourselves as girls.”

Monica, 12 year old pupil, Northern Ghana

Two girls in Nketa Library in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, enjoy reading a book donated by Book Aid International. © KB Mpofu/Book Aid International. All photos taken in line with local Covid guidance.
A message from our new Chair

Around the world, millions of people have never seen or held a new book.

Millions of schoolchildren can learn only by sharing a single threadbare textbook and millions of people have never been encouraged to read, or to escape into the pages of a book.

Yet books give people power. They transform how people see themselves, and see the world around them.

At Book Aid International we share the power of books – and people use that power to create a more equal future. Every year we provide over one million brand new books to thousands of schools, libraries, refugee camps and prisons around the world, creating access to books where the barriers to reading and learning are at their most challenging.

And those challenges have never been greater than they are now.

The pandemic has closed thousands of classrooms in which children were already struggling to learn, with very few books between them. Climate change is impacting communities around the world. Conflict and displacement are putting countless livelihoods and lives at risk.

A book might seem like a small thing in the fight against inequality – but we see every day how a book can spark a transformation. Books light up imaginations and ambitions. They are powerful tools for fighting poverty, improving education, challenging discrimination and building a more equal world for all.

In the places where teachers struggle to encourage children to dream big, where it’s hardest to become a doctor, where there has never been a library before – that’s where we are determined to put the power of books in people’s hands.

This commitment is at the heart of our new strategy.

By focusing on the people who face the greatest barriers to reading and learning we can take the next step towards a world where everyone has access to the books that will enrich, improve and change their lives.

This strategy is that next step, and I invite you to take it with us.

Dr Alice Prochaska
Chair, Book Aid International

Strategy overview

In our new strategy we have four key goals: equity, engagement, partnership and advocacy.

These four goals all contribute to our vision of a world where everyone has access to the books they need to enrich, improve and change their lives.

To ensure equity of access to books we are focusing our work on the places with the fewest resources and on the most marginalised communities, giving more disadvantaged people opportunities to realise their potential.

To improve access to books and get people engaged with reading we are working with NGO and library partners to support school, community and public libraries: anywhere where people can come together and read. And in everything we do we will advocate and speak out for the power of books to improve and change lives.

To do all this we will invest in our committed people, in our inspirational partners and in our sustainability as a charity, ensuring we are well placed to meet all the challenges the future may hold.

Our mission is to give people around the world who lack access to books the opportunity to read for pleasure, study and lifelong learning.

Our vision is a world where everyone has access to books that will enrich, improve and change their lives.

Goal 1: Equity
We will prioritise reaching more of the people who face the greatest barriers to reading and learning.

Goal 2: Engagement
We will work to engage more people with reading, especially in under-served, rural and marginalised communities.

Goal 3: Partnership
We will develop dynamic partnerships with organisations that share our vision of creating more equitable access to books.

Goal 4: Advocacy
We will be advocates for the transformational power of books.

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Goal 1: Equity

We will prioritise reaching more of the people who face the greatest barriers to reading and learning.

Our equity goal focuses on creating access to books where lives are impacted by poverty and inequality, where people are excluded from the opportunity to read and when conflict and disaster disrupt lives. It also commits us to ensuring that all of our work contributes to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We have four key priorities in realising our goal.

The challenges

82.4 million people forcibly displaced in 2021¹

88 million people pushed into extreme poverty by Covid²

Priority one: Supporting the poorest communities

Books enrich education and give people the opportunity to learn new skills throughout their lives – and with this lifelong learning comes the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty.

In this strategy period, we will focus on creating access to books for people in countries with high levels of poverty, particularly rural populations and under-served urban communities.

➢ By 2025 60% of the books we donate will reach low-income countries.*

Priority two: Reaching excluded readers

The most disadvantaged people are often excluded from opportunities to learn. Women and girls and people displaced from their homes are particularly at risk. For them, books in libraries and classrooms may be out of reach.

Moving forward, we will focus on creating opportunities for reading and learning to flourish for people who have been marginalised – partnering with NGOs who focus on these communities.

➢ By 2025 65% of the books we provide will support the work of NGOs.

Priority three: Responding to crisis

Climate change, conflict and disaster are increasingly forcing people from their homes, closing schools, destroying libraries and leaving millions without the chance to read.

Books offer the chance to return to education or take refuge in a great story. In this strategy period we will respond where lives are disrupted by these crises, especially when books are lost.

➢ By 2025 35% of our work will take place in countries recovering from or affected by conflict and disaster.

Priority four: Contributing to the SDGs

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity. At its heart are 17 goals which recognise that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with improving health and education, reducing inequality and spurring economic growth.

Moving forward, we will continue to align our work with the SDGs because we know that by facilitating access to information and giving everyone the chance to learn, we can contribute to delivering the Agenda for Sustainable Development.

➢ By 2025 all of our work will support the delivery of the SDGs, particularly in the provision of quality education, good health and gender equality.

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1. UNHCR (https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/)

*As defined by the World Bank

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Monica, a student at Gowrie Primary School in rural Ghana, reading a locally published book purchased through a Book Aid International programme. © Book Aid International/Natalija Gormalova Video and Photography
**Goal 2: Engagement**

We will work to engage more people with reading, especially in under-served, rural and marginalised communities.

Through our engagement goal we will create rich, diverse and relevant book collections in school libraries, community reading spaces and library outreach services to inspire communities throughout – and beyond – Africa to read, learn and experience the transformational power of books.

We have four key priorities in realising our goal.

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**Priority one: Creating vibrant school libraries**

School libraries full of brand new, well-chosen books help pupils become confident readers, curious learners and, eventually, school leavers with ambition to succeed. School libraries support teachers in creating rich, engaging lessons and offer a valuable resource for the whole community to access and enjoy.

Moving forward, we will grow our work supporting school libraries and training teachers in how to use books to enrich learning.

By 2025 we will establish or equip over 1,500 school libraries every year.

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**Priority two: Giving communities access to books**

Public, community and mobile libraries give people from all walks of life the opportunity to engage with books and reading. And well-stocked libraries – whether in a city, a township or a remote village – act as vital information hubs for the whole community.

Between now and 2025 we will partner with public and community libraries to engage whole communities in reading through book donations, a range of dynamic events and other activities.

➤ By 2025 we will set up or support at least 50 new community libraries.

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**Priority three: Working around the world**

Demand is growing around the world for books to support education, improve competence in English and enhance life chances. The need is particularly acute where people are displaced from their homes or cut off from formal education.

In the years to come, we will expand our work beyond Africa focusing on communities where there is a real need for the books we can provide.

➤ By 2025 we will partner with at least 25 new NGOs outside Africa.

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**Priority four: Curating rich and diverse book collections**

Children and adults are far more likely to engage with reading if they have rich and varied collections from which they can choose the books they want to read.

In this strategy period we will work with UK and local publishers to expand the range of books we can provide, a range of dynamic events and other activities.

By 2025 we will secure more donated books from publishers, increasing the number of books donated every year.

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The challenges

87% of sub-Saharan African primary school pupils are experiencing learning poverty.

168 million children missed at least a year of in-person learning during Covid.

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Goal 3: Partnership

We will develop dynamic partnerships with organisations that share our vision of creating more equitable access to books.

Everything we do is driven by partnership. Our partners tell us what books their communities need and we provide books in response to their requests. They then make those books available to readers and run projects and programmes which support reading and learning.

By supporting our partners and enabling them to do more, we can create sustainable change for the people who need books most. So in this strategy period, we will invest in our partners, helping build their skills to deliver programmes which enable people to read.

We will engage more in-country trainers to deliver our projects and programmes and upskill local teachers and librarians through a ‘train the trainer’ model. Those teachers and librarians can then go on to share their skills with others.

We will also grow and diversify our partner network – establishing new partnerships with NGOs within and beyond the education space. In addition, we will work with local publishers, reading agencies, library associations and other groups which exist to promote the value of reading.

This expanded partner network will help us reach a more diverse range of readers with book collections which will inspire children, and all people, to read.

By 2025 we will:

- Upskill 30 local trainers
- Increase the percentage of locally published books in our projects
- Increase our partnerships with a more diverse range of NGOs

Goal 4: Advocacy

We will be advocates for the transformational power of books.

Millions of people are held back by a lack of books, and too often the impact of being without books goes unrecognised. Moving forward, we will raise awareness of the pressing need for books around the world and help our partners nurture a culture of reading in their own communities.

Where there are important discussions about reading and education, we will engage with international and local organisations to promote books and reading. We will also use our event appearances, contacts and channels to increase awareness of the need for books globally.

In all of our work we will highlight the power of books, supporting our partners and readers to share their stories of how books change lives and using those stories to inspire action.

What we do in the UK is only part of the solution, so we will also support our partners to raise the profile of books in their own communities.

Our partners know how to inspire people to read, motivate local leaders and make the case for books – and our Reading Promotion programme supports this important work. In the years ahead we will expand the programme, enabling more partners to advocate for reading.

By 2025 we will:

- Expand our Reading Promotion programme to 20 countries
- Increase audience reach and engagement across all channels

Advocacy in action

Moving forward, we will do more to support our partners’ work promoting books and reading in their own communities – as we have in Ghana.

“There are still a huge number of Ghanaians who are neither able to read nor write. This can be attributed to the fact that there is not enough advocacy of the value of books and reading in Ghana. The Reading Promotion programme gives us the chance to raise the profile of reading in schools, institutions and libraries.”

Godbless Duncan-Amissah, Projects Manager, Ghana Library Authority

The African Parks team speaking to students in Malawi about the importance of conservation during a book handover.

A speech by Hayford Siaw, Director of Ghana Library Authority, at a Reading Promotion event in Ghana. © Ghana Library Authority.
Fit for the future

To achieve our goals, we must ensure that we have the people, resources and infrastructure to take up opportunities, face challenges and respond to a rapidly changing world.

People and partners

Our people and our partners are at the heart of everything we do, with the skills, experience and expertise that comes from delivering programmes and constantly evaluating the outcomes and impacts of our work.

Between now and 2025 we will ensure that all our staff and partners are trained, motivated and supported to do their best work. We will also work with our Board to assure the good governance of the charity and our adherence to high ethical standards.

Infrastructure

Our work relies on efficient logistics and the physical capacity to receive, process and deliver books around the world. It also requires effective fundraising and communications – both of which are increasingly moving to digital channels.

Between now and 2025 we will ensure that the charity has both the physical and digital capability to support all its activities, including remote working; more local activities being delivered by local experts and training being delivered online to librarians and teachers. We will also ensure our brand is strong, modern and engaging.

Sustainability

Our financial sustainability is dependent on the in-kind donations from UK publishers and the generous support of all our donors.

Between now and 2025 we will continue to develop our relationships with publishers to ensure a high volume of book donations. We will invest in our fundraising to secure the income of the charity, and we will attract the next generation of supporters through compelling stories of change. We will carefully manage the funds of the charity, especially our free reserves and the environmental impact of our work.

A more equal world

A strategy for the future of any charity will ultimately be shaped by decisions about where it can make the greatest impact.

In our Power of Books strategy we choose to focus our support on the most disadvantaged communities, and the opportunity that books offer people to step up and improve their life chances.

We choose to partner increasingly with dynamic NGOs that really understand how to engage people in their communities with reading. We choose to partner with local reading advocates, trainers and publishers who can extend our reach, amplify our impact and ensure our work is relevant and responds to the need. And in all our work we commit to advocating for wonderful books that enhance, and change, lives.

Our focus remains strongly on children and young people, for a reading habit acquired young lasts a lifetime. We extend our support to communities displaced by conflict, for the lifeline that books can offer. And we are ready to step in when vital books are lost, whether through climate events or man-made disaster.

We know that everything we do is built on collaboration. With the publishers who donate the books we send, with our many supporters and friends and with our inspirational partners around the world.

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“A step at a time, we fight these battles.”

Edna Adan Ismail founded the Edna Adan Maternity Hospital in Hargeysa, Somaliland, and is a leader in the fight to abolish female genital mutilation. This new strategy focuses on supporting more people like Edna.

“In Somaliland, there’s nobody like Book Aid International. When I opened the hospital, the first gift of books was from Book Aid International. Without books, we cannot develop. Without books, we cannot get out of the situation that we are in. We are now walking towards the direction in which we wish to go. We have women engineers. We have women doctors. A step at a time, we fight these battles.”

Edna Adan Ismail (second from right) in the hospital library with recent graduates.
It’s about parity of esteem. That’s what we offer to readers everywhere.

I can’t stress sufficiently how precious it is for a child in a disadvantaged area of Accra to have a book in their hands. A book that’s identical to the one held by an infinitely more privileged child from a wealthier community.

Lord Boateng, Book Aid International Vice Patron