

BOOKLINKS

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BOOKS CHANGE LIVES

PRIMARY COMMITMENTS

AFRICA'S THIRST FOR BOOKS

FAMILY MATTERS

WELCOME

Welcome to BookLinks, Book Aid International's networking newsletter.

This edition of BookLinks is a very exciting one for Book Aid International because it carries an article by our Director, Clive Nettleton about 'Books Change Lives', our ambitious new strategy.

Some 18% of the world's adults continue to live without literacy skills and neither Africa nor Asia will achieve the goal of a 50 percent improvement in adult literacy by 2015 without a great deal more support. Despite improvements in primary school enrolment rates, the quality of education that children attending primary school in the developing world receive remains a major challenge.

Dynamic literate environments, where books and other reading materials are produced and used, are absolutely vital to addressing these challenges and sustaining improvements in literacy and educational achievement.

'Books Change Lives' sets out our aims to do a lot more to support the creation of those rich literate environments by supporting community access to books and information, increasing the availability of material on development and human rights and leveraging the power of books to improve the quality of primary education.

In fact much of the rest of this edition of BookLinks sets out how we believe more, better quality books in primary schools, where teachers have the confidence and skills to use them can make all the difference to educational quality and outcomes.

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In future editions of BookLinks we will take a closer look at how we plan to support increased community access to books, including to books about development and human rights, the other key themes in our new strategy.

This edition also contains an extract from Doris Lessing's Nobel acceptance speech in which she spoke movingly about the hunger for reading material in Africa.

Finally, Julia Eccleshare and Joseph O'Reilly look at how family focussed book gifting could make a vital contribution to expanding and improving early childhood care and education in the developing world.

This edition of BookLinks is the first to be published with the support of a grant from the Unwin Charitable Trust. Established in 1914 by Sir Stanley Unwin, founder of George Allen and Unwin in the UK, the Trust supports a range of activities and we are delighted to be among its most recent beneficiaries.

We hope you find the information contained in BookLinks useful and interesting and look forward to receiving your feedback. We're also always looking for contributions so we would be delighted to receive your submission.

Please e-mail:
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BOOKS CHANGE LIVES

Clive Nettleton sets out Book Aid International's ambitious new plans to do more in support of literacy, education and development.

Books change lives. That belief has driven Book Aid International for more than 50 years in which we have provided over 25 million books, concentrating in recent years on countries in sub-Saharan Africa. And it is the foundation on which our new strategy being launched in September has been built over the past few months.

At the core of the strategy is the fundamental human right to literacy. It is critical to ensuring that people have the capacity to make informed decisions and participate in social development. Poverty goes hand in hand with illiteracy. Without literacy people do not have the capability to access education or health care, to take advantage of opportunities for employment, or participate in social, economic and political decisions which affect their lives.

The right to literacy extends beyond learning to read and write. It requires access to books and other materials at all levels and for all ages, from early years through primary to secondary school and tertiary education, from vocational education to adults and children seeking to read to find information or for pleasure. Access is more than physical availability. Books need to address the interests and issues of the people who read them in a language they understand. Trained teachers and librarians are needed to support people to use books effectively in schools to acquire the essential skills and beyond to maintain and use them effectively. In the long term the goal must be to create literate environments which drive and support social, political, economic and cultural development. Our strategy is driven by our purpose – to increase access to books to support literacy, education and development in sub-Saharan Africa.

To deliver on this purpose we are committed to expanding our work with local partners to increase access to books and information by building programmes in three key areas.

Supporting public, community and educational libraries

Books are a crucial factor in supporting communities to exercise their right to literacy, to understand and exercise other rights, and to develop their capacity to participate in decisions which affect personal and community development. Trained librarians are crucial to ensuring that books are accessible and effectively used. In most African countries communities rely entirely on public and community-based libraries to gain access to books and reading materials. Extending these services and developing innovative programmes around them is central to building literacy. Effective libraries with trained staff in educational institutions are essential to training effective teachers, librarians and others required to build literate societies.

Supporting organisations working in development and human rights

Books have a vital role to play in providing access to the information and knowledge needed to influence development policy and practice. Local NGOs and community organisations lack the funds to get the books and information they need to operate effectively. We are committed to expanding our work in helping to develop local resource centres. Given significant gender disparities in access to education and information, and in levels of literacy, projects aimed at providing books and information we will give priority to work with organisations promoting women's issues and needs.



Supporting improvements to the quality of primary education

There is a growing recognition that quality is a significant problem as countries strive to achieve universal primary education. A wide range of factors affect schools' ability to provide quality education, and there is a growing recognition that access to good quality books and learning materials is crucial for educational quality.

Despite this growing recognition, increasing access to books in schools remains a serious challenge. Firstly, there is a serious lack of available titles. Secondly the quality and relevance of the material, including the language in which it is written, is often inadequate or not appropriate. The availability of locally published books in local languages is crucial here. Even when books and learning materials are theoretically available, schools don't have access to them, either lacking the funds to purchase them or the knowledge and systems to do so. Finally, when books are made available to schools, the school often lacks the skills and knowledge that enables it to store and manage the books to best effect and its teachers do not have the experience or the confidence to use the books in the classroom to support learning outcomes. Book Aid International will support organisations in the education sector to improve the availability, appropriateness, accessibility and use of books in schools.

Creating literate societies; innovation and influence

Securing people's right to literacy and creating literate societies in which this right can be exercised is a vast challenge. The demand for books and information in sub-Saharan Africa far outstrips our capacity to deliver. However, Book Aid International's work creates two opportunities that can help meet the demand for books beyond our own work.

Our support for innovative, community based projects aimed at advancing literacy and access to books and information can show what is possible. By sharing our experiences and those of our partners we can grow the ideas and inspiration necessary to encourage others to take action in support of literacy and greater access to books and information.

Our shared experience can also be used to identify the key policy and practical challenges we face in more literate societies. Long-term solutions to literacy and access to books and the knowledge they provide lie in creating the political will necessary to develop and implement policies that support the creation of literate societies. Book Aid International is committed to learning from its experience through documenting and evaluating its work. We will use the learning from programmes to develop policy recommendations for which we and our partners can advocate.

Delivering the strategy

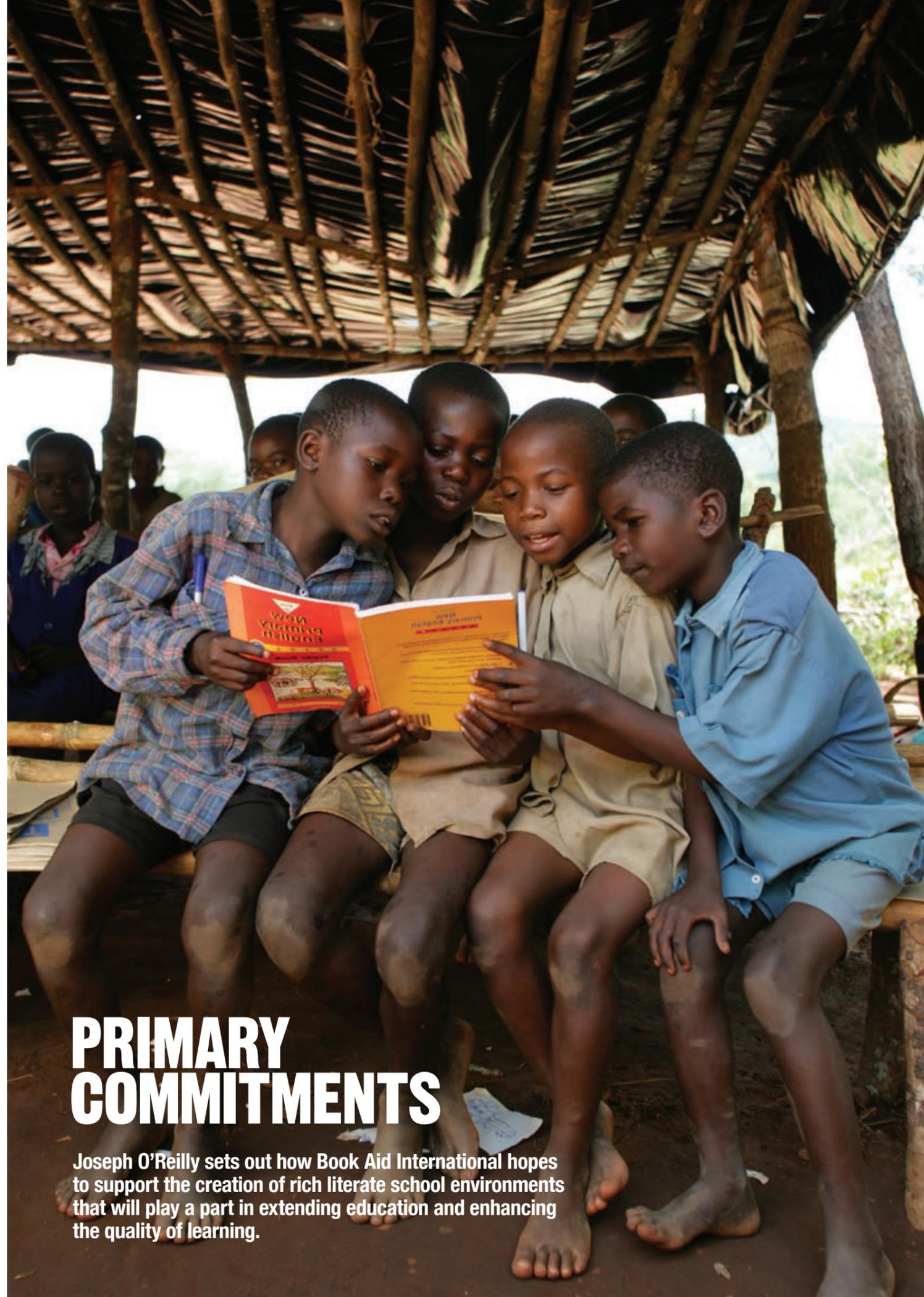
Delivering on this strategy requires a strong core programme with the flexibility to respond to change and opportunities. Over the past year we have strengthened our core relationships with partners in some countries, while withdrawing from others. We have established exciting new partnerships with national NGOs, developing new projects to support reading in primary schools. Our engagement with local development and advocacy organisations is increasing, particularly with women's organisations. Other opportunities may arise and we need to be open to them. In a rapidly changing world, we are committed to expanding access to books and supporting efforts to develop literacy

Operating successfully in a rapidly changing environment also requires a strong team in the centre with the capacity to develop relationships and programmes, and find the resources to support them. In the past year Book Aid International has reviewed its structure, concentrated its work in 12 countries and expanded its partnerships in those countries, secured its finances and built new relationships with publishers and donors.

I believe we have created an organisation capable of playing a significant role in supporting literacy, education and development in sub-Saharan Africa.

Clive Nettleton is the Director of Book Aid International.

Books are crucial to exercising the right to literacy



PRIMARY COMMITMENTS

Joseph O'Reilly sets out how Book Aid International hopes to support the creation of rich literate school environments that will play a part in extending education and enhancing the quality of learning.



In 2000 the international community made a commitment that by 2015 all of the world's children would complete primary education.

Since then the number of out of school children across the world has declined each year. In particular, Sub-Saharan Africa has shown historically unprecedented rates of enrolment growth.

But the picture is not universally positive. If the goal of universal primary education is to be reached two key challenges must be addressed.

Firstly there are still 72 million primary age children out of school. One in missing out on a basic education and getting them into school must become an urgent international priority.

Secondly, for those in school, we need to enhance the quality of their learning. In many countries a student's experience of school is characterised by repetition, drop out and poor learning outcomes.

In the following feature Joseph O'Reilly sets out how Book Aid International hopes to support the creation of rich literate school environments that will play a part in extending education and enhancing the quality of learning.

Education for all

Education provision has long been acknowledged as an integral part of development. In 1945 the 37 countries that founded UNESCO signed up to a constitution expressing a belief "in full and equal opportunities for education

for all." Also, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to education" (Article 26).

However, it is only since 1990 and the World Conference on Education For All that concerted efforts have been made by the international community to act jointly to prioritise education and to focus significant resources in this area. Education then became a major theme in development in 2000 with a second global education conference in Dakar and the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals at the UN Millennium Summit in New York.

More children in school than ever before

The result of these investments is that there has been a significant rise in primary school enrolment. For instance, in the last 15 years, and with rising population levels, the gross enrolment in primary education in sub-Saharan Africa rose from 77.5% to 84.9% – almost 10 million more children in school. And globally, 47 countries have achieved universal primary education. More girls have become enrolled in primary schools, although the 2005 gender parity goal has been missed. The number of secondary students has also risen substantially – more than four times the increase in the number of primary students. In about 70 countries out of 110 countries with data, public spending on education has increased as a share of national income.

But access continues to be a problem

However, access to schooling still remains a problem for around 80 million children worldwide. Key policy challenges include the need to provide equality of access to education for girls, children with disabilities, communities in fragile states (particularly conflict and post-conflict scenarios), and for those poor communities that find the costs of school attendance prohibitive.

The costs of purchasing uniforms and textbooks, or transport costs to reach school, are frequently a problem for the poorest families and so also are school fees in countries where education is not provided for free.

The quality challenge

There is a growing recognition that the quality of teaching and learning outcomes are a significant challenge for countries that are implementing universal primary education. Poor literacy and numeracy, high levels of grade repetition and low levels of pupil retention are all symptoms of poor educational quality that are common to many developing countries.

A 1995-1998 study by the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) measured primary school students' reading literacy against standards established by national reading experts and sixth grade teachers. In four out of seven countries, fewer than half the sixth graders achieved minimum competence in reading.

This study was compared with another done by SACMEQ two years later, which saw literacy scores falling even further in five out of six countries (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2005). Effectively this means that a significant number of children are completing school to all intents and purposes functionally illiterate.

There are numerous challenges that bear on a school's ability to provide quality education including teacher training, pay and retention, school leadership and management and the quality of school infrastructure.

The role of books and learning materials

There is also a growing awareness of the importance of access to good quality books and learning materials to educational quality. In fact, student book ratios are sometimes used as a proxy indicator of quality. However, there are a number of challenges in respect of book provision.

Firstly, there is a serious lack of available titles. Secondly the quality and relevance of the material, including the language that it's printed in, is often inadequate or not appropriate. Even when books and learning materials are theoretically available schools don't have access to them, they either lack the funds to purchase them or the knowledge and systems to do so. Finally even when books are made available to schools, the school often lacks the skills and knowledge that enables it to store and manage the books to best effect and its teachers don't have the experience and confidence to use the books in the classroom to greatest effect. These challenges apply both to text books, supplementary non-fiction and children's fiction based readers. Addressing the challenges across the continuum from availability to use is vital if books are to realise their potential to contribute to better learning outcomes in schools.

In exploring these challenges further this article looks at how one organisation, the Tanzanian Children's Book Project has developed a comprehensive approach to addressing each of the challenges.

Established in 1991 in an effort to alleviate the acute shortage of children's books in Tanzania, the Children's Book Project is widely recognised as a leading provider of books and reading support. In 2007 the Children's Book Project won the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize.

Availability

The publishing industry in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa remains very small and reliant on text book publishing for its core business. The market for books other than text books is extremely small and as a result publishers lack incentives to publish non-text book materials such as children's readers.

Tanzania's Children's Book Project supports the publication of local language children's book by committing to purchase a set number of approved titles in return for the publishers committing to a larger run. The Project's current practice is to commit to purchasing 3,000 books on the basis that 5,000 will be printed.

Books published in excess of those purchased by the Children's Book Project are sold commercially, helping to create and feed local markets for children's material.

This model stimulates demand for children's books in the form of a guaranteed order and by working directly with publishers it supports the supply side of the equation.

Appropriateness

Even when locally published children's books are available they are often not appropriate. The absence of a vibrant local children's book industry often means that publishers don't have a well developed understanding of what makes a good children's book.

Appropriate books are those where specific issues like local language and context are used in. Appropriate books will also be of a high quality which will be reflected in illustrations and of course in the quality of what's written.

In order to improve the quality of the children's books being produced in Tanzania the Children's Book Project has provided training and skills development for stakeholders in the book industry, including writers, illustrators and publishers. Since its inception three-hundred fifty-six writers, 191 of them women, have been trained in CBP workshops.



Student book ratios are an important indicator of educational quality



In addition to building the capacity of industry stakeholders the Children's Book Project works with publishers on a book by book basis, assessing titles that are submitted as camera ready art work and suggesting improvements, thereby increasing the quality of the books published with the Project's support.

The Children's Book Project has also published good practice guidelines on writing and illustrating for children with which publishers must comply for their books to be purchased.

These efforts mean that books that are published with the assistance of the Project are widely regarded as being the best in their class.

All of the Project's books are published in Swahili, the language of instruction in Tanzania's primary schools.

Accessibility

When appropriate children's books are available they also need to be made accessible to end users, i.e. children in schools. However a wide range of barriers exist that inhibit children's access to available books and learning materials. The cost of books is obviously

a key factor, including for schools that have little or no funding to buy books. But cost isn't the only factor. Many schools don't have the knowledge and systems to select and purchase books from publishers.

Subsidized and free book donations can play a vital role in improving children's access to available books and learning materials.

The Children's Book Project makes material available to schools that are part of its network. In addition to starter sets which consist of multiple copies of a selection of titles the Children's Book Project also commits to donating newly published titles to schools within its network on an annual basis, thereby ensuring the growth in the school's book collection and a steady supply of new material to teachers and students.

The Project also produces a catalogue of its material that it distributes to educational institutions and book shops throughout Swahili speaking East Africa with a view to improving stakeholder's knowledge of available material.

Effective use

Access to good quality books is critical to achieving better educational outcomes but it won't guarantee it. Research indicates that moving from a teaching environment with almost no books to one where books are used to support teaching and learning requires new skills and confidence on the part of both teachers, students and ideally parents.

Schools also need support and training to ensure that they store and manage their book collections to best effect. Without a system for storing books and recording their use there's a real risk that the book collection will deteriorate or be misused.

Effective book provision in schools includes help for the school community to establish an agreed system for storing and retrieving the books and support for teachers in using books as part of a more participatory and child centre approach to teaching.

In the schools in which it works the Children's Book Project works with teachers and school principals to establish a school library and with teachers throughout the school to support them to use the school's new books in the classroom. Peer based teaching is used to encourage teachers to reflect on their own class room practice and to share what works in the classroom with each other.

Involving the community, changing policy and improving practice

All the evidence from educational researchers points to the fact that activities aimed at improving teaching quality and learning outcomes, including book provision and library creation, are more effective when parents, carers and community members know about and participate in those activities. These activities help build recognition in the local community for the importance of a rich literate environment, not just in the school but more broadly.

Training and support for teachers and parents to undertake budget monitoring conducted by Action Aid and its local partners has helped to improve the effectiveness of spending by school managers and principals, including in some areas on school books and teaching materials.

However small, projects aimed at supporting improved access to and use of books in schools also have a vital role to play in showing local communities and decision makers the difference that books and learning materials can make to teaching quality and learning outcomes. Monitoring and evaluating these initiatives must be done to build a more robust evidence base for our argument. As part of the implementation of our new strategic commitment to promote the quality of universal primary education by increasing the availability, improving the appropriateness and enhancing access to and the use of books and learning materials Book Aid International is currently developing a range of new projects and proposals with community based partners.

We are delighted to be working with the Children's Book Project for Tanzania supporting them to produce and distribute new children's books and to run a series of whole of school reading promotion events in collaboration with Tanzania's Book Development Council

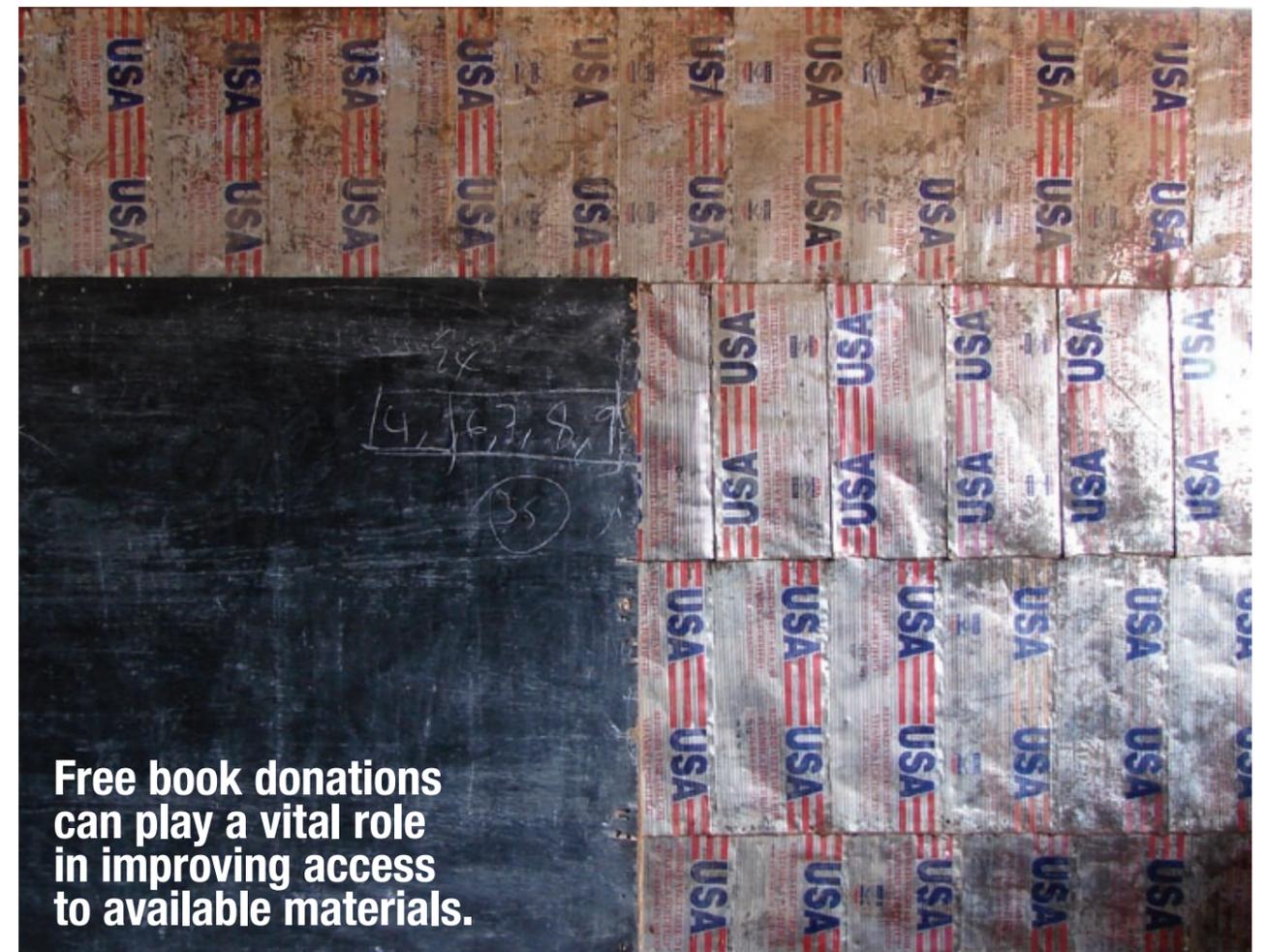
In Zambia we are working with Zambia's Open Community Schools Movement to support the provision of both text books and locally published children's readers, along with training and support for their teachers in using books more effectively in the classroom.

Also in Zambia we are working with the Forum of African Women Educationalists, supporting their mobile library project which visits schools that would otherwise not have access to the range and variety of reading material that the mobile library offers.

In Kenya we are developing a project with the Windle Trust Kenya aimed at improving access to text books, non fiction reference material and children's readers in primary schools in the Dadaab refugee camp. The project proposes to create libraries in three schools and to support the professional development of the school's largely untrained teacher workforce.

We're looking forward to implementing these projects, documenting our and our partner's experiences and sharing our collective learning with a view to helping shape the policy and practice of other stakeholders in the field.

Joseph O'Reilly is the Head of Policy & Programmes at Book Aid International.



Free book donations can play a vital role in improving access to available materials.

COUNTING DOWN

In addition to working with local partners across Africa to improve the quality of primary education, Book Aid International is actively engaged in lobbying donor governments in general and the British government in particular, to increase the extent and quality of contributions to education in the developing world.

Although progress has been made towards ensuring the right of every child to quality public primary education, there are still 72 million primary age children out of school. While enrolment has grown rapidly in both South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, one in nine of the world's children are still missing out on a basic education.

The UK Government has played a vital part in securing the global commitment to dramatically expand educational opportunities for primary-aged children. Its international policy leadership and dialogue, funding commitments and other support to developing countries has helped to secure significant improvements in educational provision in general and in primary school enrolment rates in particular. But a number of key challenges remain for the UK Department for International Development (DFID) if it is to be effective in playing its part in ensuring the target of universal primary completion by 2015, as expressed in Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2, and reaching gender parity in primary and secondary education, as expressed in MDG 3, are to be met. At the midway point to the MDGs there are less than 2 years left to get all primary-aged children enrolled in school if they are to complete a course of free, good quality primary education by 2015. 2008 is therefore a crucial year for DFID to take decisive action.

'The Final Countdown: achieving quality primary education for all by 2015', which has been produced by the Global Campaign for Education, of which Book Aid International is a member, evaluates DFID's promises and approach to meeting the education MDGs to date and recommends five actions DFID should take to live up to its commitment to achieving universal primary education by 2015. These are:

- _ Triple aid disbursement to education in the next two years in order to meet funding commitments;
- _ Ensure greater stability in aid flows to education;
- _ Increase investment in those countries furthest from achieving the education MDGs;
- _ Ensure that the development and annual review of national education policy effectively addresses issues of quality, equity and inclusion;
- _ Engage more with the macro economic context in partner countries to ensure that the delivery of quality education is not impeded by macroeconomic constraints.

'The Final Countdown' also provides a range of detailed strategies for achieving these recommendations.

The Directors of a range of development organisations that are part of the Global Campaign for Education, including Clive Nettleton from Book Aid International, met with the UK Minister for International Development Gillian Merron MP when the report was launched.

At that meeting the Minister promised the Campaign that a detailed overview of future education spending would be provided in an effort to demonstrate how the UK could meet its existing funding commitments. The Global Campaign for Education is continuing policy dialogue and discussion with the Department for International Development on each of its other asks and will meet again with the Minister later in 2008.

The Minister promised an overview of future education spending

A key policy and advocacy priority for both the Campaign and Book Aid International in the coming months will be how the UK and other donors can make a bigger contribution to supporting improvements to the quality of education being provided in primary schools throughout the developing world.

To download a copy of 'The Final Countdown' visit www.sendmyfriend.org, the website of the Global Campaign for Education in the UK.

BRINGING BOOKS TO LIFE



A new resource produced by Book Aid International will introduce teachers to the various ways in which books can be used to support teaching and learning in the class room.

'Bringing Books to Life' provides a simple and easy to understand overview of five key teaching methods that can be used by teachers when using books in the classroom, including:

- _ Reading aloud;
- _ Shared reading;
- _ Guided reading;
- _ Group reading; and
- _ Independent reading and writing.

Providing appropriate, high quality reading materials is key to supporting the acquisition of reading skills among primary age students but in order to get the most out of reading materials teachers have to be supported in using books effectively.

'Bringing books to life' seeks to share some simple strategies along with some inventive ideas for using books in the classroom, along with some basic information that will help the teacher understand the theory and experience that underpins each approach.

It has been written for both trained and untrained primary school teachers and students and trainee teachers in the hope that it will act as a springboard for further inspiration and reflection on how books are currently used in the classroom.

The material will be field tested in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda where Book Aid International is working with community based partners to provide schools with books, and teachers with training in school library development and reading promotion.

Following field testing and adaptation, local language versions of the resource will be produced and distributed to schools that currently receive books from Book Aid International or which are schools in which our local partners are working.

"I'm confident that 'Bringing books to life' will help teachers in community schools in Zambia to do exactly that. Building a culture in our schools in which books are used creatively is vital and teachers need support and inspiration to do that," said Harriet Sianjibu-Miyato the Director of Zambia Open Community Schools.

'Bringing books to life' is the first of a number of practical resources on book production, supply and use that we plan to produce as part of our efforts to support partners acquire the technical skills necessary to undertake more effective programming.

AFRICA'S THIRST FOR BOOKS

In December last year Doris Lessing was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. In her acceptance speech Lessing reflected on the situation in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, including the hunger for reading material. On the following pages we've reproduced an extract from that speech.

My mind is full of splendid memories of Africa which I can revive and look at whenever I want. How about those sunsets, gold and purple and orange, spreading across the sky at evening. How about butterflies and moths and bees on the aromatic bushes of the Kalahari? Or, sitting on the pale grassy banks of the Zambesi, the water dark and glossy, with all the birds of Africa darting about. Yes, elephants, giraffes, lions and the rest, there were plenty of those, but how about the sky at night, still unpolluted, black and wonderful, full of restless stars.

There are other memories too. A young African man, eighteen perhaps, in tears, standing in what he hopes will be his 'library'. A visiting American seeing that his library had no books, had sent a crate of them. The young man had taken each one out, reverently, and wrapped them in plastic. "But," we say, "these books were sent to be read, surely?" "No," he replies, "they will get dirty, and where will I get any more?"

This young man wants us to send him books from England to use as teaching guides.

"I only did four years in senior school," he says, "but they never taught me to teach."

I have seen a teacher in a school where there were no textbooks, not even a chalk for the blackboard. He taught his class of six to eighteen year olds by moving stones in the dust, chanting "Two times two is..." and so on. I have seen a girl, perhaps not more than twenty, also lacking textbooks, exercise books, biros, seen her teach the ABC by scratching the letters in the dirt with a stick, while the sun beat down and the dust swirled.

We are witnessing here that great hunger for education in Africa, anywhere in the Third World, or whatever we call parts of the world where parents long to get an education for their children which will take them out of poverty.

I would like you to imagine yourselves somewhere in Southern Africa, standing in an Indian store, in a poor area, in a time of bad drought. There is a line of people, mostly women, with every kind of container for water. This store gets a bowser of precious water every afternoon from the town, and here the people wait.

The Indian is standing with the heels of his hands pressed down on the counter, and he is watching a black woman, who

is bending over a wedge of paper that looks as if it has been torn from a book. She is reading Anna Karenin.

She is reading slowly, mouthing the words. It looks a difficult book. This is a young woman with two little children clutching at her legs. She is pregnant. The Indian is distressed, because the young woman's headscarf, which should be white, is yellow with dust. Dust lies between her breasts and on her arms. This man is distressed because of the lines of people, all thirsty. He doesn't have enough water for them. He is angry because he knows there are people dying out there, beyond the dust clouds. His older brother had been here holding the fort, but he had said he needed a break, had gone into town, really rather ill, because of the drought.

This man is curious. He says to the young woman, "What are you reading?"

"It is about Russia," says the girl.

"Do you know where Russia is?" He hardly knows himself.

The young woman looks straight at him, full of dignity, though her eyes are red from dust, "I was best in the class. My teacher said I was best."

The young woman resumes her reading. She wants to get to the end of the paragraph.

The Indian looks at the two little children and reaches for some Fanta, but the mother says, "Fanta makes them thirstier."

The Indian knows he shouldn't do this but he reaches down to a great plastic container beside him, behind the counter, and pours out two mugs of water, which he hands to the children. He watches while the girl looks at her children drinking, her mouth moving. He gives her a mug of water. It hurts him to see her drinking it, so painfully thirsty is she.

Now she hands him her own plastic water container, which he fills. The young woman and the children watch him closely so that he doesn't spill any.

She is bending again over the book. She reads slowly. The paragraph fascinates her and she reads it again.

"Varenka, with her white kerchief over her black hair, surrounded by the children and gaily and good-humouredly busy with them, and at the same visibly excited at the possibility of an offer of marriage from a man she cared

for, looked very attractive. Koznyshev walked by her side and kept casting admiring glances at her. Looking at her, he recalled all the delightful things he had heard from her lips, all the good he knew about her, and became more and more conscious that the feeling he had for her was something rare, something he had felt but once before, long, long ago, in his early youth. The joy of being near her increased step by step, and at last reached such a point that, as he put a huge birch mushroom with a slender stalk and up-curling top into her basket, he looked into her eyes and, noting the flush of glad and frightened agitation that suffused her face, he was confused himself, and in silence gave her a smile that said too much."

This lump of print is lying on the counter, together with some old copies of magazines, some pages of newspapers with pictures of girls in bikinis.

It is time for the woman to leave the haven of the Indian store, and set off back along the four miles to her village. Outside, the lines of waiting women clamour and complain. But still the Indian lingers. He knows what it will cost this girl – going back home, with the two clinging children. He would give her the piece of prose that so fascinates her, but he cannot really believe this splinter of a girl with her great belly can really understand it.

Why is perhaps a third of Anna Karenin here on this counter in a remote Indian store? It is like this.

I have seen a teacher in a school where there were no textbooks, not even a chalk for the blackboard



A certain high official, from the United Nations as it happens, bought a copy of this novel in a bookshop before he set out on his journey to cross several oceans and seas. On the plane, settled in his business class seat, he tore the book into three parts. He looked around his fellow passengers as he did this, knowing he would see looks of shock, curiosity, but some of amusement. When he was settled, his seat belt tight, he said aloud to whomever could hear, "I always do this when I've a long trip. You don't want to have to hold up some heavy great book." The novel was a paperback, but, true, it is a long book. This man is well used to people listening when he spoke. "I always do this, travelling," he confided. "Travelling at all these days, is hard enough." And as soon as people were settling down, he opened his part of Anna Karenin, and read. When people looked his way, curiously or not, he confided in them. "No, it really is the only way to travel." He knew the novel, liked it, and this original mode of reading did add spice to what was after all a well known book.

When he reached the end of a section of the book, he called the air hostess, and sent the chapters back to his secretary, travelling in the cheaper seats. This caused much interest,

condemnation, certainly curiosity, every time a section of the great Russian novel arrived, mutilated but readable, in the back part of the plane. Altogether, this clever way of reading Anna Karenin makes an impression, and probably no one there would forget it.

Meanwhile, in the Indian store, the young woman is holding on to the counter, her little children clinging to her skirts. She wears jeans, since she is a modern woman, but over them she has put on the heavy woollen skirt, part of the traditional dress of her people: her children can easily cling onto its thick folds. She sends a thankful look to the Indian, whom she knew liked her and was sorry for her, and she steps out into the blowing clouds.

The children are past crying, and their throats are full of dust. This was hard, oh yes, it was hard, this stepping, one foot after another, through the dust that lay in soft deceiving mounds under her feet. Hard, but she was used to hardship, was she not? Her mind was on the story she had been reading. She was thinking, She is just like me, in her white headscarf, and she is looking after children, too. I could be her, that Russian girl. And the man there, he loves her and will ask her

to marry him. She had not finished more than that one paragraph. Yes, she thinks, a man will come for me, and take me away from all this, take me and the children, yes, he will love me and look after me.

She steps on. The can of water is heavy on her shoulders. On she goes. The children can hear the water slopping about. Half way she stops, sets down the can. Her children are whimpering and touching it. She thinks that she cannot open it, because dust would blow in. There is no way she can open the can until she gets home.

"Wait," she tells her children, "wait."

She has to pull herself together and go on. She thinks, My teacher said there is a library, bigger than the supermarket, a big building and it is full of books. The young woman is smiling as she moves on, the dust blowing in her face. I am clever, she thinks. Teacher said I am clever. The cleverest in the school – she said I was. My children will be clever, like me. I will take them to the library, the place full of books, and they will go to school, and they will be teachers – my teacher told me I could be a teacher. My children will live far from here, earning money. They will live near the big library and enjoy a good life.

You may ask how that piece of the Russian novel ever ended up on that counter in the Indian store? It would make a pretty story. Perhaps someone will tell it. On goes that poor girl, held upright by thoughts of the water she will give her children once home, and drink a little of herself. On she goes, through the dreaded dusts of an African drought.

We are a jaded lot, we in our threatened world. We are good for irony and even cynicism. Some words and ideas we hardly use, so worn out have they become. But we may want to restore some words that have lost their potency.

We have a treasure-house of literature, going back to the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans. It is all there, this wealth of literature, to be discovered again and again by whoever is lucky enough to come upon it. A treasure. Suppose it did not exist. How impoverished, how empty we would be. We own a legacy of languages, poems, histories, and it is not one that will ever be exhausted. It is there, always.

We have a bequest of stories, tales from the old storytellers, some of whose names we know, but some not. The storytellers go back and back, to a clearing in the forest where a great fire burns, and the old shamans dance and sing, for our heritage of stories began in fire, magic, the spirit world. And that is where it is held, today.

Ask any modern storyteller and they will say there is always a moment when they are touched with fire, with what we like to call inspiration, and this goes back and back to the beginning of our race, to the great winds that shaped us and our world. The storyteller is deep inside every one of us. The story-maker is always with us. Let us suppose our world is ravaged by war, by the horrors that we all of us easily imagine. Let us suppose floods wash through our cities, the seas rise. But the storyteller will be there, for it is our imaginations which shape us, keep us, create us – for good and for ill. It is our stories that will recreate us, when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed. It is the storyteller, the dream-maker, the myth-maker, that is our phoenix, that represents us at our best, and at our most creative.

That poor girl trudging through the dust, dreaming of an education for her children, do we think that we are better than she is – we, stuffed full of food, our cupboards full of clothes, stifling in our superfluities?

I think it is that girl, and the women who were talking about books and an education when they had not eaten for three days, that may yet define us.

Born on 22 October 1919 to British parents in what was then known as Persia (now Iran) Lessing's family moved to a farm in what was then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1925. Lessing described her childhood on the farm in the first part of her autobiography, Under My Skin (1994) one of a range of books that dealt with Southern Africa. In 1945 Doris married Gottfried Lessing, a German-Jewish immigrant she had met in a Marxist group mainly concerned with the race issue. She became involved with the Southern Rhodesian Labour Party. She and Gottfried had a son, Peter. When the couple divorced in 1949, she took Peter and moved to London, quickly establishing herself as a writer. Between 1952 and 1956 she was a member of the British Communist Party and was active in the campaign against nuclear weapons. Because of her criticism of the South African regime, she was prohibited entry to that country between 1956 and 1995. After a brief visit to Southern Rhodesia in 1956, she was banned there as well for the same reason. In African Laughter: Four Visits to Zimbabwe (1992) she described going back in 1982 to the country where she had grown up.

As a gift to Lessing on being awarded the Nobel Prize her publisher Harper Collins donated 10,000 books to Book Aid International.

We are witnessing here that great hunger for education in Africa

OPINION: FAMILY MATTERS

Family focussed book provision and support could make a vital contribution to children's literacy and school preparedness argue Julia Eccleshare and Joseph O'Reilly.

The Education for All goals focus on the need to provide learning opportunities at every stage in life, from infancy to adulthood. Despite universal recognition of the fact that learning begins well before a child walks through the classroom door early childhood care and education (ECCE) interventions don't exist in much of the world.

The 2008 Education for All Global Monitoring Report stated that only 53% of the world's countries have ECCE programmes for children under three. Confined mostly to North America and Western Europe, Central Asia and Latin America, ECCE programmes are particularly lacking in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States.

Major government support for childcare services is unlikely to grow significantly in developing countries where perceived demand is low or has not yet reached a critical level. One viable ECCE strategy would be to support parents to provide better education to children in their care.

Family literacy – an approach which works through parents to improve the reading and writing of their children, as well as the improvement of the parent's literacy – has seen significant expansion in the industrialized world and could be adapted to help meet the needs of pre-school children and their parents in the developing world. Family literacy is a proven intergenerational approach that improves the literacy, language and life skills of both parents and children. The results of research into the impact of family literacy programs in industrialized countries include:

_ Children participating in family literacy programs are rated higher by their teachers than a randomly selected comparison group in terms of overall academic performance, motivation to learn, attendance, and likelihood of future success.

_ Adults who participate in family literacy often pursue educational and job related goals, such as earning a high school diploma or GED, learning English, and gaining computer skills.

Uniquely, adult participants in family literacy interventions also have opportunities to learn how to create a learning environment at home, regardless of their current literacy level and children receive age-appropriate instruction that prepares them for school and starts them on a path of lifelong learning.

One increasingly common family literacy intervention is the provision of age appropriate books to parents along with professional and peer support aimed at encouraging parents to share books with their babies and toddlers.

These programmes recognize that access to books is essential to reading development. Research into the impact of book provision projects indicate that:

_ The number of books in a child's home correlates significantly with reading scores.

_ The more types of reading materials there are in the home, the higher students score in reading proficiency.

_ Students who do more reading at home are better readers and have higher math scores.

The provision of age appropriate, context specific, local language books to parents as part of a broader effort to encourage sharing books with children could have the same benefits in developing countries. This would necessitate support for the local production of books for pre-schoolers, the supply of those books to families with young children and the implementation of strategies aimed at helping parents develop the confidence to play an active part in their children's learning and their own.

The multiple benefits of family focused book provision and reading promotion programmes pose huge opportunities for developing countries: more successful transitions to primary school, better early learning outcomes and improved completion rates will help to secure the investment in universal primary education.

Better skilled and confident parents who understand the role they can play in their children's learning and who have a better sense of how to advance their own will help reduce poverty and increase equality.

The case for expanding and improving ECCE in the developing world is unambiguous, providing families with books, along with support to use them effectively, offers a simple and scalable way of doing so.

Julia Eccleshare has spent her working life to date within the children's book sector as a critic, an editor, an author and a commentator. She is currently the Co-Director of the UK based Centre for Learning in Primary Education which runs various family literacy programmes and is children's editor of The Guardian.

Joseph O'Reilly is the Head of Policy & Programmes at Book Aid International.

Family learning improves literacy, language & life skills





We must build global momentum in support of literacy

On International Literacy Day, Book Aid International's Director Clive Nettleton urged the international community prioritise literacy.

More than halfway through the UN Literacy Decade launched in 2003, one in five adults does not have the elementary skills required to read a street sign, a child's book, a map, a newspaper, names on a voting ballot or instructions on a medicine bottle. A staggering 1 billion adults are illiterate, almost two thirds of whom are women, and even more adults are unable to read or write well enough to function effectively in society.

"Although governments worldwide have signed up to a UN goal that promises a 50% reduction in illiteracy by 2015, they are investing scandalously little in programmes to achieve it," said Mr Nettleton.

"The failure to invest in adult and community literacy in the developing world is also undermining progress in meeting all of the Millennium Development Goals.

"Literacy is the fertilizer needed for development and democracy to take root and grow. It is the invisible ingredient in any successful strategy for eradicating poverty: in recent years it has become all too invisible.

"The UK Government has lead the way in supporting primary education in the developing world. Building on the success of those efforts it should play a similar role in support of adult literacy. But to do so it needs to develop a literacy strategy, find the money to fund it and commit to working globally to generate the political will necessary to halve the number of illiterate adults by 2015."

For more information:
www.bookaid.org

Community literacy projects acknowledged by UNESCO

Literacy projects in Brazil, Ethiopia, South Africa and Zambia won the four UNESCO International Literacy Prizes this year.

The UNESCO International Reading Association Literacy Prize was awarded to the Curitiba City Council's programme 'Alfabetizando com saude' (Brazil). This programme stood out for its success over the years and the genuine collaboration with and between the Health and Education Municipal bodies of the City of Curitiba.

The UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize, which was last year won by Book Aid International partner the Children's Book Project, went to the People's Action Forum programme 'Reflect and HIV/AIDS' (Zambia). Recognizing the potential of women's literacy in the prevention and treatment of diseases, particularly HIV and AIDS, the 'Reflect and HIV/AIDS' programme is remarkable for its innovative cultural programmes in mother tongue languages used to reach rural women.

One of the two UNESCO Confucius Prizes for Literacy was awarded to Operation Upgrade (South Africa), for the 'Kwanibela Project', continuing the Operation's 40-year history of commitment and change. Its focus on rural women, HIV/AIDS awareness, family nutrition and income, as well as its promising results and innovative elements, provide a true model for other countries.

The other UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy was awarded to the Adult and Non-Formal Education Association in Ethiopia (ANFEAE) programme, 'Literacy Plus' (Ethiopia). Outstanding in its community-based approach to teaching business, conflict resolution and disease prevention, and for its writing workshops for the newly literate, it provides a model of innovation and self-sustainability.

For more information:
www.unesco.org



Tanzania to host Pan-African Reading Conference

Teachers, teacher educators, lecturers, adult literacy instructors, researchers, librarians, writers, publishers, book sellers, community leaders, policy makers and readers from all over Africa and beyond will converge in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania in 2009 for the 6th Pan-African Reading for All Conference.

Organized by the International Reading Association's International Development Committee in Africa (IRA/IDCA) in collaboration with the Reading Association of Tanzania (CCHAUTA) and Children's Book Project for Tanzania (CBP) the conference will take place from August 10th – 14th, 2009.

Under the theme: 'Literacy for Community Based Socio-economic Transformation and Development' participants share their experiences in literacy and reading promotion initiatives and practices from different countries and present, examine, analyze, and seek ways of surmounting the various challenges preventing successful transmission of literacy through formal and non-formal systems of education.

The Pan-African Conference has become an important literacy event on the African Continent providing platform for policy makers in government and the donor community to interface with literacy professionals at all levels and researchers to share vital knowledge and information on appropriate ways and strategies of delivering literacy and reading skills to the community at the grass root level.

In countries where the conference has been held a number of positive developments have been registered ranging from rapid growth and development of community libraries, adult literacy classes, children's reading tents, emergence of reading and writing clubs in schools and communities to positive policy pronouncements in favor of the book sector and publishing industry.

Book Aid International will be at the conference and will be working with our partners in the lead up to it to maximise the benefits of the conference for them.

For more information:
www.reading.org

BookLinks

BookLinks is Book Aid International's networking newsletter for individuals and organisations working to create more literate societies in the developing world.

Book Aid International

Book Aid International increases access to books to support literacy, education and development in sub-Saharan Africa.

Book Aid's contact details can be found on the back cover of this newsletter.

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