

PROJECT TITLE: A MOBILE LIBRARY AND OUTDOOR READERS HUB FOR CHILDREN

PROJECT INITIATOR: Edem Dorothy Ossai

PROJECT DESCRIPTION/SUMMARY:

The Mobile Library and Outdoor Readers Hub, is a unique strategy to address the lack of school or other local libraries for children (both in-school and out-of-school) living in poor communities and districts. It is designed to operate during the weekend, on Saturdays. Every Saturday a specially equipped van will convey a small library of storybooks and early literacy materials into one poor community (which lacks a local library), in order for interested children and teenagers in such areas to have book reading access. As part of the mobile library, the van will also convey a small collection of foldable chairs, floor mats and foldable gazebos which, upon arrival in the host community, will be assembled into an outdoor reader's hub, where an average of 100 children and teenagers can gather to read exciting books and participate in other hub activities such as special book readings, quizzes, poetry recitals etc. The mobile library is designed to operate a 4-hour reading session and another 2-hour general session for other constructive non-reading activities. In addition it will operate a book lending club in each community visited, which will allow avid and interested early readers to borrow books and return to an appointed Community book club Rep upon completion.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The literacy and early education levels of children in socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Nigeria is low. A 2013 UNESCO report¹ indicates that most children living in poor communities suffer greatly from deprivation of basic education and organized learning. Governmental education and literacy programmes have failed to provide early childhood education as well as family and community learning opportunities for children living in such communities, particularly female children. This has resulted in several drawbacks including an absent reading culture amongst many children. In addition vast studies show that an alarming population of youths in Nigeria lack access to 21st century relevant competencies and are at high risk of unemployment, teenage pregnancy, poverty and criminal engagement. A major factor behind this has been traced to the lack of a proper educational foundation and the absence of a reading culture. Still in connection, there are limited public school libraries, local libraries, or even community learning centres across the entire Country. Such facilities serve as incubators for knowledge and creative ideas and are necessary to engineer a positive and innovative youth culture.

PROJECT GOAL/OBJECTIVE:

The objective is to promote early literacy and a reading culture amongst children living in poor and disadvantaged communities; improve the general knowledge capacity and competitiveness of poor and disadvantaged children, as well as to foster healthy use of community recreational spaces.

PROJECT TARGET:

The Project targets poor children especially girls who lack access to qualitative educational opportunities and relevant exposure which comes from access to books. Such children include those from families with low income; who attend poor community public schools or who don't attend any formal school programme at all. Each Saturday an estimated one hundred (100) children/teenagers will be provided access to books and literacy building activities. The target communities are ones described as poor or disadvantaged which suffer limited social infrastructure such as good roads,

¹ "Mother and Child Education Programme" (MCEP). Country Profile: Nigeria. Available online www.unesco.org/uii/litbase/?menu=9&programme=142

electricity connection, sound public schools, good housing, sanitation, area security, standard health clinics, youth centres or a public library. The communities involved will experience the Mobile Library/Outdoor Readers Hub at least once every 2 months on rotation.

PROJECT VALUE PROPOSITION:

1. This Project is premised on the fact that certain initial conditions must exist in the early life of a child which are a prerequisite to owning a relevant mindset and appropriate skills for societal contribution and 21st century relevance. Crucial amongst such initial conditions is an early reading culture. By Introducing books to poor and socially disadvantaged children, the Project will therefore foster an early reading culture, basic knowledge, global trend awareness, critical reasoning abilities, as well as a general competitiveness which otherwise the backgrounds of such children do not foster.
2. By providing access to books which in turn expose the mind to ideas and high ambitions, the Project will further impact to reduce issues such as teen pregnancy, crime and low innovation or enterprise development amongst the youth.
3. Not only will the mobile libraries address the problem of limited libraries and community centres, but the Outdoor readers Hub will further serve as an intervention to combat idleness, gang/motor park loitering and criminal vice amongst children living in poor communities.
4. It will also introduce a new model of constructive group recreation & group usage of outdoor community spaces as demonstrated through the outdoor readers' hub & activities.

PROJECT FUNDING SOURCES

Apart from any initial funding, to ensure its sustenance, the mobile library will seek and attract funding from corporate organizations and brand owners that have products and services targeted at children, through advertising. Such companies and brand owners may advertise their products or services on our Mobile van for a fee and also sponsor branded items at our "outdoor reader's hub" such as gazebos, roll-up posters or souvenirs and refreshments). Through such sponsorship and advertising charges the Project costs such as secretarial services, transportation, vehicle maintenance, personnel costs etc will be met. In addition, the collection of books for the library will be sustained by constant periodic sourcing through community donor channels. We shall visit publishing organizations and request for children books donations. We shall also issue calls and announcements to members of the public through local radio, television and social media channels, inviting book donations and early literacy materials from private individuals' collections, writers associations and other concerned groups.

POTENTIAL FOR SCALING UP

The Project is designed to take off in five disadvantaged communities in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. However with wider resources, the Project has huge capacity for scaling-up such that rather than a visit to just one community each Saturday, in the next phase a small network of Mobile Libraries and outdoor reader's hub shall operate simultaneously in at least 5 poor communities each Saturday. Ultimately, operating at an optimal scale, a state-wide network of mobile Libraries and Outdoor Reader's Hubs shall be visible each Saturday across EVERY poor community within each state's coverage area. This could range from 20 to 30 mobile libraries and outdoor reader's hubs assembled each weekend. In view of the widespread nature of the root problem in the Country, the Mobile Library Project is capable of being replicated across all the 36 States of Nigeria including the Federal Capital Territory with similar derived impact and benefits.