

# The Bagamoyo Community Reading Tent as Part of Reader Development and Reading Promotion Efforts in Tanzania

*Hassan N. Nsubuga*

**I**n Tanzania, a number of organizations work together to promote a reading culture among children and adults. Notable among these organizations are:

- Tanzania Library Services (TLS), which operate a nationwide public library service (covering 18 regional centres, 12 districts and 2 divisions);
- Children's Book Project (CBP);
- Book Development Council (BDC, or BAMVITA in Kiswahili);
- Tanzania Library Association (TLA).

Over the years, book festivals and reading tents have been organized in various regional/district centres in Tanzania, the purpose being to stimulate and promote a reading culture in the country. The Bagamoyo Community Reading tent, held for two days in 2002 (5 and 6 June), is one such reading programme run annually.

Bagamoyo is a small township with a population of some 32,000 inhabitants. It is situated 70 km along the coast north of Dar es Salaam. At one time, and for a brief period, it was the capital of Tanganyika under German rule. Now it is both a historic and tourist town, with a lot to show from the past centuries. Bagamoyo is among the poorest districts in Tanzania, with a low literacy rate and a low level of development. Recently, TLS, in collaboration with the local district council, established a district library in one of the old buildings. Funding assistance to renovate the building so that it could be used as a district library came from the UNESCO National Commission. The library has become a centre that people of different age groups can visit and read books for information, knowledge and leisure. So the idea of conducting a community reading tent at the newly established Bagamoyo District Library, coupled with the provision of Kiswahili books, was geared at bringing change to the inhabitants of Bagamoyo and at promoting a reading culture among a people who had previously known no library services.

## **Objectives**

The Bagamoyo Community Reading Tent, jointly organized by TLS and BAMVITA, had the following objectives:

- To promote and cultivate a reading culture among the members of the Bagamoyo community.
- To provide the Bagamoyo rural community with the opportunity to have close and easy access to books and other literature available in the District Library.
- To promote interest in books among the people of the Bagamoyo community, both young and old.

## **Funding**

Funding for the community reading tent at Bagamoyo was made available to TLS by BAMVITA. The amount provided for this activity totalled US\$1,500 (equivalent to 1,450,630 Tanzania shillings at that time). TLS administered this fund and used it to meet various obligations for the reading tent programme, including the purchase of books and stationery, hire of tents and chairs, publicity and contingencies.

## **Mobilization**

With the help of the Bagamoyo District local authority, up to 70 participants were mobilized to participate in the community reading tent. The participants ranged from the ages of 10 to 95. Invitations at the local level were sent to those who had shown interest in participating in the community reading tent at Bagamoyo. It was launched by the District Executive Director and closed by the District Commissioner on the second day.

## **Activities**

### *Reading for leisure*

In reading for leisure, each participant was given an opportunity to select a book of their choice from a range of books they had selected with much interest, and to read it. At the end of the day some participants were able to re-tell to each other the stories they had read, while others inquired about the meanings of words they had found difficult when reading the story they had chosen. The difficulty encountered by some readers was solved by their being guided to the glossary at the end of a storybook, and the participants then enjoyed their reading more.

### *Story-telling*

Another activity conducted in the community reading tent was story-telling. Participants of different ages found it amusing to re-tell stories that they had read in the morning. Some stories were folk-tales, which were re-told especially by the older participants, who were trying to recount stories of the past to the younger generation.

### *Reading competition*

On the first day it was difficult for the whole group to participate in the competition for various reasons, including lack of enough time. Only 15 interested participants were finally chosen to compete in this activity. Each competitor was given one selected text to read, and a mark was awarded based on fluency, punctuation, syllable, pronunciation, and intonation.

The competition produced three winners, all women. This raised some complaints amongst the male competitors, wondering how it was that none of their group had won. The organizers and judges of the reading competition had to explain to them that judgement was done fairly and that each competitor had an equal chance of winning, irrespective of whether they were male or female.

On the second day, the competitors were divided into groups – one for the elderly and another for young people. The elderly group produced one winner and the young group produced two winners. Though this arrangement was done purposely to avoid or at least minimize the complaints from the elderly of the previous day, it coincidentally happened again that all the winners were women.

Finally, all the winners from the two days' of competition were awarded prizes of two Kiswahili storybooks each. This was done deliberately as a way of encouraging them to continue reading books that provide education, information and leisure. In addition, every adult participant – not just the winners – was given a book on HIV/AIDS, and school children were given picture books as well as easy readers – all donated by TLS.

### *Other activities*

Apart from the reading competitions, time was also allocated for indoor games such as the local *bao*, which is played on a chess-like board with 64 (sometimes 32) holes for squares, and seeds or pebbles for counters. This *bao* game is very popular among the elderly as it is based on mathematics and deep thinking and is a good relaxation and pastime activity. One reason why time was allocated to *bao* was to train the



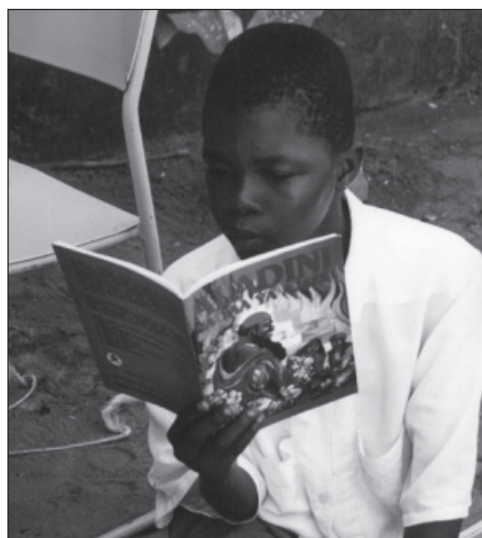
*An old lady reads a storybook.*



*Old people enjoy reading storybooks.*



*A lady reads a storybook to her blind friend.*



*A schoolchild enjoys reading a story-book.*

participants to plan their time properly for their activities other than reading.

As for the school children, they sang some songs and recited poems, all relating to the benefits of reading and of education in general.

### **Observations**

When evaluating the events of the two days of the community reading tent held for the first time in Bagamoyo, it can be safely said that the whole exercise was very successful. The turnout was quite satisfactory, even on the part of the elderly. The community itself was well represented, participants ranging from children of 10 years of age to older people of over 90. Even disabled people were represented. For example, there was a blind lady with another lady acting as a guide who read some storybooks to her.

Moreover, the community reading tent at Bagamoyo revealed that women there had shown the greatest interest in reading by coming out winners in the reading competition, and that men, especially the elderly, had shown the greatest interest in story-telling. This fact certainly cannot be taken to represent all other communities, but at least this is what was revealed at Bagamoyo. Perhaps it is a challenge to be followed up in other communities in future reading tents.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

- The promotion of a reading culture must go hand-in-hand with the provision of relevant books to the community. The community reading tent held at Bagamoyo has shown that there is a great interest in reading among people of various age groups – but only if efforts are undertaken to provide interesting and appropriate books for them.
- Bagamoyo town, itself a historic town, has vast resources, both human and material. The human resources include the elderly people (most of whom have links to the past, including the slave trade). They are in a position to narrate historical matters, which, if carefully collected, could be recorded and preserved at the District Library to benefit not only the present generation but future ones as well.
- The interest in reading shown by the visually handicapped participant at the community reading tent shows that there is a need to establish library services to cater for such disadvantaged members of society. Fortunately, TLS has realized this, hence the launching

of a library for the blind recently at the National Central Library in Dar es Salaam.

- There should be regular readership surveys so that those involved in the production and distribution of appropriate reading materials at different levels can ensure that their activities better satisfy evolving reading needs.

# The Children's Interactive Programme at Mbale Public Library, Uganda

*Ruth Mwayi*

**M**bale Public Library is located in Eastern Uganda and serves the municipality of Mbale and the surrounding sub-counties. The library, like all public libraries in Uganda, has recently been passed over to the control of the local authority, Mbale Municipal Council. However the Uganda Public Libraries Board retains responsibility for:

- development of national policies on public libraries, in consultation with the local government agencies;
- issuing advice, standards, norms, work manuals and guidelines in respect of library premises, staffing, stock, information processing, storage and retrieval;
- inspection to ensure that libraries conform to national policies, guidelines and standards;
- provision of technical, professional and advisory services in the field of library and information services, including carrying out advocacy at the local and international level in matters relating to library and information services.

The library serves the district of Mbale, which has a population of 958,100 (year 2000 estimate). Records show that there are 31,195 regular users of the library, not including casual users who drop in once in a while to browse and read newspapers. Total primary school enrolment in the district is 331,100 (year 2000 estimate) and, of these, 36% are in the upper primary section, i.e. classes P5 to P7, aged between 10 and 14.

The library occupies rented premises and the space is inadequate to cater for the growing number of adult and child users. The children's section occupies a very small section of the library and this has greatly affected the growth of services to children. The librarian has, however, been eager to develop a reading and information-seeking culture among children so that they can grow with it into adulthood.

Because of the limited space, lack of furniture in the children's section, and the need to avoid inconveniencing other library users, the staff, with

support and backing of some schools around, started an interactive children's programme at the library. The programme runs every Saturday, from midday to 4.00 p.m. – that is, at a time when the library has closed to the other (adult) users. Children are encouraged to use the library during the normal opening hours of the library but, in addition, special programmes are arranged for them for Saturday afternoons.

### **Aims and objectives of the programme**

To provide children with an opportunity to access information resources that enhance their awareness of the environment in which they live, and to develop in them an interest in reading and using library resources.

### **Elements of the programme**

#### *Activities*

- Story sessions, which include group reading from a selected book, listening to readings or audio-tapes, as well as story-telling, including folk-tales.
- Training in information search techniques, which is done both in groups and as individuals. This exposes children to the library stock.
- Showing educative and informative documentaries (films), which are discussed afterwards.
- Independent reading, sometimes using guided questions.
- Hosting guest speakers, who talk to the children and answer questions on topics of interest selected by the children, including career guidance by professionals in different fields.
- Games, songs and plays.

#### *Target group*

The programme is for children in upper primary schools in the municipality of Mbale. Children in the lower primary schools are served by a school book-box service. The book boxes contain 150–200 books each, and the teachers at the respective schools are expected to help their pupils use the books.

#### *Reading materials*

The programme uses books, audio-tapes and videotapes stocked in the library. More are sometimes borrowed from other sources to add variety and meet users' demands.

Currently, the library has to borrow equipment to play back the audio- and videotapes since it does not have its own.

### **Promotion and publicity**

This is done through the following:

- Sensitization visits by the librarian to schools.
- Regular interaction between the librarian, the local library committee members and the policy-makers. Some of the library committee members are influential at the municipality and district level, and they are the link between the general public (users) and the library administration.
- Book fairs are organized annually during the National Book Week Festival. A children's reading tent is always part of the activities of the Book Week Festival, and these tents are hosted at a different primary school every year so as to take services nearer to the people.
- The media is used to publicize the activities of the library and of the Book Week Festival, as well as the children's reading tent in particular.

### **Implications for staff**

Library staff have used their skills in working with children; some have learnt skills on the job. Sometimes schoolteachers offer their expertise to run sessions, and guest speakers are always qualified and experienced people in their fields.

### **Attendance**

Only schools in Mbale municipality participate in the programme at the moment. Of the 24 schools in the municipality, with a population of over 6,000 pupils in upper primary, only four schools have taken advantage of the arrangement.

The programme is jointly organized by the schools and the library. The schools organize the children and bring them to the library in school groups. Each school brings 30 pupils per session, making a total attendance each Saturday of 120.

### **Costs and source of funding**

Most of the materials used are acquired through donations and most come through the Public Libraries Board.

Children have had to be charged a nominal fee of 200 Uganda

shillings (US\$0.12) per child per Saturday to cater for the facilitation of guest speakers. This money is collected by the respective schools.

### **Outcomes**

- The programme is very popular with the children and the schools.
- Children have been able to develop more interest in the library and to borrow more and more books for reading at home.
- More people have become aware of the existence of the library and its benefits. This includes both children and adults (parents).

### **Problems faced**

- Children, once mobilized, become avid readers. With just over 4,000 children's books in stock, there is need for continual replenishment of stock to satisfy the demand. The library does not have a sound revenue base for this.
- The library does not have electronic equipment to enable it to integrate ICT resources fully. Even simple equipment such as a radio, television, projector or VCR are still lacking. They are currently being borrowed whenever they are needed.
- The physical space and furniture is inadequate to cater for the whole child population in the town. Numbers have to be limited in order to fit into available facilities.
- The inadequate space also makes the diversification and expansion of activities difficult.

### **Future of the programme**

There are plans to start an outreach programme to take similar services to other areas on the outskirts of the town. However, the library will need funds to do this.

The programme is not generating any funds. However, it is hoped that the Municipal Council will support the funding of a library development project, already submitted. Services to children form a component of the project.

# Reading Programmes of Zambia Library Service

*Namukale Chifunda*

**Z**ambia Library Service (ZLS) came into existence in 1962 as a department of the Ministry of Education. It is a public library system that provides library and information services all over Zambia through provincial and branch libraries and library centres. It also assists and promotes school and community libraries.

## **Mission statement**

To inculcate a culture of reading and using information for personal and national development through the provision of library and information services throughout the country.

## **Objectives**

- To establish and manage a public library network throughout Zambia.
- To establish and co-ordinate libraries in learning institutions in Zambia.
- To provide timely and relevant information in various formats.
- To assist other organizations providing library and information services to the public.

## **Reading programmes**

ZLS has long played a role in promoting children's reading through the children's sections of libraries; the service has also been instrumental in promoting school libraries throughout the country and in training teacher-librarians.

ZLS noted a problem of low reading levels among primary-school children. The problem of poor reading levels in Zambian primary schools had been worrying authorities in the Ministry of Education, parents and the general public for some time. This has been attributed to, among other things, a lack of exposure to books and reading materials. A good number

of schools in Zambia have no libraries. It is hoped that reading programmes such as the Children's Reading Tent and the Children's Reading Competition will expose children to books.

The level of illiteracy in developing countries is apparently higher among women than among men; this is especially so in the countries of Africa. It limits the participation of women in development projects and programmes, because they cannot access important information. The ability to read gives individuals access to a wide body of knowledge. It was for this reason that ZLS started women's corners in its libraries.

The general objective of the reading programmes is to inculcate a reading culture in women and in children at a tender age. More specific objectives are:

- to provide an attractive environment in which children can enjoy reading;
- to demonstrate to teacher-librarians how their school libraries should be run;
- to encourage children to use libraries;
- to allow more children to experience the enjoyment of reading;
- to make appropriate reading materials available to women and young mothers in a conducive environment;
- to encourage young women who drop out of school, together with older women, to continue using the library services available in order to maintain and improve their education, health and economic status.

### **Children's reading programmes**

In 1997, ZLS started a reading programme that offers a Children's Reading Competition and a Children's Reading Tent. The programme aims at encouraging children to develop an interest in reading, thereby drawing them closer to the library in order for them to supplement knowledge gained from their teachers. It is intended that the children will develop a sense of independent research, which will prove useful later in their lives as they grasp issues and develop survival skills in a competitive world. The target group covers nursery level through to Grade Nine.

### **Children's Reading Competition**

The competition is in the form of a 'readathon'. Children write a short report on the books that they have read during a given time, and prizes are awarded to those who read the most. The competition might also be

of a form in which children are asked to read a lot of different books and, on the last day, the panel of judges selects the books that each grade has to read aloud. They set a number of criteria that a good reader should have, i.e. pronunciation of words, gesture, speed, intonation and pitch. Each criterion is allotted five marks, giving a possible total of 25 marks from each judge.

### *Examples*

A small reading competition was run in conjunction with Zambia's National Library Week in 1999, in the form of a readathon. The competition was for pupils in Grade One through to Grade Nine. It required pupils to write a short report on the books that they had read during that time, and prizes were awarded to those who had read the most. These prizes were parcels of books, including dictionaries, given by Oxford University Press, and were presented at provincial celebrations during National Library Week.

A reading competition also took place during National Library Week in Solwezi on the final day of the Reading Tent in 2000. Five schools took part in the competition: Rodwell Mwepu Basic, Solwezi Modern, Kikombe Basic, Kimsala Basic and Solwezi Basic schools. The 27 participants were divided into two groups: Grades One to Three, and Grades Four to Six. There were prizes for the best three in each group.

The reading competition started in the afternoon. The morning had been set aside for the participating pupils to prepare, and most of them were engrossed in different books, since they did not know which books would be used for the competition. The reading of the books was enjoyable for all, as it caused the pupils who were watching to laugh and notice the mistakes that their friends were making whilst reading.

There was a panel of five judges, who awarded marks out of a possible total of 125. In the first group, the top prize went to a Grade Two pupil with 97 marks, the second prize to a Grade Two pupil with 87 marks and the third to a Grade Three pupil with 77 marks. In the second group, the top prize was awarded to a Grade Five pupil with 110 marks, the second to a Grade Six pupil with 108 marks and the third to a Grade Five pupil with 104 marks.

### **Children's Reading Tent**

This is a tent that offers library facilities to children in schools as well as to those who are not in school. It aims to attract attendance by children so as to encourage them to read on their own and to develop a keen



*Drawing.*



*Story-telling.*



*Netball.*



*Reading.*



*Painting.*



*Winners of the  
reading competition.*

interest in reading. The programme has proved inspirational in introducing children to the thrills of reading. It has also encouraged interaction among teachers, parents and librarians. This three-way process enhances better and improved information provision to the child.

The idea of a reading tent came from a member of staff who attended the Zimbabwe International Book Fair and saw such a tent in operation. It was introduced in Lusaka in 1997 and in 1998 spread to Choma in Southern Province and Solwezi in Northern Province.

Activities that take place in the tents include: story reading; story-telling; making flowers from toilet tissue; cutting out paper dolls; colouring with paints, felt-tip pens and wax crayons; drawing and painting; and playing with Plasticine. Outside the tent, ball games, team games and skipping take place.

### **Women's Reading Corners**

Women's reading corners were designed to promote reading among women in Zambia. Pilot projects from 1998 to date are being carried out in four provincial libraries at Choma, Mansa, Mongu and Solwezi. The corners are run by ZLS librarians, with the assistance of Women's Corner Committees.

#### *Strategies*

Information is disseminated by:

- providing reading books and other printed materials;
- making practical demonstrations;
- assisting women with reading; and
- collaborating with other organizations dealing with women's affairs.

#### *Major constraints*

The major constraints experienced by the committees are:

- lack of appropriate reading materials, especially those written in Zambian languages;
- lack of funds (there is a need for money to carry out demonstrations as this consolidates the theory);
- lack of incentives;
- lack of transport; and
- a lack of skills on the part of the ZLS staff and the women's committees to deal with women issues.

*Example*

During the official launch in Mansa, it was stated that it was only when women were empowered politically, socially, culturally and economically that their potential could be realized.

The women made five visits. At Musumali village, the Women's Corner Executive talked to the headman and made an appointment to meet the women of the village. The Women's Corner could not make it to the first visit because of a lack of transport and funds. On the second visit to the same village, a lot of women attended. The Women's Corner women carried out demonstrations on health and taught the women about human rights. The village women showed interest in visiting the library but later stopped because there were no Zambian (in this case Bemba) language books. At Kabuta village, demonstrations were made to girls who had dropped out of school. No follow-up was made.