

## **The Caterpillar Project**

### **Report by Ian Stringer Lead Officer**

#### **The Beginning**

At IFLA World Library Conference in Berlin 2003 I was acting chair of the mobile library section when we received proposals to help with an idea for supplying books to rural African communities. There were about four different ideas but the universal favourite was dubbed *the Caterpillar Project* as it envisaged using a folding box shelf system to transport books to isolated communities. The term *Caterpillar Project* was coined from an existing project in Kenya. Sam Culphe and June Baatjes worked together on the project, which was tested in the North (Kenya) and South (rural South Africa) areas of Africa.

So a small sub-group was formed for the project and a bid made for IFLA funding to do a pilot scheme. The group included, myself from the UK, Ruth Ornholt from Norway and June Baatjes

#### **Funding**

Ian Stringer and Ruth Ornholt did a short training programme on mobile libraries for Irish librarians in both Dublin and Belfast. We raised about USD1000 towards the project, some of which was used to get June Baatjes to Ireland.

In Ireland after each session, June gave the delegates a summary of our project. She presented the case, with passion and was unexpectedly rewarded with the donation of books to go with the finished product. This was from one of the delegates who had connections with a Catholic charity.

I had accurate drawings done by my son and at IFLA 2004 these were shown to the group and June gave a personal presentation on progress in South Africa.

June got the designs built by local labour and showed them to various bodies. In Oslo at the 2005 conference, the IFLA public libraries section raised more money for the project.

#### **The design**

The Caterpillar Book Box is a folding case, which is 1.8m high on castors for ease of movement, and the shelves accommodate approximately 100 books fuelled by a crate depot of approximately 500 books to replenish the stock in circulation. The first box has been used by an Adult Basic Education group who are using it at

night, and a very small school group in the daytime.

### **The Pilot Scheme**

The pilot scheme was located in Koekenaap, which is a very poor farming area where 60% of the adults are illiterate and only 30% of nine year olds can read. They are too poor to travel the 20 miles to the nearest library. The adults are nomadic as they earn a living during the grape season, which lasts only three months a year before they move in search of other work.

The Caterpillar Book Box is the only access that this community has to books. The children have been very excited by the existence of the first Caterpillar Book Box, which bears the IFLA logo.

It is the aim of the Public Library Section is to seed fund a further 20 Caterpillar Book Boxes to be placed in rural communities in Kenya, Swaziland and Malawi and that they should contain not only books but health information on HIV and AIDS. The work will be done by local carpenters who will make the boxes to the specification supplied and the local communities selected with the assistance of Librarians and Information workers in the countries selected.

June Baatjes advised in 2007 'I have been working for the minister of Education in the Western Cape since June. He was very impressed with the Caterpillar Project. He wanted one in every class and I said let's start small. The Caterpillar has undergone a metamorphosis. I have developed the BABY CAT as I call it. Twenty of these very practical Caterpillars were launched in February and given to pre-schools attached to primary schools.

The one I developed according to our original design is at TONKO BOSMAN in the Stellenbosch Wine farming district.

I was given sufficient money for 20 BABY CATS and I wish to give 23 of the new streamlined version, which has a white interactive board as well, to the Adult Basic Education and Training Centres (ABET) where adult learners, especially farm workers learn to become literate.'

Following our advertisement on the website, we had some replies, which the committee sorted out into genuine applications and then made a choice on merit. The successful applicant was Burkino Faso. Thanks to a good proposal by librarian Oumou Ouedraogo. She received the drawings and has submitted the following report

The public library section of IFLA granted money to help with the framework of the installation of libraries in the rural communes of Burkina Faso

#### Evolution and achievements

Education for all is the master key for access to knowledge; however, we noted that in Burkina Faso the majority of the villages do not have libraries. The villagers do not have the means to reach libraries. The Caterpillar project is a means for them to reach books. The first library is established with the Secondary School of Dapelgo, a rural district located 35 km from the town of Ouagadougou. Using the books is free; the children do not have the means to pay for a subscription library.

The inauguration of the library took place on February 7 in the presence of local chiefs and of the population of Dapelgo who are delighted and they testified to the need for such a work. The books were bought by taking account of the expressed needs. We initially carried out the construction of the Caterpillar cases by the carpenters by taking account of the model describes by Ian Stringer. Then we bought the books, which meet the needs of the population.

Finally, we proceeded to the provision of the case of books, which was received with enthusiasm. The population testified that it is a relief for them. Their pupils will be able to improve their knowledge at the school. It was also an occasion for us to make a display on hygiene and cleansing which constitutes a main issue in a rural environment. From February to June, the case is at the disposal of the pupils and as from August, it will be at the disposal of all the population.

The third phase of the project is now in Ghana . Lorraine Jacjkon of New Jersey USA is leading this phase. This is her submission

#### Project:

Making books available for adults and children living in remote villages in Ghana, Africa.

#### Method:

Using the Public Library Division's Caterpillar Program and the circulating Presbyterian church pastors to deliver the needed materials.

#### Specifics:

The Presbytery of West Akyem of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana

and the Presbytery of New Brunswick, New Jersey have a Covenant to work in partnership with one another.

Specifics:

Last year I was a member of an American Study Group that visited Ghana to strengthen that relationship. I stayed with Rev. Daniel Oboe-Wereba and traveled with him as he visited the surrounding communities visiting his parishioners. As soon as they learned I was a Librarian, many of the villagers requested books and other school materials. I believe that the Public Library Division's Caterpillar Program could provide the needed materials that are so needed for this district of Ghana.

My proposal is that we work with the Presbyterian Church, specifically with Rev. Wereba, who visits his congregations on a regular basis ministering to their needs. Using a local lumber mill in the Oda District (whose owner is an officer of the Church whom I met on my visit) the portable library shelves will be constructed. I, along with the Ghanaian librarians I met this past summer, would equip these units with a mixture of books of all types.

The Minister would then take these collections to the outlying villages so the villagers of all ages can make their selections. He'll then fill the shelves with other materials and take them to the next congregations. The next time he visits (about once a month), they can exchange the titles for new materials. Rev. Wereba is responsible for four churches in his district along with the city center church in Oda, so these collections can serve a large number of people.

Lorraine Jackson