



Outreach to Vulnerable Youth in Africa through Partnerships for Innovative Programming: The Lubuto Library Project

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160 — *Surprising Library!* — Public Libraries, Libraries for Children and Young Adults and School Libraries and Resource Centers

Abstract:

The Lubuto Library Project is an innovative international development organization whose mission is to enrich the lives of vulnerable and out-of-school children and youth in sub-Saharan Africa. The organization constructs indigenously-styled open-access libraries stocked with a comprehensive collection of well-chosen books that serve as safe havens and are the center for Lubuto's programs, which offer discovery and joy through reading, music, art, drama, computers and other activities. Partnership with Government and community organizations that host Lubuto Libraries is a critical element of the libraries' success, impact and sustainability. Lubuto's innovative and impactful programs include LubutoMentoring, LubutoArts; LubutoLiteracy and LubutoStorytime.

The Lubuto Library Project, Inc. (www.Lubuto.org) is an innovative international development organization that, in cooperation with governments, creates opportunities for equitable education and poverty reduction through libraries and related educational, cultural and community programs. Its mission is to enrich the lives of street children, orphans and other vulnerable and out-of-school children and youth (OVCY) in sub-Saharan Africa. The organization constructs beautiful, indigenously-styled open-access libraries stocked with a comprehensive collection of well-chosen books. Lubuto Libraries serve as safe havens and are the center for Lubuto's programs, which offer discovery and joy through reading, music, art, drama, computers and other activities.

Founded in 2005, Lubuto Library Project (LLP) opened its first library at the Fountain of Hope Drop-In Centre in Lusaka, Zambia in 2007 and a second library at Ngwerere School in Lusaka in November, 2010. Lubuto's professionals work hand-in-hand with Zambia's education establishment including the Ministry of Education on all levels, the University of Zambia and the Zambia Library Association. Direct partnerships with the Government and the community-based organizations that host Lubuto Libraries are a critical element of the libraries' success, impact and sustainability. Lubuto additionally partners with other non-governmental organizations for its programs and outreach. This presentation will focus on Lubuto's formal partnership with the Zambia Library Service and the collaborative creation of several of Lubuto's most innovative and impactful programs.

Lubuto's Partnership with the Zambia Library Service (ZLS)

The Lubuto model's full range of preservation, reading promotion, educational and social service activities demonstrate the valuable role libraries can play in national development. The first Lubuto Libraries in Zambia have been embraced by the country's education stakeholders and the Ministry of Education, Science and Vocational Training (MOESVT) is committed to supporting expansion of the model to each province, in partnership with the Zambia Library Service (ZLS).

The program will work in six provinces in Zambia: Eastern, Luapula, Northern, North-Western, Southern and Western. Lubuto Libraries will be built directly adjacent to the provincial ZLS libraries, and operated in close collaboration with ZLS. Recognizing the effectiveness of the Lubuto model in contributing to achievement of MOESVT and Millennium Development Goal (MDG) objectives, this approach was proposed by ZLS. It will extend ZLS services to Zambia's majority population of children and youth that it is currently unequipped to serve, improving educational quality and access for that demographic.

Partnership is fundamental to the Lubuto model and it is through a unique collaborative effort that the planned expansion was conceptualised and developed. The implementation of the program will be a joint effort between the Lubuto Library Project (LLP) and Zambia's Ministry of Education, Science and Vocational Training (MOESVT). The Zambia Library Service, as a department of the MOESVT, manages the public library network throughout Zambia and plays a vital role in the provision of education in the country. In addition to ensuring the establishment and co-ordination of libraries, ZLS is responsible for assisting other organisations providing library and information services.

This initiative draws strength from the shared aims and long history of collaboration between the partners. LLP's priorities and plans have been closely coordinated with the library community in Zambia and the MOESVT since inception, with Government possessing ultimate "ownership" of Lubuto Libraries. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between LLP and the Ministry was signed in 2008, naming LLP as a national partner in providing literacy and library services to Zambia's orphans and vulnerable children. This MOU complements national plans to ensure equitable access to educational resources and mandates LLP to "provide leadership in establishing standards of good library practice" in order to improve the quality of education in Zambia. The direct relationship between ZLS and LLP was formalized in a meeting of officials of both organisations at ZLS in June 2011. A new MOU now outlines specific responsibilities of

MOEVST and LLP in national scale-up and integration of the Lubuto Library model into ZLS library services.

In a joint initiative to establish and sustain Lubuto Libraries as part of ZLS provincial libraries, MOEVST (ZLS) and LLP will plan integration of the two library services in a complementary way that clarifies the scope of each library to effectively serve their respective user groups. LLP is a technical partner of MOEVST in these activities but the physical structures and property of the libraries (including the book collections, computers and materials of all media) are owned by MOEVST and managed by ZLS. The ZLS provincial libraries will primarily exist to serve adults and institutions in Zambian society; the Lubuto Libraries' purpose is to serve children and youth. As a technical partner, LLP will assist in architectural designs to enhance usability of ZLS facilities and in establishing ICT facilities for public access computers in ZLS libraries in coordination with child-appropriate ICT use in Lubuto Libraries. The scope of book collections will likewise reflect the different user groups of each library and as Lubuto Libraries are integrated with ZLS libraries, those portions of ZLS book collections geared to children will be transferred to the Lubuto facilities, reclassified and integrated into LLP's child-friendly organisation system.

LLP will work in close partnership with ZLS in planning, management and Lubuto Library system and policy incorporation into the existing ZLS library policy. New service and collection policies will thus need the complete approval of ZLS management and require joint development by ZLS and LLP. LLP will assist ZLS with stakeholder advocacy with a goal of obtaining development funding and ongoing direct financial support for the ZLS-Lubuto libraries. Additionally, LLP cooperates with other key Ministry bodies including the University of Zambia (UNZA), Copperbelt University, technical, educational and vocational colleges thereby enhancing the network of competent accredited library education support structures. LLP proposed and identified a Fulbright scholar to teach children's literature and library services in UNZA's Department of Library and Information Science in academic year 2010-2011. The professor worked with Lubuto to build professional capacity in Zambia for high quality services to children and youth through curriculum development and service-learning at UNZA and Evelyn Hone College. LLP continues to identify other scholars who will institutionalize this capacity in Zambia.

Finally, LLP collaborates with the Zambian Board on Books for Young People, the Zambia Library Association (an organization it was instrumental in founding), Government and other stakeholders in preserving and documenting indigenous literature, cultural history and knowledge. Having created an initial digital archive of Zambian materials found in the U.S. Library of Congress, LLP will continue to work with ZLS to identify and digitize out-of-print Zambian literature to add to the LubutoCollections.org digital archive and endeavor to have selected works reprinted by Government or commercial publishers. LLP will work with ZLS to build their capacity to sustain and continue the preservation and digitization programme and to engage library users and communities in creation of new materials in various media that preserve oral traditions. With support from the International Board on Books for Young People, Lubuto and ZBBY organized and hosted two workshops in October 2010 that underscored the importance of preserving traditional stories and making cloth books for children in local languages.

Lubuto Library Programs

LubutoMentoring is an innovative program that addresses the psychosocial support and life skills training needs of OVCY by teaching values and offering counseling and mentoring in Lubuto Libraries. Sessions conducted in Zambian languages combine group discussion with storytelling, a traditional way that values are passed down through generations, connecting children to their roots and society. Using the dual approach of direct intervention and community-level capacity building, *LubutoMentoring* creates a sustainable, needs-driven platform for reaching marginalized young people.

From September 2009 to July 2010, the Lubuto Library Project – in partnership with Project Concern International and with support from the US Agency for International Development – offered a one-year pilot of this life-changing program to OVC from 16 communities in Lusaka. Designed by Zambian sociologist Dr. Lawrence Mukuka, the program was structured in cycles of 12 sessions focusing on key concepts: purpose, honesty, faith, courage, perseverance, self-confidence, responsibility, persistence, self-motivation, self-empowerment, friendship, self-discipline.

The pilot program reached 831 children (438 boys and 393 girls) from vulnerable circumstances, many of whom were street children, through 316 mentoring sessions. Each child participated in about 13 sessions, totaling 10,892 interactions. Many became regular readers at the library and joined other Lubuto programs, and dozens decided to return to school. The program also trained 17 male and 15 female caregivers from the participating communities, trained 92 parents and offered orientation to 100 more parents.

The impact of this initiative on hard-to-reach, out-of-school children had several dimensions:

- Participating children learned valuable life skills, built self-esteem and self-awareness, and forged social and cultural connections to the world around them. Knowledge of program concepts increased by an average of 44.5% among participating youth.
- Being situated within Lubuto Libraries, the program exposed participants to a wide range of holistic programs and services and increased use of the library for literacy and other educational purposes. Approximately 70% of the children used the library's computers and the book collection before or after their mentoring sessions.
- Communication and engagement between children and their caregivers was improved by encouraging active caregiver involvement in the program. During the final program review, caregivers reported that their training enabled them to better understand and respond to the needs of children in their care.
- Teachers who participated in the program were exposed to participatory teaching methods and are now emulating these techniques in their classes. These teachers also felt that after their training in mentoring, they are now able to offer advice to parents who seek help on how to deal with their children's problematic behavior and to students who face problems.

Future plans for *LubutoMentoring*: The pilot program could not accommodate the strong demand to participate, especially among street children. Lubuto Library Project is working to expand its funding partnerships to meet this demand, with adaptations based on lessons learned in the pilot and establishment of more Lubuto Libraries. Meanwhile, counseling sessions are still carried out in the libraries by mentors trained under the pilot program.

LubutoArts is a self-sustaining visual art training program designed and taught by prominent Zambian artists.

The visual arts are the most accessible and rewarding means of communication, learning and self-expression for many young people, leading them to the library's books in many ways and enhancing their self-esteem. *LubutoArts* nurtures and develops the creativity of children and youth and enriches their lives with a true appreciation and understanding of art. The young artists acquire skills in artistic expression through color, line, shape, space, texture, form and design. A portfolio system encourages them to keep records demonstrating successes, growth and creativity over time and to actively participate in the process of self and peer criticism. Perhaps most importantly, *LubutoArts* provides an opportunity to develop their talent and gives them a mode of expression, a way to communicate their stories and thoughts with the wider world.

A good number of participants have essentially launched careers as professional artists, and exposure through Lubuto's communications has created growing demand growing for them to produce more work on commission. Many talented artists have been and will continue to be discovered through this program.

This art training program has developed participants' talents since the first Lubuto library opened in 2007. It was established as the "Visual Arts Program" by Zambian artist and teacher Mwamba Mulangala, who volunteered his time to train the young artists. The Visual Arts Council of Zambia sponsored an exhibition of their work at Lusaka's private Henry Tayali Gallery in February 2009. Diplomats and members of Zambia's arts community attended its opening and most of the paintings were sold. This led to a June 2011 Lubuto's *LubutoArts* exhibition at the prestigious Stella Jones Gallery in New Orleans, USA. The Stella Jones exhibition was the impetus for turning the Visual Arts Program into a self-sustaining art training program, *LubutoArts*. The program has since been supported by a percentage of the proceeds of the sale of artworks

Other artists have joined in teaching the program since its establishment, and Lubuto has received support and guidance from Zambia's National Arts Council and the Visual Arts Council of Zambia, whose former head also volunteered to teach *LubutoArts*. Partnerships with the Stella Jones and Henry Tayali galleries have been key to this program's success and LLP continues to identify other opportunities to display *LubutoArts* work in Zambia and internationally (including at the International Monetary Fund spring meetings in Washington, DC, in April 2012).

LubutoDrama is an engaging, twice-weekly performing arts program of drama, improvisation, and adapting books and stories for performance. Tales from the library's collection form the basis for developing presentations, inviting children to escape, imagine and be free to explore

and join the adventures of the characters. Children are encouraged to tell their own stories as well. Collaborating together, children develop a script based on a book or story, assign parts and begin the work of producing a play, including composing songs for performance. The young actors build props, make costumes, learn lines, rehearse and finally perform for the community at Lubuto Libraries.

Lubuto*Drama* instills a sense of confidence in participants, giving them opportunities to express their opinion and have their voice heard, to work towards the goal of performance and enjoy their achievement, and to explore their potential. The program has been quite successful in directly influencing children who are in danger of going onto the streets (to become "street children") to avoid that choice. This impact is measured using interviews, observation notes and data on participants.

Of the important role Lubuto*Drama* plays in children's lives, actor and Lubuto supporter Danny Glover noted that it "reinforces their sense of themselves and re-establishes a different confidence in them... [I]t sets something in motion ... a way to organize the emotional life within you. To watch these young people engaging in that and claiming it for themselves is very special." The Lubuto Productions film *Our Time to Bring Change* (available on YouTube) features Lubuto*Drama* participants' comments on how this program has built their confidence, self-esteem and visions of a way forward in their lives.

Partnership with the community group Barefeet Theatre introduced this program in Lubuto Libraries in 2007 and it is now offered by Lubuto Library Project staff. Barefeet's techniques have been very successful throughout Lusaka and beyond in preventing children from living on the street. Combined with Lubuto Libraries' resources and services that provide OVCY access to educational opportunities otherwise beyond their reach, the program is very popular and hundreds of children have participated.

LLP is currently seeking funding and collaborative partners to produce Lubuto*Storytime*, a monthly video program to be filmed in the Lubuto Library. Each program will have two parts, introducing Zambian children to the highest quality children's literature while at the same time celebrating and preserving traditional Zambian stories. It is expected that the parallels drawn between oral culture and drama and printed literature will increase appreciation of Zambia's indigenous literary traditions.

LubutoLaptops: Lubuto volunteers introduced 10 One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) XO laptops at the first Lubuto Library in Kamwala, Lusaka in February 2009. Within two weeks, dozens of trainers were trained and there began 6-day per week morning and afternoon sessions in which the laptops were in constant use. The program has remained wildly popular and LLP has sent dozens more donated XO laptops to expand it. While the laptops have the capability of communicating with one another where there is no internet access, and they come loaded with fun and enriching educational software, perhaps the most valuable and most used feature is simply the ability for Lubuto's children to write their stories, which they do on a regular basis.

The educational benefits of use of se of the OLPC laptops are tremendous, particularly in giving vulnerable and out-of-school children and youth the opportunity to learn subjects taught by

programs on the laptops and to learn computer skills. Perhaps more important to the children Lubuto Libraries serve, on their own they began to use them as a means to tell the story of their lives to others, an important activity that helps them to establish their identity and to deal with the psychological difficulties of their lives.

How and by whom the laptops are used is monitored by daily records of data, disaggregated by gender. Library staffers observe the type of use and teach children to use the laptops. Children's stories are retained for collection by Lubuto Project staff for publication or further work with them. Youth who developed more advanced skills and interest with the XO laptops participated in the Lubuto*Literacy* program described below.

LLP's key partners, who made this program possible, were the One Laptop Per Child organization, the OLPC Foundation and Sugar Labs' Mike Lee, who has provided technical guidance on use and maintenance of the computers. All of the XO laptops have been donated, either by OLPC or by individual OLPC owners in the U.S.

Lubuto*Literacy*: To learn to read effectively children need to initially learn to read in their mother tongue. This is a challenge in Zambia due to multiple factors that exist throughout Africa in countries with multiple indigenous languages and weak education infrastructure. Lubuto libraries reach out-of-school children and can help them toward reading by read-aloud, storytelling and drama programs and maintenance of literacy with comprehensive, carefully chosen book collections, but tools for teaching reading in Zambian languages were not available. There was a critical need for a means to teach all Zambian children to read in their original languages.

In partnership with the Ministry of Education, Lubuto planned and carried out an initiative to address this problem. Youth who had developed advanced skills in XO laptop use and experienced Zambian reading teachers were trained in the OLPC application Etoys and gathered weekly to create early reading programs in seven Zambian languages, using six OLPC XO 1.5 laptops. Two Zambian teachers designed the applications based on the government's reading curriculum. The teachers worked with youth who adapted the teacher's designs into Etoys activities and with artists from the Lubuto*Arts* program who created associated computer graphics. Five translators adapted the series of lessons to other languages.

The result of this effort was 100 computer-based reading lessons in each of Zambia's seven main languages – 700 lessons in total. The open-source lessons, while created on Lubuto's OLPC laptops, can run on any computer platform and will be available to all to download, under Creative Commons licensing, from www.LubutoCollections.org.

Through Lubuto*Literacy*, Lubuto Libraries actually teach children to read, an exceptional innovation in library services. Lubuto*Literacy* extends the government reading curriculum beyond the classroom. The lessons are currently in use in Lubuto Libraries via USB drives, and can be made immediately available through ZLS libraries via portable digital media. LLP will determine with Government partners and other education stakeholders the most practical distribution method to schools and other educational institutions in the coming years, a plan that will evolve as ICT infrastructure strengthens throughout the nation. Their open availability via

the website is intended to inspire translation to similarly structured languages or the creation of similar programs in other African countries and languages.

Each reading lesson was evaluated by an expert consultant from Zambia's Curriculum Development Centre and was improved based on feedback. Beyond the use of the lessons by children coming to Lubuto's libraries to learn to read, Lubuto Literacy has expanded use of Lubuto Libraries' book collections, laptops and other programs and services. All of the participating youth earned school fees covering their entire secondary school years while developing valuable computer and graphics skills. The teachers, advisor and evaluator earned consultant fees and all participants were recognized as having made a major contribution to literacy in Zambia.

The project was supported by a grant from the EIFL Public Library Innovation Program (PLIP), which received funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to encourage innovative applications of information technology in public libraries. EIFL, Electronic Information for Libraries, is an independent, not-for-profit organization based in Rome, Italy. Other key partners were Zambia's Ministry of Education; Mike Lee of OLPC and Sugar Labs, our key technical advisor; the OLPC Foundation, which donated 6 XO 1.5 laptops; and volunteers from the Special Libraries Association who added sound files with instructions to each of the 700 lessons. Lubuto Literacy was presented at the eLearning Africa conference in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in May 2011 and to Zambia's Ministry of Education at a June 2011 launch at the Fountain of Hope Lubuto Library.

New Programs in Development:

In addition to the established programs described above and the core Lubuto *Storytime* program, Lubuto staff regularly interacts with community members and other NGOs to develop new programming that meets needs identified in our target user community. All new programs are created in partnership with other organizations or individuals. Programs currently under development include:

Lubuto Health: A health and HIV/AIDS program is being developed through LLP's partnership with PCI, an international health NGO. While young children and adolescents have been a challenging target population for health services and in particular sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, Lubuto Libraries provide an important point of contact and means of disseminating health materials, information and programming. Lubuto Library collections include materials on all levels on health in general, medicine, the human body and health information on subjects of special importance to users of Lubuto Libraries. Using their participatory approach PCI will develop Lubuto *Health* programming in sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections and other common health related areas such as personal and environmental hygiene including, hand washing, malaria prevention and treatment, diarrheal diseases, and prevention of common accidents. As with the Lubuto *Mentoring* program, caregivers will also participate in this program and receive training in health promotion, treatment, care and support, to further reinforce children's behavior changes.

Lubuto*Littleones*: Responding to national and international recognition of the critical role early childhood education plays in the intellectual and emotional development of all people, LLP is formalizing its services to very young children and their mothers. Like all Lubuto programs, development of Lubuto*Littleones* will be based on traditional games, songs and stories from Zambia's various cultures. The program will aim to increase learning opportunities for pre-school children; provide relief and stimulation for pre-school children affected by AIDS (e.g. HIV-positive children, orphans and children with terminally ill parents); and build the capacity of communities to be able to care for and stimulate their children. After researching early childhood programming of libraries in other countries, LLP is currently identifying local partners to assist in developing this program in a way that is specific to Zambian culture and meets the needs of the most vulnerable young children and young mothers/caregivers.

Lubuto*Empowerment*: This program will incorporate elements of legal, economic and social empowerment. The legal empowerment component will give children and youth tools to understand, navigate within, and flourish under the nation's legal system, as well as to provide an understanding of their personhood under International Human Rights Law and Zambian law, thereby improving self-esteem. The economic empowerment component will target adolescents, integrating youth into society through skills training and information provision on market trends, and providing the critical link between youth and the job market. Sessions will include topics such as identifying viable business opportunities, understanding current market conditions and trends, developing business plans, managing finances and accounting, mobilising resources, networking and business promotion. The social empowerment component will include sessions on peer education and leadership, advocacy and civic education to enable youth to share information with their peers as well as articulate their needs to local decision-makers.

Lubuto*Environment*: This program will teach children how nature works, how trees and plants sustain our lives and how to behave toward nature. Issues of cleanliness, garbage disposal, recycling, energy conservation, growing food naturally, sustaining nature in the urban environment and global warming will be discussed with the children and interested adults of the immediate community.

The Strength of Partnerships

In summary, the Lubuto Library Project is a very small but highly professional development organization that grew out of its founders' many years of experience with African libraries, international development, indigenous architecture and building methods, and work with street children and other vulnerable youth in Zambia. A strong network of Zambian leaders and scholars has informed Lubuto's development since inception. Thus Lubuto's approaches have adapted and innovated to meet priority needs and grown with strong support and participation of those it serves, others with similar objectives, and society at large. With no financial endowment, this growth could only happen through partnerships – and those partnerships in turn have strengthened and helped define the Lubuto model.

This “organic” growth, responsive to needs as they are identified, has made innovation a natural and regular feature of Lubuto libraries. Particularly because the libraries are intended especially to serve a population that would not think of libraries as a place for them, we have intended that

their development follow the “guidance” of its users. This idea was perhaps best expressed at the opening event for the first Lubuto Library in September 2007:

“The library that we are celebrating today is unique, and it is the first of at least 100 we plan to build. Its architecture, which is based on indigenous styles, was conceived to create a profound, safe and welcoming space for the children it was built to serve, and to re-connect them with society. It is a concrete and enduring recognition that they are important and cared-for members of the Zambian and international communities and a reminder that making the effort to help them to thrive will enrich all of our lives – and society as a whole.

This library is beautiful and special, but it is much more than a building filled with shelves of books. For the young people assembled with us today and for many others who will find their way here, it is a refuge from life on the streets, a place where they can just be children, and where books will allow them to dream and envision a better future. It is not an extravagance but, rather, simultaneously, an obligation and a reward.

In fact, a Lubuto Library is probably a very different institution from what most of you ever thought a library to be. We ask those reaching out to Lusaka’s street children to tell them about the library, but not to use the word “library.” We want the children to hear that, at the Fountain of Hope, there is a place called “Lubuto” that is there just for them. Whether or not they can read or speak English, let them come to find for themselves what we have to offer, come and show us what they need and how our libraries can meet those needs.”

Lubuto’s most important partners of all are the vulnerable children and youth we strive to serve.