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## **Introduction**

In Zambia, half of the population consists of youth under the age of 18, and the future of the nation depends on the quality and accessibility of the educational opportunities afforded to these young people. Consequently, the modern and future librarian in Zambia must be engaged with the needs and interests of children and youth, responsively innovating with and for young people. Too often, however, librarians still treat children as a secondary user group, relegated to corners and neglected in relation to programming. The modern and future librarian puts children in the center of library service development in order to truly connect them with the possibilities for learning, self-expression, and empowerment that libraries provide. As librarians, our professional skills can be used to put children in the center by a) meeting them where they are and interacting with their communities in substantive ways, b) creating and adapting programs to respond to their needs and interests, c) sharing new learning possibilities through technology, and d) supporting the whole child through the provision of psychosocial services and referrals. In contexts where librarians are unfamiliar with the provision of robust services to children, these skills can be developed through partnerships, continuous professional development, community support, information sharing, and intelligent staff recruitment and training. The development of a youth services skill set is critical: If as librarians we fail to develop the skills needed to serve children and youth in innovative ways, we allow our profession to fail our children and youth.

## **Background**

This paper considers the case of Lubuto Library Partners, an innovative development organization that builds the capacity of public libraries to create opportunities for equitable education and poverty reduction. Its mission is to empower African children and youth and help

them develop the knowledge and skills to reconnect with their culture and community and participate fully in society. Lubuto constructs enduring, indigenously-styled open-access libraries stocked with comprehensive collections of well-chosen books and appropriate technology. These libraries serve as safe havens and are the center for Lubuto's programs, which offer education, information, psychosocial support and self-expression through reading, music, art, drama, computers, mentoring and other activities.

The impetus for Lubuto's founding was that a large number of vulnerable children in Zambia—many of whom were out-of-school, as well as children living on the streets, children with disabilities, orphans, and others—were in need of public safe spaces that provide both encouragement and growth. Rather than focusing on offering specific or regimented programming, the Lubuto Library Model is designed to innovatively use professional library services as an adaptable and inclusive tool to support African children and youth.

LLP opened its first library at the Fountain of Hope Drop-In Centre in Kamwala, Lusaka in September 2007, a second library at Ngwerere Basic School in Garden Compound, Lusaka in November, 2010, and a third library in the village of Nabukuyu in the Southern Province in November of 2015. These libraries have received well over 850,000 visits and reached some 86,000 young people. Lubuto has moved from reaching an average of 440 new children per month in 2007 to reaching an average of about 1,400 new children per month in 2015. Over 14,000 children have participated in a Lubuto program, over 70% of which are orphans, one in four is out of school and a little less than one in 10 comes from the streets. A fourth Lubuto Library is currently being constructed at the Mthunzi Center in peri-urban Lusaka West, with a fifth library slated to open in Choma in 2018.

The Lubuto Library model has been developed over years of direct interaction with beneficiaries, guided by strong and direct oversight by prominent Zambians who have led LLP in adapting professional frameworks, standards and techniques to local conditions. 2015 marked the 10-year anniversary of the organization, with both U.S. headquarter and Zambia offices officially established at the same time in 2005. Thirteen full-time librarians currently work in Lubuto Libraries, an average of 4 staff members per library. Strategic decision-making is guided by a Board of Directors, an Advisory Board, and a Collections and Programs Advisory Council. LLP

has received wide professional recognition and awards such as repeated nominations for the Swedish Arts Council's Astrid Lindgren Award and the American Library Association's Presidential Citation for International Innovation.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between LLP and the Ministry of General Education was signed in 2008, which named 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 mandated LLP to "provide leadership in establishing standards of good library practice" in order to improve the quality of education in Zambia. Since mid-2011, LLP has worked extensively with the Zambia Library Service (ZLS) to plan in detail the scale-up of Lubuto Libraries across the country—libraries that will ultimately be owned and managed by ZLS. On May 15th 2014, a new MOU was signed with the Ministry that confirmed their commitment to provide, to the maximum extent possible, the necessary financial support for the building of libraries that meet the needs of orphans and vulnerable children and youth in Zambia, and clarified the responsibilities of LLP and the Ministry after the establishment of a Lubuto library. As national partners in the provision of library services to children and youth, the Ministry of General Education has called upon Lubuto Library Partners as advisors in the creation of a staffing structure for youth librarianship in the civil service-- a key development in the advancement of the profession of youth librarianship in Zambia.

### **Innovative Library Services to Children and Youth**

There is a strong need for libraries to expand their service provision to children and youth beyond "traditional" library services such as reference and reader's advisory in order to create dynamic, future-oriented libraries that engage children deeply. Librarians serving children and youth need the skills to provide *outreach* that brings the community—especially the most vulnerable-- into the library, to adapt and develop *programming* to engage children in a variety of ways, to use and share new *technologies*, and to provide *holistic support* through referrals and psychosocial services.

#### *1) Outreach*

Librarians must move beyond the walls of the library in order to reach the children in the community who may never have visited a library before. Outreach provides a bridge to the library, facilitating access by introducing services and programs, and is particularly key when it comes to vulnerable and isolated young people. These children and youth may not feel that they belong in libraries, or may believe that libraries have nothing to offer them. As librarians it is our obligation to demonstrate the opportunities for connection, learning, and self-expression that libraries can offer to all children regardless of educational background, ability, or socioeconomic status.

Lubuto Libraries conduct routine (multiple times/week) outreach sessions with various demographic groups of children and youth, depending on community makeup. Some of the key groups targeted include out-of-school children, children with disabilities, children living on the streets, children sent to do agricultural work, and teachers and schools. During outreach sessions staff go out into the community to meet children where they are, bringing books, technology, and program demonstrations to share. They use active group games as icebreakers to draw children in, after which they conduct storytimes, share technology (such as a laptop or Zedupad), and/or conduct a brief program session (such as Lubuto *Mentoring*). They also inform children about when the library is open, how to get to the library, and answer their questions about programs and services. A key point of outreach is clarifying that the library is free and open to all. LLP outreach has connected with over 15,000 children who might otherwise have never known about the library or accessed its services.

*Out-of-school children* are the key group of children and youth that LLP outreach engages. Children who are excluded from the formal educational system can flourish in public libraries, which offer free, high-quality learning opportunities to all. For some of these children, the library can act as a gateway back to school by stimulating interest and motivation in learning. The library can also serve as a place where children and youth are connected to much-needed educational services and resources. Lubuto Libraries link out-of-school youth with scholarship opportunities, both by referring them to other organizations in the community that provide scholarships and by connecting them to sponsors directly. Our experience has been that these

children—children formerly out-of-school who have returned to school as a result of their time in the library-- become some of the most active participants in library programs and often volunteer their time to help out in the libraries. Other young people, particularly those who have been out-of-school for a long time, may not be able or willing to return to school. These youth still benefit substantially from involvement in library programs, many of which impart artistic and technical skills that they can use to make a livelihood. For instance, former participants in *LubutoArts* and *LubutoLaptops* have gone on to become professional artists and computer programmers as a result of their participation in library programs.

*Children with disabilities* are welcomed in Lubuto Libraries, where there is a strong focus on inclusion and respect. At Lubuto Libraries in Lusaka we regularly receive visits from children with sensory disabilities (i.e., deaf, blind, hard-of-hearing), particularly at the Ngwerere Lubuto Library where there is a large Deaf community in the surrounding area. This reality has spurred the development of library programming targeted to meet the needs of deaf children and youth, starting with a Zambian Sign Language storytime that is currently being piloted. Concomitant outreach efforts are being launched in order to inform the Deaf community about the programs and resources available through Lubuto Libraries. Naturally, these outreach efforts require partnership: Lubuto has worked with Zambian Deaf Youth and Women to identify trained sign language interpreters who have been recruited as volunteers to lead outreach and programming to meet the needs of deaf children and youth.

At the Mumuni Library in southern province, many children with physical disabilities live too far away from the library to access it easily. In order to better reach children with disabilities, the Mumuni library has developed a robust outreach partnership with Holy Family Child Development Center, a Monze-based organization that serves children with disabilities and their families. Ndala, the Mumuni library manager, travels by vehicle with the Holy Family team to conduct joint outreach in surrounding villages. Ndala brings books to share during these outreach sessions, but has also found that drama, oral storytelling, and puppets are highly effective ways of sharing stories with children who have severe disabilities. Children from Holy Family's center in Monze visit the library monthly in a bus to use the library resources and participate in programs.

*Children living on the streets* are another key demographic group targeted by Lubuto's outreach program. Often the library is the only safe, free space these children have access to, and the library staff have been instrumental in connecting many of these children to shelters and other support services. In some instances, the library's trained Outreach Coordinator conducts family counseling with these children and their families of origin to support reintegration. LLP's outreach to street children is rendered especially effective by the fact that LLP has staff who were themselves street children, facilitating trust and understanding between staff and this highly vulnerable group of young people. Other outreach is conducted in partnership with organizations serving former street children, such as Vision of Hope, a shelter that accommodates girls who were formerly homeless (many of whom have children). The center has no library and nowhere nearby to access library services, so LLP staff travel to the center in order to provide storytime and Lubuto *Mentoring* sessions to the girls who are resident there. Staff from Vision of Hope report that these services have been "life-changing" for many of the girls.

Lubuto also conducts extensive outreach to *teachers and schools*, providing training opportunities, resource sharing, and partnership opportunities. Lubuto Libraries are all located near schools (both government and community schools), enabling easy access for teachers and students. The libraries supplement the often-scarce resources available in schools. In order to draw in school groups, library staff visit classrooms to conduct storytimes and share information about library programs and services with children and their teachers. Classes are also invited to visit the library on a regular basis—at the Mumuni Library, classes from the nearby school visit on a weekly basis for a scheduled "library hour" that they use to conduct research, watch movies, and use computers. Teachers from the school have also used the library as a site for conducting their Computer Studies classes, as computers would not be available otherwise.

Conducting outreach is also a valuable way to learn about barriers to access that keep children from visiting the library. A major barrier observed by LLP staff is the fact that *children are often kept home to do household chores* or supervise younger siblings. At the Mumuni library in southern province this problem is especially acute during the rainy season, when parents send children to herd cattle on the floodplains. In order to effectively reach these children, staff at the Mumuni Library have brought their outreach to the floodplains, where they meet up with small

groups of children that are eager to have the opportunity to read, play, and use technology with LLP staff while the cattle graze around them.

Another central component of outreach is *community engagement*, finding ways to target adult members of the community whose support is critical to the success of the library. LLP's experience has been that some parents and caregivers initially regard libraries with suspicion, concerned because the libraries are unfamiliar and/or parents don't know how what services the library provides. In order to address these concerns and to engage parents/caregivers more deeply in supporting their children's learning and literacy, LLP has hosted a series of Community Open Houses at each of the libraries. These events include drama performances, family storytimes, library tours, volunteer recognition, and program demonstrations. During the 2015 Open Houses the libraries received 1,700 visitors between the three events. Children report that these events have affected their parents' willingness to send them to the library, and have increased their parents' support for their education generally.

Community leaders are another group whose support is essential to the successful functioning of public libraries. At the Mumuni library in southern province, Lubuto held a Library Day for Traditional Leaders. These leaders (chiefs and headmen) are key partners in generating community support for the library, especially in relation to convincing parents to send their out-of-school children to the library. The event was planned to inform traditional leaders about the library and its services, as well as to update them on its first year of use, to work out how traditional leaders can best support the library in their communities, and to get feedback and suggestions from traditional leaders about challenges to library use in their communities. The day included library tours, updates about library use and programs, a moderated community discussion about the role of traditional leaders in supporting the library, and drama and dance. It was a highly effective means of informing traditional leaders about their role in relation to the library, and staff have reported that the number of out-of-school children visiting the library has increased as a result of the support mobilized during this event.

## 2. *Programming*

Varied library programming is an important way in which libraries can attract children and youth who might otherwise never come to a library. Programming offers children opportunities to learn

and explore in new ways, and connects with children whose talents lie in areas besides literacy/reading and academics. Lubuto libraries offer holistic programming in which young people and adults from every level of society can participate.

LLP's programs include **LubutoLiteracy**, an innovation that was awarded an All Children Reading grant for its solution to improving early grade reading. *LubutoLiteracy* provides open access to interactive, computer-based lessons in Zambia's seven major languages, developed by local experts to extend the Zambian reading curriculum beyond classroom walls to reach and include all Zambians. *LubutoLiteracy* lessons were recently approved by the Curriculum Development Center for use in schools, and will be distributed nationally.

**LubutoStorytime** provides daily reading and read-aloud sessions, drawing on the library collections' rich resources, by library staff, teachers, volunteers and library visitors, as well as by and among the children themselves. In addition to book-based storytime, community volunteers share traditional stories with children in the libraries. **LubutoMentoring** addresses psychosocial support and life skills training needs of vulnerable youth by teaching values and offering counselling and mentoring. Sessions conducted in Zambian languages combine group book discussions with storytelling, a traditional way that values are passed down through generations, directly connecting children to their roots and society. **LubutoArts** is a self-sustained visual art training program supported by volunteer artists and arts organizations. Participants develop their talents and have exhibited and sold their artwork in Zambia and the United States. **LubutoDrama** is a twice-weekly performing arts program of drama, improvisation, and adapting books and stories from the collection for performance. Other regular programs include movie showings and a fiction/non-fiction teen book club that builds confidence in developing readers and fluent readers simultaneously.

Modern and future librarians respond dynamically to their communities, seeking input and assistance in developing programs that people care about and benefit from. These programs have been developed over years through consultation with expert advisors and partner organizations and reflect the needs and interests of specific communities. Lubuto Libraries have continued to adapt programs to meet specific needs. For example, at the Mumuni Library in southern province there is very little interest in the established *LubutoArts* program. Feedback from the community



revealed that the children and youth were more interested in learning the arts and crafts traditional to their area and valued by their community-- such as carving and making clay figurines-- than they were in the drawing, painting, and mixed-media art practiced by the program in Lusaka. This feedback is being used to reshape the *LubutoArts* program offered at Mumuni to focus on these areas of interest.

LLP continues to develop new programs based on user demand, community interest, and broader trends in the educational system. For example, LLP's ongoing interest in introducing early childhood programming has been pushed to the forefront of our programming agenda based on the concomitant development and introduction of Early Childhood Education curriculum in Zambian schools. Other programs under development include a conservation agriculture program (planned in response to community requests for agricultural programming at the Mumuni Library), a Zambian Sign Language Storytime program (planned in response to increasing numbers of visits from deaf children), health and HIV prevention programs, a music program, and a self-help program for women.

### *3. New technologies*

Librarians have always adapted to technological change by evaluating new technologies and sharing them with users. Modern and future-oriented librarians, however, go further by imagining new uses for familiar technology and by giving children and youth the skills they need to learn and create content through technology. Because technology changes rapidly, it is important for librarians to consider the most recent developments in child-friendly technology and assess whether they are at the point where they can be adopted. Some recent, notable technologies that LLP has worked with include:

#### *a. Sparkup*

LLP has partnered with an Israeli company called Sparkup to work on the development of oral translation technology that has the potential to revolutionize the accessibility of high-quality, international children's literature in Zambia. A small device that attaches to the back of a picture book, the Sparkup was designed to allow families to record themselves reading a book aloud to

their child. Using an in-built camera paired with a speaker and a microphone, the device is able to scan the picture, identify the page, and match the page of the picture book with a recording of the text. LLP immediately identified the potential for the Sparkup to be used for multilingual oral translation of picture books, in which the device is paired with an English-language picture book, and recordings are done in Zambian languages. Early collaboration with Sparkup has yielded the development of a device that allows the user to switch between three different languages (with possibility of expansion). Trial use of the Sparkup in the libraries has demonstrated a high level of engagement and interest on the part of users, and research suggests that pairing audio and text is a valuable strategy for struggling and emergent readers. The Sparkup is also a useful tool for visually impaired children and children with learning disabilities.

#### *b. Zedupads*

The first child-friendly computer technology introduced in Lubuto Libraries was the One Laptop Per Child laptop, a small, rugged laptop running a child-friendly Linux-based operating system that included educational software. These laptops were heavily used in the libraries for years, including in the early development of Lubuto *Literacy* lessons, which featured programming and computer-based artwork produced by teenage library users. However, the increasing obsolescence of this technology has led to the need for LLP to evaluate new alternatives for the library. The iSchool Zedupads have been identified as a strong replacement for the OLPC laptops. iSchool Zedupads are educational tablets designed to support the Zambian curriculum. They include animated curriculum-based lessons for the primary grades, local-language reading materials, and educational games. Early testing of Zedupads in the libraries has shown them to be durable, child-friendly, and highly popular with children and youth. They also contain local-language apps developed for adults on topics such as health and agriculture that have been heavily used at the Mumuni Library.

#### *4. Psychosocial support/referrals*

The modern and future librarian sees children as more than “library patrons,” and recognizes the important role that public librarians can and must play in supporting children’s rights and fostering their holistic development. This is particularly key in settings where librarians work with vulnerable children, whose rights are often violated and who experience a great deal of

abuse, stress, grief, and trauma. While librarians may not think of psychosocial support as a standard component of their professional role, the fact remains that public libraries offer vulnerable children a uniquely safe space and supportive community in which to process their experiences, learn their rights, and become empowered. Librarians should see this as a valuable opportunity to expand the ways in which they serve children to meet a broader range of needs.

Lubuto Libraries provide holistic psychosocial support through Lubuto *Mentoring*, one-on-one counseling with trained staff, and through the provision of referrals. Staff carefully evaluate whether a child's situation is something that can be addressed appropriately by our Outreach Coordinator, who has received training in counseling vulnerable children, or whether outside expertise/resources are required. Some of the issues that children come to discuss in one-on-one counseling include school problems, death of family members, being mistreated or abused, child labor issues, sexual assault, homelessness, and mental illness. Some of these children are referred to professional counselors or referred to other organizations that can meet some of their needs. Staff have referred children to organizations including orphanages/shelters, hospitals and clinics, social welfare offices, the Child Protection Unit, and schools. Children learn about their rights through storytimes, Lubuto *Mentoring* sessions, and drama performances. Staff report that many children open up about personal situations in which their rights have been violated after attending these programs, and may also seek help for friends in difficult circumstances.

### **Becoming the Modern and Future Children's Librarian**

The case of Lubuto Libraries is intended to highlight the diverse skill set required by librarians serving vulnerable children and youth. These professional skills are central to the work of all public librarians and need to be embraced as such at all levels. Nationally, library schools must begin to address the gap in service provision to children through the introduction of children's services-focused courses and the Ministry of General Education must introduce a career structure for children's librarians in the civil service. However, libraries and librarians serving children and youth right now must also focus on how they can improve service provision to young people using the tools immediately at their disposal—including but not limited to partnerships, information-sharing, staff recruitment and training, and community feedback.

### *a. Partnerships*

Partnerships allow for libraries to learn from a diverse range of organizations and individuals with particular expertise, facilitating widely-expanded programming opportunities. Lubuto Library Partners has benefited from countless partnerships in all areas of its work. A key example in relation to library programming is the establishment of *LubutoDrama*, which was initially guided by Barefeet, a performing arts organization. This partnership has continued to evolve as the drama program became sustained by library staff. Now Barefeet offers two programs at Lubuto Libraries, led by their own facilitators—*Uncle John*, a program for at-risk children to build coping skills, and *Quest*, a civic engagement program. Partners benefit from their work with Lubuto Libraries as well by increasing the reach of their own programming and service provision to children and youth, especially to vulnerable children and youth who are often not reached in traditional interventions that operate through schools and other closed institutions. Other key partnerships have been forged around arts programming (with the stART Foundation), programming for deaf children (with *Zambian Deaf Youth and Women*), and conservation agriculture (with *Brethren in Christ Child Development Center*). Beyond consulting with organizations, however, LLP has continuously sought out highly-regarded experts in its fields of work to guide program development. *LubutoMentoring* and *LubutoLiteracy* were both developed by academic experts from the University of Zambia.

### *b. Training*

Public library staff who work with children but have no specialized training can begin to develop skills in relation to youth services via several different training models. Lubuto Library Partners employs internal staff training (one-on-one and large group), external training on specialized topics, and distance/online training (i.e., MOOCs). Determining what type of training is useful and who is qualified to provide it are two key considerations when organizing professional development opportunities. For instance, staff requests spurred LLP to organize a training on services to deaf children and youth. Increasing numbers of deaf children and youth visiting the library resulted in staff feeling that they were inadequately equipped to communicate with and serve these children. LLP explored resources available in the local community and discovered that the *Zambian National Association for the Deaf* was available to provide trainings on basic *Zambian Sign Language* and awareness-raising for our staff. Staff have reported that this training

changed their attitudes towards deaf children and increased their motivation to ensure that deaf children were being equitably served in Lubuto programs.

*c. Staff recruitment*

Without staff who are able to make children feel safe and welcome libraries will fail in their mission to serve them. At LLP staff are carefully selected based on their ability to work effectively with children and their commitment to protecting children's rights. Our staff also represent a wide range of backgrounds and specializations—including but not limited to outreach officers, professional librarians, visual artists, and computer programmers—who are able to facilitate a variety of programs based on their diverse skill sets and personal backgrounds that enable them to connect effectively with different types of children. Similarly, LLP has recruited numerous volunteers who provide complementary skills and facilitate new programs. These volunteers are carefully screened through an interview process designed to assess their interests and capabilities.

*d. Information-sharing*

LLP remains highly involved with the library profession on national, regional, and international levels by attending and presenting at conferences, participating in national and regional library associations, consulting library publications, and staying in touch with our wide professional network. Libraries stand to gain tremendously by sharing their experiences—including their failures—with other librarians in order to get feedback and stimulate new ideas. For instance, in designing early childhood programs and sign language storytime programs LLP has drawn on information gleaned from international professional publications and consultation with other librarians leading/developing similar programs in southern Africa.

*e. Responding to community needs/interests*

Ongoing engagement with the community a library serves is one of the simplest and most meaningful ways of developing dynamic services. Each community has different interests and expectations when it comes to its library, and these interests and expectations need to be expressed in concrete settings in order for libraries to benefit from them. Some examples of ways that libraries can learn from local communities include holding events, organizing library meetings, leading focus groups, and conducting interviews with key users/user groups. Lubuto

has benefitted incomparably from community engagement, most notably at the Mumuni Library in southern province where community feedback has been instrumental in the development of several major programs (including agricultural programming, a self-help group for women, and a traditional arts and crafts program) and in collection development priorities (strong emphasis on local language literature and materials to support agricultural development). Work with the community also benefits the library by providing a source of expertise and guidance. For instance, at the Mumuni Library requests from the community that a traditional arts and crafts program be introduced were coupled by recommendations of local community members who could facilitate the program. These community members are valuable resources that the library may not be aware of unless it seeks them out.

## **Conclusion**

Public libraries offer children from all walks of life—including those who are on the streets, out-of-school, heads of households, disabled, or otherwise isolated from the formal educational system—a gateway to learning, empowerment, and community. With the impending creation of a staffing structure for youth librarianship in the civil service-- a major milestone in the advancement of youth librarianship in Zambia—the skills required to serve children and youth effectively through public libraries must be given serious attention by the profession as a whole. Librarians working with youth in public libraries must operate at a high professional level while pushing the boundaries of what we consider “traditional” library services to children and youth. Lubuto Libraries serve as a national model for public library services to children and youth in Zambia, and the skills of Lubuto librarians set the standard for the development of high-caliber services to children and youth in public libraries. Librarians in Lubuto Libraries conduct outreach to meet children and youth where they are (i.e., in schools, on the streets, in the fields), develop flexible programming targeted to the specific needs and interests of children and their communities, explore and adapt new technologies, and support the psychosocial needs of children directly and through referrals, among many other activities. What unites the diverse activities of the modern and future children’s librarian is a focus on the empowerment of children and youth and the development of their self-expression, creativity, and understanding of their rights.