Why Mobile Libraries?

Have you ever heard of William Kamkwamba, the boy from Malawi who harnessed the wind? He and his family endured intense poverty and hunger until he found an unexpected solution. Using library books, at the age of 14, he built a windmill to power his family’s home from makeshift scraps. Research has shown that literacy and education is directly linked to a better quality of life. Madagascar ranks 155 out of 187 in the 2014 Human Development Index, making it one of the most impoverished countries. Several areas of Madagascar are also isolated and have no access to books. Mobile libraries can be utilized to empower and improve Malagasy lives.

This multifaceted approach provides opportunities to improve literacy, community health, develop sustainable livelihoods and environmental conservation.

"Literacy unlocks the door to learning throughout life, is essential to development and health, and opens the way for democratic participation and active Citizenship." - Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary-General

Mission Statement

The traveling Madagascar Library program supports the establishment of libraries as engines of development and social change. Education is a powerful tool, and provides opportunities that can improve the quality of life. Our goal is to provide topical and relevant educational materials such as books, literacy materials, agricultural documents, etc., as well as provide guidance via workshops and lectures.
Background Story
Our adventure started as a vacation in Madagascar, but became a spiritual journey with the guidance of our passionate 12 year veteran tour guide, J.J. We ventured beyond typical designated tourist zones, visited schools and spoke intimately with villagers. We were shocked to find out that over 80% of Malagasy live on $1.25 or less a day, and suffer some of the highest rates of illiteracy (65%; 2010).

Our online retail business, Vape Club, provides proceeds each month to sustain the function and development of the mobile library system. In cooperation with NGO Zara Aina, J.J. and his team are the local experts who run the mobile library. We facilitate them in carrying out, as local experts, what they think the Malagasy people need most.

Mobile Library Services & Operations
We allow kids and adults to check out books under a filing system where we track the reading progress of each participant. As books are read and returned appropriate rewards follow. As an incentive and reward J.J. wants to also give kids clothing for reaching reading goals. Additionally, we develop and sustain libraries in villages that we travel too.

Books chosen for the mobile library reflect empowering knowledge as a way to improve, literacy, agricultural practices, family relations, health, environmental issues, sexual health, trades, etc. We also provide topical fiction books that inspire and address cultural taboos. Children and adults can also request books.
Involving the communities we serve as a grounds committee is key. This allows the community to feel a sense of ownership, build trust, as well as help with some maintenance for the mobile library. We further engage the Malagasy people through community workshops as a means of guidance, fluid communication & empowerment.

Together, we find “locally relevant solutions, often built on ‘hybrids’ that mix local traditions with ‘modern’ best practice.” Workshops & group discussions focus on various aspects: health practices, UNICEF type events, environmental issues, kids events, special Zara Aina theater events, literacy lessons, follow ups on community needs solutions, etc.

Library Resources & Materials

Our needs for materials will evolve as we understand more about the communities we work with. Our initial suggestions for materials include:

**Book Themes**
- Farming and agriculture
- Educational and school books
- DIY / Construction
- Healthcare & Wellbeing
- Nature and Wildlife
- Solutions for human impact on environments
- Dictionaries
- Encyclopedias
- Magazines
- Children’s Books
- Inspiring Biographies
- Relevant Fiction

**Learning To Read Materials**
- Picture books with sight words
- Literacy Workbooks/ language books
- Literacy Games
- SD Cards with literacy material for phones

**Other**
- Materials discussing successful community improvements on agricultural practices, renewable homemade energy resources, family health, etc. from NGOs.
- Atlases
- Maps
- Newspapers

**Incentives**
- T-shirts, notepads, pens, clothes, things they need
Route & Time Procedure

On the trip J.J. and team spend two days in each location. Traditionally with a mobile library a couple hours is the maximum it will be in one location. However, J.J. anticipates that our approach is a much better method for the Malagasy people as well as realistic for travel. The idea is to be in one location for the evening through to the morning so that traveling can be done during the day and library services can be offered when individuals are generally available. Each trip is around 10 days in length. For now, the tour must operate so that the first and last locations will be close to Tana. This ‘10 day tour’ happens twice a month, with each location being visited on the same day of the week for consistency. This schedule allows for two monthly home breaks of around 5 days.

Project Timeline

At the moment we have equipped the mobile library with books, a solar panel, etc and have completed a couple of very successful tours. We will add further services and books as the tour progresses and areas of need are identified. We are also working on creating a streamlined option for sending book donations from abroad. Additionally, we are seeking to work with local Malagasy publishers and authors. After the first four months of the project we aim to be at a successful place with services and relationships to operate at a truly benefi-
Future Expansion Ideas

We would like to potentially introduce a seed sharing system. We would donate seed packets and bulk seed to the library. People could then plant the seeds and the library asks that when they harvest the plants, they return the seeds. Borrow. Grow. Return. However, this is a new idea and more research will need to take place.

Once a certain level of success and positive statistics have been reported we want to evolve the library and consider ideas to further enrich the community, as well as create more libraries. We would love to utilize SD cards as a source for copying literacy materials to phones.

Stated by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, “In Mexico, public libraries provide the only Internet access for nearly two-thirds of rural communities. In rural Botswana, public libraries serve as small business owners’ offices, helping people make their businesses more sophisticated and competitive.

In Ukraine, one community has used library Internet access to collect information about farming techniques, fundamentally changing the way they grow tomatoes and substantially increasing their crop quality and yield.”

Adapting aspects like these into the libraries would be ideal for long term goals.

Project Contact Details

Please send all book donations to:
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MADAGASCAR

For more information please email:
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