

Report on July 2009 Busia Children's Reading Tent

Background: According to a baseline survey carried out earlier, BUSIA District had 124 primary schools with 8 coordinating centres.

It was found out that there were many factors limiting good school performance which included:

- lack of adequate scholastic materials
- inadequate reading materials(they have a few provided by the ministry of education.)
- inadequate buildings
- poor school management
- lack of adequate libraries.
- lack of parental interest in school affairs.
- long distance to school

In Busia district schools, only p1 and p2 have reading lessons.

The Reading tent could not solve some of the challenges mentioned above but dealt with lack of adequate scholastic materials, inadequate reading materials, and lack of adequate libraries. It is the earnest belief of the implementers that a positive trend towards recovery was started.

The activities started with a workshop for teachers. During this workshop, the work done centred on how to help the teachers to see and understand the advantages of reading for their pupils and for themselves.

The second part of the Reading Tent activities involved the pupils and were aimed at making reading a life time habit for the children

It was realized that reading opened the eyes of the pupils and enabled them to reason better. It was agreed that the pupils hitherto saw the world as a narrow strip that offered little and this attitude could be changed through acquired knowledge.

The pupils understood the messages contained in the books that they read during the activities. By the end of the two days, teachers and pupils were convinced that the habit of reading widely would uplift their levels of understanding, help them to love school and contribute to better performance in their school work as well as to the overall development in the long term.

Overall and specific Objectives

Project Objective

The main objective of the Reading Tent project was to promote reading so that it becomes a lifetime habit of the individual; to ensure, through the activities and interactions carried out, that the pupils and teachers learn to put to use the knowledge gained through reading widely; and that they all understand that the knowledge gained would always be a door of opportunity and would assist them to contribute effectively to national and personal development.

Other specific objectives were:

- a) To sensitise the community and schools about the importance and benefits of reading.
- b) To avail books and other reading materials to at least ten schools in Bulumbi sub county.
- c) To promote purposeful reading.
- d) To sensitise parents and teachers about the need to inculcate good reading habits among children at an early age.

- e) To create an opportunity for pupils and teachers in Buhobe Primary school and the neighbouring schools to interact amongst themselves as they exchange information gained from reading widely.
- f) To sensitise local leaders, opinion leaders and policy makers about the importance of reading for the development of the individual and the nation.
- g) To learn about health, good leadership, and other developmental issues through reading widely.

The project was implemented over a three day period.

On the first day a workshop for teachers only was held in which the facilitators shared information with **twenty** teachers. One could say that what was shared in that session was not exactly new to them, but it was like a time to rearrange priorities and of putting what they already knew into proper perspective.

As teachers, they knew a lot about reading and writing because it is part of the curriculum. Despite this fact, research and experience in other places has shown that there is normally no period allotted to reading on school time tables. It had even been the case that some teachers told students to only read their notes in order to pass their exams. The teachers acknowledged all this to be the truth and agreed that the situation was compounded by inadequate reading materials that were not necessarily from the Examinations Board List.

Consequently at the teachers' workshop, the facilitators and participants meticulously went through the importance of reading, writing and keeping a library.

Day two and three involved both teachers and pupils. The pupils were introduced to reading as a worthwhile habit that contributed to their general learning. During the two days they discovered that reading could be fun, and was in fact, not as boring and tedious as they had always been made to believe.

The project purpose's relation to the perspectives of interest for NABOTU

After the three days of the reading tent at Bulumbi Sub County, it was clear from the way the activities run, and from the way the teachers and pupils responded, that this was a great contribution to improved quality of and access to education and learning.

The facilitators were privileged to share three days of ground breaking work at Buhobe Primary school. Starting with the teachers workshop, and then the two days of various activities with the pupils, it was clear that the work done was having an impact.

From the beginning, the teachers who attended the workshop all concurred with the facilitators that reading widely was a sure way to gaining knowledge leading to success in life.

For the two days of the tent, it was found that the children had interest in books but all along lacked access to them. When they read some of the books that were to be given to them, they expressed appreciation of the fact that their education was going to improve.

From verbal and written evaluations they showed that their education was going to improve greatly from the reading materials that they were given. The teachers too confirmed that the time spent and the knowledge shared had helped them to see their service delivery differently.

The pupils on the other hand, realized that learning did not consist only of reading teachers' notes, but of various other materials such as books, journals, newspapers etc.

Project Purpose

The project purpose was to contribute to improved quality of and access to education and learning. To achieve this teachers and pupils were taken through various activities over a three day period. Books were donated to the participating schools and some to the teachers.

20 teachers from the selected schools were called to a one day workshop which was a kind of refresher time for them to bring out the emphasis on reading.

During the workshop, the facilitators were aware that teachers knew a lot but needed support and encouragement. Therefore the workshop was mainly participatory and they shared among other things, information that the teachers would need to recollect in order to encourage reading amongst pupils, as well as ideas to promote reading.

The Reading tent took place from the 20th- 22nd July 2009, at Buhobe P. School

Lessons Learnt

The first lesson learnt was that remote schools in Ugandan are very disadvantaged. Working with students and teachers at Buhobe P/s, the implementers saw the harsh realities of a rural school. Students lacked motivation through programmes that work and suit their needs. The reading tent seemed like a ripple in the pool.

The teachers too, had a problem of lack of exposure nevertheless the workshop enabled them to understand the whole perspective and shared freely. They were able to take the students through the activities during the tent.

The idea of using Ugandan authored books at this level proved good because pupils found them easier to understand due to the familiar topics and themes. The belief that reading programmes should start from the familiar to the unfamiliar was proved correct.

When pupils start reading books that are set in an environment with which they are able to identify, it becomes simple for them and therefore easy to follow. This helps to encourage them to continue reading and make reading a life time habit.

Secondly, reading Ugandan authored books brings the concept of writing closer to the reader. Students know at an early age that writers are people like everyone else and that they (pupils) too can be writers if they put their minds to it.

From the lessons learnt, it is recommended that local books should continue to take precedence over imported ones.

Description of the Reading Tent Activities

1. Activity One:

- **Day One- Workshop for Teachers**

The activities started off with a workshop for teachers. Each of the ten schools invited was required to send two teachers.

The importance of training two teachers was that in case a teacher left the school at least one would remain to carry out the programmes.

During the workshop, a manual entitled: A Manual for Teachers for Promoting and Teaching Reading in Primary Schools, was used. They also went through entitled: Managing The Book Collection of a School Library.

Both manuals were received from NABOTU as training materials.

Each teacher was able to take a copy which would help him/her as they continued to carry out the reading programmes in their schools.

There was enough material in the manual for group work which made it quite participatory, and that way, a lot of information was shared between the participants and the facilitators.

The teachers also were able to role play some of the activities they had learnt about. They also identified which of the activities were easier for them from the list in the manual.

2. Activity Two:

- **Day 2 and Day 3- READING TENT WITH THE PUPILS**

After the training workshop, the teachers were set to carry out the activities of the tent. The facilitators' role was mainly supervisory, but worked with the teachers whenever necessary.

The students were divided into four equal groups and each group had at least four teachers. Different teachers took pupils through various activities.

Below are some of the activities that were carried out.

Before the beginning of the three day event, at a meeting consisting of implementers and NABOTU officials, the activities were classified into core and non core. The core activities were those that were seen to contribute directly to the promotion of reading.

1. CORE ACTIVITIES

a) Silent Reading

Silent reading was seen to be the most important way to promote reading and as such it was to number one on the time table. So each morning was to start with it. The books that were used in this activity were part of those to be donated to the schools.

Students under the supervision of their teachers and the facilitators could pick a book as soon as they were registered, and start reading. This was found to be very useful even if one or two schools came late, others would be continuing with their reading. Students were supposed to read quietly first after choosing a book of their choice. This was to introduce them to individual habit of purposeful reading.

Each student was given an exercise book and a pen. This book was to be a journal for the new words that the readers encountered. The pupils were to look up these words later in a lesson of Dictionary use.

b) **Reading Aloud**

This was deemed a second important activity in the promotion of reading. Pupils were put in four groups, with two or three teachers. In their groups, the teachers took them through the practice of reading aloud. This helped them to shed the fear of speaking before others and to learn to pronounce words properly.

During the loud reading exercise, marks were awarded and the best reader got a prize at the end of the day.

c) **Story Writing & Book making**

This was a third core activity. The purpose was to let the pupils practice story writing. Pupils were then taken through what a book consists of eg story, title, authors name, cover illustration, blurb or puff and publisher's name, they were required to imagine a story and write it.

The levels of writing were fairly good. This exercise was aimed at training the pupils in expressing themselves in writing and learning to use their imaginations and creativity.

The stories were to be made into books with the assistance of the teachers and facilitators. This one incorporated the element of **drawing** because they had to illustrate their covers. The best illustrator as well as the best story writer received prizes.

A good number of pupils could express themselves well in English, which meant that with a bit of help from the readers, these pupils could be very good.

d) **HIV/AIDS session**

In this session an author was to read for the students from his/her book about the subject of AIDS/HIV.

Lillian Tindyebwa, author, *Maggie's Friends*, (Macmillan 2008), read for the pupils from this book.. The students answered a few questions orally about it. It showed that they able to follow what was read.

Non CORE ACTIVITIES

These were: a) Word games

These were done at the end of day two. Teachers were familiar with them because they were also in the manual used during the workshop.

b) Spelling and New words.

The students again worked in groups with the teachers and learnt Dictionary Use. Each group had one dictionary but in future more dictionaries will be needed to expedite this activity. It was very beneficial to the pupils because many of them had never used a dictionary before.

c) Quiz

The teachers had been assigned to draw up suitable questions for the quiz. The topics were HIV/AIDS and Corruption. The pupils worked in groups and the best pupils in the quiz were given prizes at the end. See appendix 'D' for the questions used in the Quiz.

Role of My organisation

FEMRITE had the role of writing a proposal to NABOTU. On approval of proposal funds were released to carry out the tent. FEMRITE then had the duty of arranging for the tent. This consisted of writing letters to the office of DEO to get them informed and get their approval to operate within their system of education.

The DEO of Busia and the Inspector of schools were very supportive from the time of the pre-visit to Busia to the end of the workshop.

FEMRITE had the responsibility to ensure that the tent was carried out according to the guidelines of NABOTU.

This was done and the tent was run successfully.

Implementation of the program/project and methodology

FEMRITE Uganda Women Writers organized the project and carried it out. NABOTU had organized a seminar for the implementers which all intending facilitators attended. In this seminar NABOTU ensured that the implementers understood what was to be done. This was done by going through the training manual which was to be used during the teachers' workshop.

One of the FEMRITE facilitators, Mrs Lillian Tindyebwa made a preliminary visit to meet the DEO. Together with Inspector of Schools and Head teachers all arrangements were done, and the reading tent was run successfully.

In all

1. 10 schools attended
2. 100 students attended
3. 20 teachers attended
4. In total 1129 books were donated.

Lessons learnt

- One of the lessons learnt is that this programme has a lot of potential.
- The pupils are thirsty for knowledge and the teachers too need inspiration and assistance in confidence building, and proactive mindset.
- The community too needs a lot of encouragement. They could try and set up their own libraries where students can be able to sit and read. This could be done through fund raising and involving their MPs, NGOs etc.
- According to the evaluation response by the teachers, it would be better if the tent was conducted during the weekend so that pupils do not miss regular school classes.

- All in all both student and teachers showed a lot of enthusiasm for the programmes. Some felt that it should be extended to all schools. NABOTU could start thinking of how that could be effected.

Important Note:

Since Dictionary use is now firmly part of the time table of CRT, it is recommended that primary school dictionaries be included among the books that are donated.

On being questioned teachers confessed to having only one copy of dictionary for the entire school!

If is possible let NABOTU include one or two copies for each class in the book donations.

10. Have the implementation during the period influenced the following issues of special concern for SIDA/EABDA/NABOTU – a negative or positive way?

A) Equality between women and men

This topic was handled. The teachers were advised to select an equal number of boys and girls. They took the advice and the gender was balanced.

B) Anti- Corruption – From the previous tent, the facilitators realised that having quiz on corruption was not the best way of handling it because the children hardly knew anything about it so this time they decided to ask the teachers to prepare and make a presentation on corruption. This proved to be very effective because at the end of the children got involved in the presentation and became very knowledgeable in the area of corruption and how to fight it.

C) HIV/AIDS

There was a good number of HIV/AIDS Readers. Most of them are written by Ugandans, therefore the plots, characters and themes were quite familiar for the pupils. They learnt from them.

Author, Mrs Lillian Tindyebwa also read for them from her book entitled *Maggie's Friends*; it is published by Macmillan and is a primary level HIV/AIDS reader. Pupils liked and answered a few questions based on it. Later there was the quiz about HIV/AIDS.

Problems occurred during the reporting period

There were no unusual or insurmountable challenges/problems during this reporting

Recommendations

1. The schools should be encouraged to be more gender sensitive in the selection of teachers.
2. Dictionaries should also be donated to the schools. Some schools had One dictionary kept in the HM's office, others did not have any.