

2022 Davis Projects for Peace | Twaleta Mwasoma Literacy Project.

Project Location: Mathare, Nairobi-Kenya. Project Dates: July-Aug 2022.

Sponsoring Institutional Partner: PACEmaker International

Project Leader: Stacy Mwangi (Home country: Nairobi-Kenya, Home college: Whitman College)

Background

In Nairobi, nearly 2.5 million people live in slums spread across 200 different settlements. In these slums, 60% of the population lives on only 6% of the available land in the area.¹ In the settlement of Mathare, there exist only two public schools that serve 70,000 children; the lack of schools puts substantial pressure on an already strained education system.² A survey by Uwezo Kenya in 2011 showed that nearly 7 out of 10 children in third grade cannot read a second grade level book.³ This statistic attests to a disturbingly low literacy level in Kenya, which is magnified in low income households where children from underprivileged backgrounds have even less access to reading resources or support.⁴ Illiteracy proves to be costly when students sit for their final exams and fail to gain points to attend high schools. As illiteracy increases, the chances of attending high school decreases and kills the dreams of many who see education as the only way out of poverty.

A lack of exposure to reading opportunities and reading support has been linked to higher illiteracy levels. In many of these settlements, social amenities, like schools and hospitals, are inadequate. As a result, informal schools called APBET (Alternative Primary Basic Education and Training) were introduced to help children who could not afford the high cost of public schools. However, these schools are not allocated funds by the government since they do not satisfy the public school requirements.⁵ Not only do children in these settlements lack money to attend public schools that are better resourced, but they also do not receive government aid in the schools they struggle to attend.

Solution

My project name, *Twaleta Mwasoma*, translates to “We provide, You read” and is aimed at improving student literacy skills in these under-resourced areas in Nairobi. I propose to set up mobile libraries in 4 APBET schools that have no library in Mathare, Kenya’s second largest slum. These mobile libraries will consist of books stored in metal boxes, which can be locked and kept inside the school. These books will be sorted into junior (age 6-10) and senior (age 10-14) reader series, and will be moved to the necessary classes when library lessons begin. These books will be stored in the teacher’s staffroom or existing buildings in the school. The library sessions will be run by Teaching Assistants from PACEmaker International⁶, an organisation that works to provide quality education for children in underserved communities. PACEmaker International has agreed to collaborate with me on my proposed project and I am in regular contact with Mr. Brian Macharia, PACEmaker International’s Regional Manager in Nairobi, to discuss the logistics of the project. As a previous PACEmaker International Teaching Assistant myself, I am highly knowledgeable about PACEmaker International and how impactful their programs are for students.

Sustainability and Impact

The literacy sessions will be run by PACE Teaching Assistants, who have been trained to support students in their literacy journey. In addition, these books will be a resource to TARL (Teaching At the Right Level), a program run by PACE that helps students learn how to read. The program is broken into steps that assess whether a pupil can move from reading letters, to words, to sentences and paragraphs, and finally to comprehension. This evaluation system will allow us to measure the impact of the project and compare differences in literacy achieved after introducing storybooks. This project is intentionally designed to continue after my departure since it will be integrated into existing TARL programs in these schools. The expected outcome is a steady growth of literacy in children, which will ensure they can express themselves in Kiswahili and English. In addition, since the facilitators will be TAs, the pressure to abandon the support program to focus on teaching core curriculum is absent as they do not teach classes but only offer support.

Project Timeline

I will implement this project in five weeks, which I have further subdivided into the following phases:

1. Phase 1: 8 days (18th July – 27th July)

Visit 3 publishing companies in Kenya to discuss prices and see available books in their catalogues. Set up a meeting with PACE to access their TARL database and organise meetings with partner schools through them. Upon establishing contact with the school, make a school visit to meet the headmaster and share the project idea and ensure the school is committed to keeping books safe. Begin discussing prices on the storage boxes with Jua Kali artisans while considering proximity to targeted schools.

2. Phase 2: 8 days (28th July – 6th August)

Purchase books from publishers and storage boxes from Jua Kali artisans. Store books at the PACE offices for covering and stamping. Purchase nylon book covers to protect books from water damage. Contact teachers to agree on a day to hand over the books. Take a mandatory break from physical activities on the 6th because of the upcoming general elections that come with tension; I have taken all necessary precautions to ensure my safety during this time.

3. Phase 3: 6 days (6th August – 12th August)

Meet Teaching Assistants working with the TARL program and share the project with them. Discuss and evaluate how literacy data will be shared to measure project impact. Contact teachers again to confirm dates to hand over the books. Work for this week will be done remotely because of security reasons that arise during general elections.

4. Phase 4: 5 days (15th August – 20th August)

Commence distribution process; distribute books among the four schools. Meet with headmasters who will provide a written acknowledgement of receivership of the books. Review data structure points with PACE and address any arising issue.

Conclusion

Through the Twaleta Mwasoma Literacy Project, I seek to provide Kiswahili and English storybooks to pupils in non-formal schools, which are popular in underprivileged and under-resourced communities. By setting up mobile libraries and collaborating with PACEmaker International's existing literacy programs in the schools with which they already partner, I will improve literacy among children who attend schools with zero government assistance and improve their chances at succeeding. I believe Twaleta Mwasoma is possible one word at a time, until sentences can be understood.

References

- [1] PLC, Standard Group. n.d. 'The Standard'. The Standard. Accessed 3 January 2022.
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- [3] Uwezo, K. (2011) Annual Learning Assessment Kenya Report 2010. <http://www.uwezo.net>.
- [4] 'More Children in Schools Now but Literacy, Numeracy Skills Remain Low'. 2020. The East African. 2 August 2020..
- [5] 'Apbet Guidelines'. n.d. Accessed 5 January 2022. <https://www.hakijamii.com/?fw-portfolio=apbet-guidelines>.
- [6] 'PACEMaker International – Promoting Access to Community Education'. n.d. Accessed 10 January 2022. <https://pacemakerinternational.org/>

2022 Davis Projects for Peace | Twaleta Mwasoma Literacy Project | Budget Proposal

Project Location: Mathare, Nairobi-Kenya. Project Dates: July-Aug 2022.

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Item	Amount	Cost/Item	Budget Description
Roundtrip airfare	\$2000		Roundtrip airfare from Walla Walla to Nairobi
Accommodation	\$810	\$23/day	Accommodation for the 40 days in student hostels
Food and water	\$1000	\$25/day	Food, water, and electricity bills for the 40 days
Books from publishers	\$4800	\$4/book	1200 copies of books for the 4 schools each retailing at an average cost of \$4
Jua Kali storage boxes	\$360	\$90/school	9 storage boxes for each of 4 schools retailing at \$10 each
Padlocks and keys	\$100	\$25/school	10 padlocks per school, retailing for \$2.5 each, for 4 schools
Transportation	\$200	\$8/day	Transportation for 25 days where movement will be necessary
Car hire	\$100	\$25/day	Driver for transporting books and boxes from vendors to schools for 4 days
Staff payments	\$200	\$20/day	Support for covering books for 4 days
Nylon books covers	\$100		Nylon covers for the books
Airtime	\$50		Airtime for making phone calls during the 40-day period
Total	\$9720		