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All about IBBY—children in crisis and books

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Abstract

IBBY's founder, Jella Lepman, believed that books could build bridges of understanding and peace between people. Because of this strongly held belief, she created IBBY as an international organization that would bring children together by means of books. She did this because she was convinced that the German children she saw after the war needed not only food, medicine, clothes or shelter, but also books. Good books, literature, and especially books from around the world. They needed to know what all good readers know: you are not alone; others have experiences, feelings, and needs just like you do, and there is a whole world out there you know nothing about. And that world is not what you thought, it is more like the world you will find in all the wonderful books.

IBBY believes that every child, rich or poor, safe or in danger, with a home or without, has the right to become a reader. This has been IBBY's continuous message.

Today, fifty-five years later, IBBY has seventy-two national sections with an international secretariat with two full-time staff in Basel, Switzerland, all paid for by the annual membership dues of our national sections. IBBY's newest members come from Haiti, Guatemala, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

In its second half century IBBY continues with many of the projects that have been previously developed: the Hans Christian Andersen Award, the IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award, the IBBY Honour List, the Documentation Centre of Books for Young People with Disabilities, and the International Children's Book Day. In addition, IBBY coordinates international celebrations of International Children's Book Day.

Following its five decades of pioneering work, IBBY has launched a new set of activities and programmes that are built on the foundation and ideas that have guided IBBY since its inception.

The framework for these new projects is the *Right of Every Child to Become a Reader*. By this IBBY means that every child everywhere in the world must have access to books and the opportunity to become a reader in the fullest sense. IBBY sees this as a fundamental right and the doorway to empowerment for every child. But this is not simply a matter of literacy. This principle entails becoming a life long reader, one who can think critically, participate actively in society, resist demagoguery, understand the world, know him or herself, and know others.

IBBY believes that the best way for this to happen is through access to the very best literature for children – wonderfully written and beautifully illustrated books that tell the truth of children's lives. But the real emphasis is on making sure children everywhere have access to books about their own lives, published in their own countries. The governing metaphor for this new emphasis is that children need books that are mirrors and books that are windows. When using the metaphor of mirrors, we think of books in which we can see ourselves, our own lives, our own experiences, hear our own names, and see our own towns and streets. If you look in the mirror and don't see yourself – are you a kind of monster, a vampire perhaps! And this engenders self-doubt: who am I if I am not worthy of being written about? But also, as Jella Lepman taught us, we need books that are windows – ones that open onto the world and let us know how other people live, that they have the same human feelings and emotions as we do. Of course, one child's mirror is another's window and vice versa, which brings IBBY back full circle to the idea that books can build bridges of understanding between people.

Unfortunately, this right to become a reader is not equally available around the world. In most of the poorer countries children are lucky to find any books, much less high quality books. And they are almost certainly never going to find books that reflect their own lives and cultures.

This is due to the structure of the publishing industry as well as to the more general economic forces with which we all contend. Publishers from the great colonial powers Britain, France and Spain continue to live off their former colonies, and along with companies from the USA, they are the world's great exporters of books. To add to this concentration in the major rich countries, comes the further corporate concentration that

has taken place in world publishing in the past twenty-five years. The frightening reality is that the vast majority of the world's book production comes from a handful of multi-media conglomerates.

As publishing is only marginally profitable the last thing these conglomerates want to do is lose money publishing for small populations in, what to them, are marginal languages. Their business interest lies in selling the same books they have developed at great expense for their home or principal markets. Compounding the effect of the ownership of publishing companies is the fact that the great majority of editors in English language publishing companies are unilingual and they are reluctant to buy books they can't read. And editors in many other countries, though they do a much better job of taking on translations, are influenced by what is published in English. None of this contributes in any way to the production of local books, in local languages, reflecting their unique and particular societies. The only people who can see themselves in these mirrors are the privileged children of the world.

IBBY can't change the structure of world publishing but thanks to the generosity of Hideo Yamada, a Japanese honey producer and philanthropist, IBBY is working in a small way to address this imbalance with an effective series of projects aimed at helping to strengthen and develop local capacity for production of high quality books and reading promotion. In 2005 the IBBY-Yamada Fund began a five-year programme of workshops in publishing, writing, illustrating, and librarianship in countries that have little or no local publishing. Good writing and illustration is not born – it is shaped by years of apprenticeship, contact with excellent peers, editors, a market, critics, librarians and most importantly – receptive, book-loving child readers. We have that kind of expertise in IBBY and through the IBBY-Yamada Fund workshop programme we can share it with others. Our broad network of National Sections means that IBBY, through its dedicated and principled activists, can carry out effective reading projects in many countries that otherwise may not pay children's reading promotion the attention that is imperative for their growth.

The following IBBY-Yamada workshops have been undertaken since 2006:

2006

Guatemala, Guatemala City: Symposium on the importance of developing life long readers in a democracy and workshops on reading promotion.

Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar: Two workshops on producing picture books and how to produce cloth picture books.

Rwanda, Kigali: Enrichment of Cultural Development, Encouraging Literacy by Bringing Children's Books to the Classroom. This took the form of a five-day workshop for heads of teacher training colleges, government officials and teachers from Rwanda and neighbouring countries. The workshop was aimed at promoting the use of locally published children's books in the classroom and of reading in local languages and the mother tongue. The workshop was supported by the IBBY-Yamada Fund, UNESCO's

International Fund for the Promotion of Culture and Rwanda's children's publishing house Editions Bakame.

2007

Cuba, Havana: Regional workshop on writing and illustration in connection with 2007 Regional Conference.

India: Creating libraries. The project established libraries in two community centres: in Arunachal Pradesh (N. India) and in New Delhi. Training sessions were organized with parents, social workers and teachers not only to train them how to run the libraries, but also how to organize additional book-related activities.

Indonesia, Jakarta: Workshop on publishing. Designed to equip the participants with basic knowledge and some of the skills needed to publish and distribute quality books for teenagers.

Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar: The second Mongolian workshop comprised a five-day course to study design, layout and illustration.

Palestine, Ramallah: Workshop for professional editing of children's literature. Designed to give a comprehensive introduction to editing for children: from the writer to the reader.

South Africa, Cape Town: Books where there are no books: The project is designed to encourage children to gather oral stories and turn them into written stories, thus helping the children develop essential writing skills and increase their knowledge, confidence and communication skills.



Uganda, Kampala: Workshop on writing and illustrating skills for children's storybooks. The three-day course included context analysis, skills needed for writers/illustrators, group discussions and presentations.

Uruguay, Montevideo: This project is designed to promote support and training for people who work with children and young people. It concentrates on training modules in public schools and reading promotion strategies.

2008

Madagascar, Antananarivo: Known as the *Bobiko* project, it is designed to develop a children's book culture: books in the local language as well as bilingual books. It includes a publishing workshop and a workshop for writers and one for illustrators.

Bolivia: To be ourselves, handmade books: To recover the oral memory of Quecha people in the town of Colcapirua. The project involves research work amongst local people and will result in the production of picture books to be distributed back into the community.

South Africa: Books where there are no books. This is a continuation of the 2007 project. The project was given the name *Unknown 2 Known* by the Zimele volunteers. Children are encouraged to write stories of everyday life (the *Known*) and to collect stories from their parents, grandparents, and neighbours: family anecdotes, folktales and legends (the *Unknown*). It is creating a platform for real human and social development and by doing so enhances the children's lives, bringing healing, building leaderships skills in the local volunteers, and fostering a sense of community volunteerism.

Germany: Professional exchange visit. The German Section of IBBY, will invite a member of another national section who will be able to participate at its annual seminar as well as give the chance to visit two other institutions in the field of children's literature and reading promotion in Germany.

Guatemala: Workshop for training teachers in reading promotion. This project aims at instructing professionals, not just teachers, with new theories and practical knowledge to promote reading. In this way, they will be able to manage new future projects.

Haiti: The Joyful Caravan of Books: workshops and festivals. The purpose of this project is to improve Haitian children's exposure to reading by bringing books to children in areas where there are no books or in places where very limited quantities are available, especially in their home language, Haitian Creole also, by training volunteers to develop skills in storytelling and creating reading materials based on their local cultural traditions and experiences. The project comprises three workshops with major themes of reading, selection, distribution of books to children, as well as storytelling.

Malaysia: Conference and workshop: publishing and marketing. The conference comprises three main activities: conference, workshop and exhibition. The sub-themes are as follows: The Business of Publishing for Children; Children's Literature in Asian Tradition; Inspiring Young Minds and Creativity; Reading Promotions and Activities.

Nepal: Setting up 12 mobile libraries. The main objective of this project is to help the establishment and administration of 12 mobile libraries in schools in remote villages in two districts of Nepal. A reading programme will also be introduced, including storytelling and other reading promotion activities.

Further to the mission of ensuring that every child has the right to become a reader and influenced by the experiences of the Banco del Libro in Venezuela and the projects that arose following the Tsunami disaster in South East Asia, IBBY has begun another very powerful activity – the IBBY Fund for Children in Crisis.

This work represents a circling back to Jella Lepman and her basic tenets. It is really an updated version of what Jella Lepman invented after World War II. This is now known around the world as Bibliotherapy.

IBBY believes that children who are suffering from natural disaster, displacement, war and its aftermath, desperately need books and stories as well as food, shelter, clothing and medicines. These are necessities and are not mutually exclusive.

Today, two projects for the IBBY Children in Crisis programme are fully operational, one has just begun, and another is about to begin and four others are in different stages of development. Funding for these major projects is being raised one project at a time.

Lebanon

Although the start of the project was delayed for about three months because of local administrative problems and the turbulent political situation in the country, the teacher-training sessions went smoothly and the teachers received newly printed manuals along with the work books for children: a total of 2,347 manuals were distributed. In connection with the training sessions, three thousand children attended eight different shows that were performed and each child received a book. The schools were given a set of 50 books each and will receive more when they become available. Despite the many problems faced by the team, the positive reports from teachers and from the school principals on the behaviour of children is very encouraging.





And, there is now the very real possibility that the Lebanese Ministry of Education will take up the program and use it in all Lebanese schools.

Gaza, Palestine

Gaza must certainly be one of the worst places in the world to be a child and it deteriorates daily. With the support of IBBY Lebanon in book selection and our section in the Palestinian territories, based in Ramallah, we are building two community children's libraries, stocking them with selected books that are appropriate to the circumstances of these children, and training two librarians in bibliotherapy. The urgency of this cannot be underestimated since librarianship hardly exists in Gaza. Through sharing reading, storytelling and talking, we hope to bring some measure of relief, understanding and light to these children. The training of librarians and the restocking of the libraries will continue in years to come. Tragically, though this project is now needed more than ever, we have had to move slower than planned as we have to be sure that it can take place safely. The first consignments of books have reached their destinations and slowly the libraries are being set up. But, because of our strong presence in the region and colleagues who believe as deeply as we do, we believe that eventually these children will be helped. This project is entirely funded by the great American author, one of the world's truly committed individuals, Katherine Paterson – author of the *Bridge to Terabithia*: a book that was so effectively used in the Bibliotherapy programmes in Venezuela.



Peru

Following the disastrous earthquake in southern Peru 2007 IBBY Peru has been working to relieve the trauma by using bibliotherapy. The initial goal of the project was to offer safe places for the children to go to. Up to then most of them were out on the streets because there was nowhere else for them to go to. IBBY Peru was especially concerned with small children and their mothers. The next phase is to secure these libraries and ensure that there is an efficient organization to run them. In order to accomplish this, frequent evaluations by professionals, such as librarians and teachers, are necessary and will become an important educational and social service.



Colombia

This is a country where a million and a half children have been displaced by the internal conflict caused by the ongoing war on drugs. We are just beginning to run a project where one thousand street children will be invited to join reading groups. The project will stock mobile libraries, and train some of the older affected children to become reading-club leaders. The children will initially be simply read to, but will be encouraged to borrow books to take to where they live and then return them and share them with the other members. We hope and expect that, through reading, these children will be freed to talk about their feelings, what has happened to them, and thus begin to understand their own circumstances so that they can see a way through the turmoil to forging new lives. At the end of the programme we will conduct a rigorous assessment of its impact that will involve relief workers who are providing housing, clothing etc., to these children on an emergency basis. This involvement will lead to them routinely including books, reading and storytelling in their future relief work and will also encourage them to spread the message of bibliotherapy. This project is being run by the Banco del Libro in

Venezuela working with Silvia Castrillon, former director of IBBY Colombia–Fundalectura and current leader of Asolectura in Colombia.

Afghanistan

IBBY, in cooperation with the Canadian Organization for Development in Education (CODE) and CIDA (the Canadian foreign aid agency) and our national section in Iran, based at the Children's Book Council, will be holding a meeting in Afghanistan in early 2009. The guests and speakers will be experts from IBBY, Iran, and CODE, as well as key people involved in reading, libraries, and the ministries of education in Afghanistan. The meeting will prepare a strategic plan on 1) how to move forward toward the creation of national publishing and local books in Afghanistan; 2) how to build a network of school libraries and train school librarians in reading promotion; and, 3) how to reinforce and bring children's materials into public libraries. Although this is an in-depth and long-term ambitious project, of which IBBY has been the catalyst, there is a very strong desire in the country, at many levels, for this to happen and IBBY is willing to invest time, energy and knowledge toward this goal. We hope to extend the project to Tajikistan as resources, both human and financial, become available.

Karen people exiled from Burma

There are roughly 120,000 Karen refugees living in camps in Thailand and the recent turmoil in Myanmar has increased the population of these camps. Children live in the camps for their entire childhood with no prospects for leaving them or of having a meaningful future. Japanese NGOs have already built libraries in these camps and this project would train and assist in the development of bibliotherapy activities, training librarians and using the libraries as a resource. It will be an activity coordinated with IBBY's Japanese section, JBBY, many of whose members have already been assisting Karen refugees.

Northern Uganda

A number of children have been rescued from the Lord's Resistance Army. As the possibility of a peace agreement grows, even more children will emerge. As the LRA's strategy was to force these children to commit unspeakable acts against their own families and communities, the rescued children are finding it almost impossible to reintegrate into their former communities, much less able to resume a normal and productive life. Using experiences gleaned with street children in Colombia, this project would focus on training aid workers and NGOs already working in this area in the usefulness of Bibliotherapy with extremely damaged children. IBBY has a strong section in Uganda who will work with the agencies.

Guatemala

This type of activity is also a goal for our new National Section in Guatemala, where thirty years of war and the death of 250,000 mainly indigenous people has left most young people without hope. As a result of the war and the complete failure by

successive governments and the United States, one of the principle sponsors of the war, to implement the peace accords, Guatemala now has the highest crime rate in the Americas. It is also the country with the highest percentage of indigenous people in the Americas. These people are bearing the brunt of the post-war chaos in Guatemala. Our experiences in Colombia will again help to formulate a Children in Crisis programme in the country, though much of the work will probably take place in indigenous communities rather than in an urban setting. Currently, there are many indigenous self-help groups who are actively seeking support for this kind of programme.

In conclusion, reading and books can save lives. They can change lives. They can give children in the most desperate circumstances a way to begin to live again and to understand what has happened to them. IBBY believes that every child, rich or poor, safe or in danger, with a home or without, has the right to become a reader. This has been IBBY's continuous message. The new projects, together with the existing ones, make IBBY and its seventy-two national sections uniquely suited to working concretely to bring children and the very best books together around the world. We stand firmly by our deeply held convictions that books and stories can change lives, bring understanding, and empower the powerless.