



**Visions In Action**  
volunteers in international development

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## The Million Book March for Literacy in Liberia- What is the Impact on Literacy?

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### **Executive Summary**

Visions in Action, an international NGO, implemented the largest book distribution and training program in Liberia's history from 2007-09. The "Million Book March for Literacy in Liberia-Books for School Libraries Project" was supported by USAID with books contributed by Books for Africa and Better World Books. Over 24 months VIA and its NGO partners received 31 shipping containers of over 760,000 new and used books from the United States and distributed them to 1040 schools in all 15 of Liberia's counties, about one third of all schools in the country. Most of the schools had no books at the start, and no functional library; by the end of the project all the target schools had received books and had two teachers trained in proper library management. This paper examines the impact the program had on Liberian schools and literacy through primarily qualitative reports from selected schools.

The Million Book March for Literacy- Books for School Libraries Project was created by Visions in Action in 2007 to address the tremendous shortage of books in schools throughout Liberia. After its devastating 14 year civil war from 1990-2003, many schools were without school furniture, supplies and books. Coupled with a lack of educational material in general in the rural areas even before the war, there was a desperate need for textbooks of all levels and supplementary reading material, including nonfiction, novels, dictionaries and encyclopedias. Visions in Action approached USAID's Africa Education Initiative for support, and received a grant to distribute initially 25 containers of new and used books to schools all over the country. With an additional 6 containers provided by Books for Africa and Better World Books, the program reached 31 containers with over 760,000 books distributed to 1040 schools, the largest program of its kind in Liberian history.

## 1. Survey of Schools

Before schools could receive books, or be invited to one of the library management trainings, a survey was carried out. This involved visiting every school to obtain important information and to view the schools library. Those schools that were ready to receive books or who were committed to establishing a library were then invited to one of the library management trainings that was to be held in their county.

## 2. Library Management Trainings

A Library Management Workshop booklet was researched and developed by Visions in Action. This then formed the structure of a two-day training. Each invited institution was given a copy of the booklet at the workshop to take back to their school. Sessions on the two-day workshop focused on:

1. Introduction to library services – an overview of library services and the role of school libraries in particular
2. Book processing – an introduction to the task of physical preparation of books that will form part of the library
3. Cataloging & Classification – basic procedures involved in simple descriptive cataloging and organizing library materials according to the Visions in Action Classification System
4. Circulation – the steps involved in setting up a record system for circulating library materials
5. Reference services – ways of assisting students who use the library
6. Pointers in library management – shelving, protection, equipment, security, environment, keeping statistics
7. Library policy issues – considering issues that will form the rules and regulations of the library – deposits, fines, access for non-students, checking out books, opening hours
8. Book distribution, waybills and MOU – informing them of what books they will receive from Visions in Action and the related documentation
9. Library quiz – to test the knowledge of the trainees over the two-day workshop

|   | County      | Number of workshops | Number of schools trained | Number of teachers trained | Male | Female |
|---|-------------|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|------|--------|
| 1 | Montserrado | 32                  | 609                       | 1213                       | 865  | 348    |
| 2 | Margibi     | 8                   | 162                       | 327                        | 226  | 101    |
| 3 | Bong        | 11                  | 213                       | 417                        | 345  | 72     |

|    |              |           |              |              |              |            |
|----|--------------|-----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| 4  | Grand Bassa  | 4         | 93           | 188          | 158          | 30         |
| 5  | Lofa         | 6         | 102          | 210          | 182          | 28         |
| 6  | Gbarpolu     | 5         | 117          | 238          | 201          | 37         |
| 7  | River Cess   | 3         | 66           | 135          | 124          | 11         |
| 8  | Bomi         | 2         | 59           | 118          | 93           | 25         |
| 9  | Sinoe        | 0         | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0          |
| 10 | Nimba        | 4         | 17           | 35           | 23           | 12         |
| 11 | Cape Mount   | 2         | 62           | 124          | 101          | 23         |
| 12 | Maryland     | 0         | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0          |
| 13 | Grand Kru    | 1         | 20           | 40           | 37           | 3          |
| 14 | Grand Gedeh  | 1         | 28           | 56           | 45           | 11         |
| 15 | River Gee    | 1         | 20           | 42           | 39           | 3          |
|    | <b>Total</b> | <b>80</b> | <b>1,568</b> | <b>3,143</b> | <b>2,439</b> | <b>704</b> |

A total of 80 workshops were carried out in 13 counties of Liberia. 69 were conducted by Visions in Action, 5 by Samaritans Purse, 4 by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), 1 by Ibis and 1 by the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

Of the 69 workshops carried out by VIA one in Nimba was co-ordinated by IRC, one in River Gee was arranged by Ibis, and the one in Grand Gedeh was arranged by Peace Corps and Creative Associates.

Due to logistical constraints and time we were unable to carry out workshops in Sinoe and Maryland counties. Two people from Sinoe County were able to attend one of the workshops in Montserrado County so that Learning Resource Greenville could benefit from books.

Of those 3,143 teachers trained, 2,439 or 78 percent were male, and 704 or 22 percent were female. This is representative of the gender imbalance amongst teachers in schools especially in the rural areas.

Not all of those schools trained have received books, this is because of the short fall in the number of books that were sent and the commitment made during the workshop to deliver a set number of books to each type of school.

### 3. Containers

A total of 31 containers were received from Books for Africa. Two contained university and college books and the rest were school level.

### 4. Books distributed and libraries reached

A total of 760,918 books were received in the 31 containers and over a period of 25 months between 1 May 2007 and 31 May 2009 they were distributed to 1040 libraries across the 15 counties of Liberia.

|   | County   | Total libraries reached | Total books distributed |
|---|----------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Bomi     | 44                      | 19,030                  |
| 2 | Bong     | 167                     | 113,274                 |
| 3 | Gbarpolu | 63                      | 36,070                  |

|    |                  |             |                |
|----|------------------|-------------|----------------|
| 4  | Grand Bassa      | 33          | 27,383         |
| 5  | Grand Cape Mount | 62          | 33,110         |
| 6  | Grand Gedeh      | 31          | 20,139         |
| 7  | Grand Kru        | 20          | 10,288         |
| 8  | Lofa             | 46          | 46,912         |
| 9  | Margibi          | 46          | 31,902         |
| 10 | Maryland         | 2           | 5,704          |
| 11 | Montserrado      | 453         | 364,453        |
| 12 | Nimba            | 24          | 20,058         |
| 13 | River Cess       | 27          | 13,744         |
| 14 | River Gee        | 21          | 16,821         |
| 15 | Sinoe            | 1           | 2,030          |
|    | <b>Total</b>     | <b>1040</b> | <b>760,918</b> |

The 1040 libraries that received books can be categorized as follows:

| <b>Type of library</b>                | <b>Total libraries reached</b> |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Primary level school                  | 496                            |
| Primary & Junior level school         | 326                            |
| Junior level school                   | 12                             |
| Junior & Senior level school          | 19                             |
| Primary, Junior & Senior level school | 132                            |
| Senior level school                   | 4                              |
| College & University                  | 25                             |
| Rural Teacher Training Institute      | 3                              |
| Church                                | 7                              |
| Community based                       | 14                             |
| Prison                                | 2                              |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>1040</b>                    |

## 5. Partner Organisations

There were many partner organisations that made the book project a success and enabled us to reach all 15 counties of Liberia with books.

- NRC – they carried out all of the training, collected, processed and delivered all of the books to schools in Grand Cape Mount, Gbarpolu and Bomi counties
- Ibis – helped co-ordinate one workshop and carried out one themselves, they collected the processed books from Visions in Action in Monrovia and delivered them to River Gee and Grand Kru counties
- IRC – helped to co-ordinate one workshop in Nimba County and trained schools in Lofa County, provided their staff to work at Visions in Actions Monrovia office to process all of the books, transported and distributed books to both counties
- Samaritans Purse – trained most schools, processed and delivered most of their books
- Creative Associates – collected most of the books from Visions in Action Monrovia office for their six resource centers and transported them to the various counties
- Peace Corps – coordinated with the help of the Learning Resource Center in Zwedru, the workshop and delivery of books to all 30 institutions in Grand Gedeh County
- UNMIL – made available two trucks to transport books to Zwedru in Grand Gedeh County
- Ministry of Education Monrovia – provided information on schools and accredited universities and were very helpful when we experienced problems at the port
- Ministry of Education at County and District level – were crucial to our activities, especially carrying out surveys and co-ordinating workshops, in some counties they also co-ordinated the book deliveries.
- USAID Gib Brown – kept in regular contact with Visions in Action Monrovia and gave invaluable guidance
- Books for Africa- sourced, stocked and shipped all of the containers of books to Liberia.
- Better World Books- Sourced and shipped several containers of university level books, and provided financial support to the project

No two relationships were the same amongst the partner organisations; they all had different levels of resources and commitment to the book project. Their standards varied greatly and

much time has been spent by Visions in Action checking and making corrections and chasing missing information and documentation. This in part can be blamed on the change and high turnover of staff at partner organizations throughout the duration of the book project and their other program commitments.

## 6. Shelf kits and locks distributed

The first shelf kits were not delivered until mid-June 2008 which meant it was not possible to reach all those schools that had benefited from books. We chose to focus our efforts in Montserrado, Bong and Grand Bassa counties where Visions in Action has offices located. In Bong and Grand Bassa the wood was purchased locally. For schools in Montserrado wood was purchased at a premium as transportation costs had been added by the supplier. All other materials (nails, varnish, glue, sandpaper) were purchased in Monrovia for the best price and sent to the two sub-offices.

Delivering shelf kits would have been challenging in many of the other counties as it involves sourcing a local carpenter that is located close to the schools and making arrangements for the wood to be cut. This process really needs someone on the ground to carry out the negotiation, constant follow up with the carpenter and a vehicle to transport the planks to the various schools. There was limited interest shown by the partner organisations in taking on deliveries of the shelf kits.

|   | County       | Number of schools served | Number of shelf kits supplied | Number of locks supplied |
|---|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Montserrado  | 296                      | 1926                          | 179                      |
| 2 | Bong         | 102                      | 302                           | 56                       |
| 3 | Grand Bassa  | 32                       | 145                           | 12                       |
|   | <b>Total</b> | <b>430</b>               | <b>2,373</b>                  | <b>247</b>               |

## 7. Case Studies:

Presented here are four case studies on the impact of the books project from a rural elementary school, a rural town high school, an urban vocational school and a university in Monrovia, the capital city. VIA compiled 25 such case studies, which can be made available upon request.

### Tellowoyan Elementary & Junior High School

|                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Location:                 | Johns Town                    |
| District:                 | Voinjama                      |
| County:                   | Lofa                          |
| Level:                    | Nursery-9 <sup>th</sup> Grade |
| Number of students:       | 426                           |
| Number of teachers:       | 15                            |
| Number of books supplied: | 575                           |

Nestled in the mountains of Lofa County, Tellowoyan Public School has been educating Lofa residents since 1968. Tellowoyan began its operations as the only school in rural Johns Town, a town that bridges Zorzor and Voinjama Districts. Throughout the seventies and eighties, the

schools library contained an abundant array of education materials with selections in mathematics, literature, sciences, and encyclopedias. However, political instability plaguing the country in the late 1980s led to the schools fourteen years closure. During this time the schools infrastructure was destroyed beyond repair and all assets including educational materials were ransacked.

In 2004, with the assistance of Liberia Community Infrastructure Project, the campus was reconstructed and Tellewoyan reopened its doors. The main difference between the opening in 1968 and 2004 was the lack of educational resources. Community residents were overjoyed with the new campus but soon realized the hardship facing the school due to the lack of vital educational materials. Faced with this challenge, parents and teachers began accepting community donations to purchase textbooks from Monrovia and neighboring Guinea.

Principal Buyawala K. Sorsor appreciated the efforts of the community and parents but recognized that the lack of sufficient educational materials significantly constrained and frustrated teachers and students. He explained "at the time [when] books were absent, it was difficult to teach and draw lesson plans." With a growing population, school administrators began appealing to external partners for assistance.

Four years later, the school was finally able to further empower students and strengthen the learning process with the arrival of the educational supplies from USAID and Books for Africa. Immediately, the Principal arranged a reading room and instructed teachers to incorporate the new materials into lesson plans.

Elementary teachers took the initiative to not only assign homework from the textbooks but to physically use textbooks during class sessions. Principal Sorsor's face lights up when discussing the schools educational resources, "[students] are now able to read and pronounce difficult words." Teachers added to the discussion by explaining "the books helped us in many ways by making lesson plans easier and providing more information to develop lessons. Lesson planning and presentation in the past can be rated at 40 percent. Now we rate it as 89 percent!"

Skills learned at the Visions in Action Library Management Workshop enabled the school's librarians to learn proper management techniques such as classification, shelf arrangement, and resource management. Librarians Alexander Forkpa and Lawrence Jallah monitored the student's library use and decided that they were responsible enough to check out books for up to one week. Student James Kollie stressed the importance and impact of learning materials for his fellow classmates and the schools policy allowing students to check out books, "when we were given assignments we had to walk too far to other towns in search of books or resource materials to do our assignments. We had to borrow, rent, or buy materials that were prescribed for our level. With the Visions in Action books, we are now relieved from this problem. At least we have books on our own campus and I borrow books all the time."

Likewise, Vice Principal for Instruction Mr. Guworwala concluded "we will use our new resources for their intended purpose. We appreciate Visions in Action because they care for our learning and we are happy that we have books to learn from."

### **Voinjama Multilateral High School**

Location: Voinjama City  
District: Voinjama  
County: Lofa

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| Level:                    | 7 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grades |
| Number of students:       | 1,125                                    |
| Number of teachers:       | 31                                       |
| Number of books supplied: | 2,604                                    |

In 1978 Voinjama Multilateral High School manifested as one of five premier multidiscipline schools in Liberia, offering a variety of practical and theoretical courses including carpentry, agriculture, and business. The school was fully equipped with modern technology and an abundant supply of education materials. Multilateral gained recognition and distinction for its unrivaled education initiatives and expanded to provide on campus housing for distant students. For the next twelve years, Multilateral matriculated into an elite competitive learning institution.

Rampant political instability in the late 1980's caused the schools abrupt closure in 1990. Over the next 14 years the school remained closed and its beautiful campus endured years of neglect and damage.

When peace finally came to the country, Multilateral reopened in 2004. However it was not the same campus as before. The infrastructure was in ruins and all resources had been pillaged. Through the generous assistance of community residents, alumni, and International NGOs the school was able to initiate rebuilding of the infrastructure. Obtaining educational materials was another obstacle. Using a strained budget the school was able to secure a few textbooks.

Five years later Visions in Action awarded the institution educational supplies made possible with funds from USAID. School Principal Addis Kutuacquoi was overwhelmed with the new resources that would ameliorate educational standards to prewar status. Principal Kutuacquoi explained "before the war our students had an interest in reading and learning; after we lost everything and student moral decreased because they did not have research materials. We had students entering in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade who could not read."

The schools library is currently under construction; in the meantime the school dedicated a classroom as the reading room. At any time of the day teachers and students are seen studying in the reading room; English, math, and chemistry books are those most demanded. School librarian Beatrice Behan reported a 50 percent increase in attendance since receiving the consignment. Not only are teachers using educational materials in class and to prepare lesson plans but also accompanying students to the library for homework assistance.

Upon completion of the library, school administrators plan to practice library management skills learned at the VIA workshop and allow students to checkout materials.

Principal Kutuacquoi expressed appreciation for the materials and explained the impact for his students "the books have created a will for students to do research; before the books many of my students could not conduct research or read; I can already see an improvement in student performance and [I] expect it will continue to increase. The books were timely." He further joked that teachers are seen reading books so often that he drafted a new policy requiring teachers to write "book reports."

Multilateral is dedicated to promoting literacy beyond its campus thus has extended an invitation to neighboring schools and residents to use their materials. The school explained that it is a small gesture of gratitude for the community support bestowed when the school was struggling to reopen. Multilateral is now fully equipped for a complete recovery.



## Diversified Skills Training Academy

|                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Location:                 | Paynesville (Monrovia suburb) |
| County:                   | Montserrado                   |
| Level of school:          | ABC to Grade 12               |
| Number of pupils:         | 400                           |
| Number of teachers:       | 24                            |
| Number of books supplied: | 2,012                         |

Founded in 2001, Diversified Skills Training Academy provides an assortment of diverse educational subjects for enrolled students. For eight years, the private institution has catered teaching to the needs of each individual student.

School administration appealed to the international community to enhance the schools efforts by providing additional educational resources. The school obtained a collection of 600 maths, law, English, and arts textbooks. These were mainly donated from various christian missions with the school purchasing five percent of its collection. However, the collection was inadequate for its growing population as junior and senior high school books were scarce. School Principal Jerry Garglahn agonized about the quality of education for older students and realized that without a sufficient consignment of educational resources for junior and senior high school students, their performance would suffer. He explained that "instructors would constantly lobby administration to purchase more education resources; they were getting frustrated."

The arrival of the educational supplies from Visions in Action has overcome this challenge for the school. Principal Garglahn excludes "VIA delivered quality books, the right type for our school, and right on time."

With the new educational supply by Visions in Action to the school Mr. Garglahn has integrated library science into the curricula with librarians transferring knowledge gained at the Visions in Action two-day Library Management Workshop. Each week the librarian teaches library science to each class and then accompanies the class to the library for practical demonstrations and reading hour. The inclusion of library science has encouraged reading and doubled library attendance. Presently students frequent the library more than teachers. Furthermore, their interest in the materials encouraged the school to allow students to check-out resources for up to one week.

Additionally instructors have incorporated resources into daily teaching. The Principal has mandated for the materials to be used during class sessions, drafting of lesson plans, and for homework assignments. Early readers are often used in class for elementary students while language arts and science textbooks are used in class for junior and senior high students. Once class sessions have ended, teachers return the materials to the library for safe keeping.

Mr. Garglahn explained that integrating resources into teaching has improved the schools educational status, student grades, and reading and comprehension skills. Moreover, according to the Principal, parents and teachers no longer complain about the lack of materials, "before VIA, [older] students and teachers would search the streets for resources ... now they don't have to do that."

## African Methodist Episcopal University

|                           |                                     |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Location:                 | Camp Johnson Road, Central Monrovia |
| County:                   | Montserrado                         |
| Level of school:          | University                          |
| Number of pupils:         | 3,517                               |
| Number of teachers:       | 367                                 |
| Number of books supplied: | 2,576                               |

Strategically located on a 14 acre campus in the heart of downtown Monrovia, African Methodist Episcopal University (AMEU) is an initiative of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

In 1994 the Bishop of the 14<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District mandated an institute for higher learning in Liberia; soon after patrons and stakeholders began the planning process and raising funds to turn the mandate into reality. In 1995 the private university initiated courses offering undergraduate degree programs in ten specialized areas including theology, political science, economics, accounting, religious education, public administration, English, management, sociology, and mass communications.

Construction plans for the new campus included a detached library, which is located across the street from the main campus. This library was stocked with science, technology, English, foreign languages, economics, social sciences, reference, business, theology, arts, and more. Half of the materials were donated from various private patrons and international non-governmental organizations with the school purchasing the remainder.

Albeit the school maintained a resourceful library many specialized materials were scarce or non-existent. Amid a growing population, the school was in need of additional materials and resources to satisfy student demand.

The new educational supplies provided by Visions in Action increased stock by more than 35 percent providing substantial increases in business and mathematical books which were in great demand.

Mathematics Professor Gogbah Koquoi described his use of the library and the books donated by Visions in Action. He stated "I visit the library once a week and use the text as a guide for teaching. Once my topic has been approved, I [browse] the different books to get the body of my subject. Since the consignment I have witnessed a 25 percent increase in student performance. My assignments require students to go to the library and I [credit] their library attendance and more resources to improvements in grades."

Graduating Senior Accounting Student Major Samukai confirmed the way Mr. Koquoi grades students performance and illustrated the impact of educational materials throughout his four year matriculation; he explained "as a freshman there was not a large selection of books so I would have to go to the University of Liberia or American Embassy Library for resources. Sometimes I would look on the internet. It was a burden and cost intensive. There were so many college students vying for the same books so many times I would have to wait long to use a book or would not be able to use it at all ... now that we have more books here, I spend my time at the AMEU library. I read ahead of class now."

AMEU Vice President Dr. Brown asserted the “Visions in Action donation forced the President (of AMEU) to think about enlarging the library. The new materials [have] stretched our capacity and additional space is needed. We are now considering developing a library for each department.” He further discussed the impact of the donation for the school, “I personally examined the books. The quality was at a high level and it made us conscious of international educational expectations and quality of resources. The holdings were diverse and we received books in areas that are not currently being offered such as engineering. It made me think, why is engineering not offered. I am now looking to develop a pool of expertise in these areas, locate more resources, and start brainstorming on enlarging curriculum and improving faculty professional development.”

Dr. Brown elaborated on the ease of educational access for students and faculty. He stated, “[the supplies] was a pleasant surprise ... especially because there was no monetary change. VIA was extremely helpful.”

The university experienced an increase in national ranking and performance which indicated an overall improvement in student comprehension and understanding. The new resource amalgamated with sound leadership and dedicated staff, AMEU is equipping its students for promising professional careers, realizing their goals, and providing the opportunity to impact and change the future of their nation.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, though there are not available national statistics proving that access to schools with books increases literacy rates and school performance, one can conclude from the 25 case studies done by VIA, of which four were presented here, that the availability of the books made a tremendous difference in the quality of the learning experience at these schools. A longitudinal study is needed over several years comparing schools that received books to those that did not to definitively show that literacy rates have increased in the schools with books. Our anecdotal evidence shows that school attendance rates and interest in school by both teachers and students was greater in the schools that received books, than those that did not.

## 7. Supporting documents

### a. Success Stories

- 14 Tellewoyan Elementary & Junior High School
- 15 Voinjama Multilateral High School
- 16 Kolahun Central High School
- 17 Christian Bible Faith Mission School
- 18 C.D.B. King Elementary School
- 19 Diversified Skills Training Academy
- 20 Ezekiel H. Guti High School
- 21 Bishop J.L. Dutton Foundation School
- 22 Albert Porte Memorial Library
- 23 African Methodist Episcopal Zion University College (AMEU Zion)
- 24 Morris Community College & Airline Studies
- 25 African Methodist Episcopal University (AMEU)

### b. International Literacy Day

### c. VIA Book Project evaluation

### d. VIA book & shelf database