



friends of **African**
Village libraries

Generous donors have enabled FAVL to establish and continuously manage 13 libraries in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Tanzania, and Uganda. FAVL also supports the Uganda Community Library Association, with 64 member libraries.

Current fundraising priorities:

- Building an endowment for each of the FAVL-managed community libraries
- Hosting children’s summer reading camps in each library
- Producing more micro-books in local languages and each country’s language of instruction to encourage a culture of reading

Friends of African Village Libraries is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt non-profit.

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Kitengesa Library: A Model For All

Founded in 1999 as a box of books distributed weekly from a classroom, within three years the library had grown to fill a one-room building. Now in its 11th year, the Kitengesa Community Library in Uganda has moved into a new three-room complex to house not only its growing collection of more than 3,000 books, but also a computer center and community hall (pictured at right). Demonstrating that a library can be so much more than a building with books, it continues to flourish by developing innovative programs in response to the needs of its community.



The Library Scholarship program, begun in 2004, pays the school fees of seven secondary school students (six are at right), who in return work for the library while acquiring valuable skills.



The library also hosts volunteers who teach computer skills to adults and English to children in the neighboring primary school. Students from more distant primary schools are invited to the regular Children’s Days to read, write, listen to stories, and play games. The new Family Literacy Project is teaching local women how to help their children do well in school (at right).



These programs have inspired change: a forestry project modeled on the Library Scholarships; a women’s micro-finance group whose initial capital was supplied by one of the library’s visiting researchers; and Afri-Pads, an organization that employs 20 local girls to sew affordable sanitary towels, using the library’s former space as its workshop (at right).

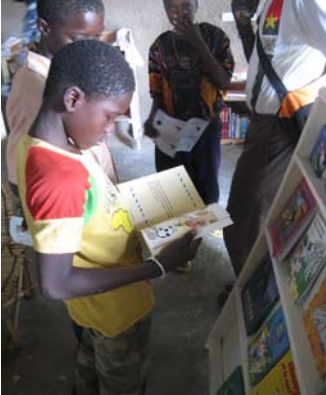


Kitengesa Community Library has become a model and an inspiration for libraries throughout Uganda, with many people visiting to get ideas. In 2007 the library’s founder also founded the Uganda Community Libraries Association (UgCLA) to support other libraries with literacy program development, staff training, and financial grants. UgCLA has grown rapidly into a vibrant, nationwide movement, with 64 member libraries today.

Village Libraries In Urgent Need of Your Support!
 The FAVL volunteer Board of Directors is making an announcement and an appeal to our friends and donors. **Read all about it inside →**

Pobé-Mengao Village Library Opens Its Doors

From Emilie Crofton, a Peace Corps Volunteer in Burkina Faso who helped the villagers of the community in which she has been living and working to organize and establish a library. This new library will be managed by FAVL.



A new page turned in the village of Pobé-Mengao when its new community library opened its doors—and its books—to the public. The opening ceremony was attended by more than 200 villagers, students, and village leaders. FAVL will continue to sustain and manage the library.

Working in the Peace Corp's Girls Education and Empowerment sector, I was struck by the absence of books and educational support for the students in the village, and also by the many young girls with low self-esteem and limited means to pursue their education. After discussing the creation of a library with villagers and local authorities, we formed a committee.

Initially things got off to a great start. Support was high, and the village donated a former government building. Next came the challenge of raising \$10,000 from supporters in the U.S. during an economic crisis. Endless letters, emails and grant writing finally brought in enough donations. A lot of work was needed to renovate the building, but villagers were more than ready to lend their hands. Their generosity was striking, especially because many did not fully comprehend the concept of a library, having never heard of one before. One villager asked what kind of food it would serve. ("Food for the mind," I answered.) Every day people would come, ready to work, to offer their encouragement, and sometimes to buy the workers' lunch for that day.

The project didn't come without challenges. People showing up late or not at all, activities and meetings delayed, and work taking much longer than needed were daily occurrences. There was one scary incident of a worker falling off a ladder. One village authority was against the library because it was not in his native village. But those that understood the value of the library refused to give up.

Since opening, the library has become a popular hangout, with nearly 100 visitors coming daily to read. The majority are students of all ages who never had access to books, coming in to improve their reading skills and to expand their knowledge of the world.

Much still remains to be done. Since the village has no electricity, the next big project is to raise funds for solar panels so that the library can stay open after dark. We also hope to build up the collection to 2,000 books. The village plans to create a Korumba Cultural Room complete with statuettes, artifacts and documents to help preserve their culture.



It is said that libraries are not made, but that they grow. In Pobé-Mengao, the seed planted has begun to sprout. With time, the efforts of the community, and the generosity of donors, we hope to soon see the fruits of our labor.

Libraries growing through reading programs

FAVL and its affiliate UgCLA (see p.1) have recently been awarded three very generous grants to support the specific needs described below. We are fortunate since during this economic crisis, the endowments of foundations are shrinking drastically while the needs of non-profit organizations are rising dramatically. Grants cover specific improvements or programs for a limited time.

The **Hawk Children's Fund** has awarded Ugandan Community Libraries Association a grant of \$16,000 for building renovation and solar electricity for two of its member libraries: the URLCODA library at Lokotoro in Arua District and the Mpolyabigere Library at Nsinze in Namutumba District.

Pockets of Change has awarded UgCLA \$7650 to support two workshops for members, to distribute children's books to ten libraries, and to host a series of meetings to develop a model for using libraries to encourage entrepreneurship at the village level.

The **Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation** has awarded FAVL a grant of \$11,000 to run Summer Reading Camps in three libraries in Ghana this summer. Each camp will run for two weeks and host 20 children, providing them with nutritious breakfast and lunch and many fun reading activities every day.

In contrast to grants, we depend on individual donors to cover most of our critical needs. Some examples are: ongoing literacy programs, books and supplies, salaries of the librarians and their regional coordinators, purchase of gas (at rising prices) and repairs for motorbikes to enable the coordinators to visit each remote library for training and supervision, or the immediate repair of a storm-damaged roof to protect a library and its books.

Volunteers and visitors in FAVL libraries

Volunteers help librarians learn new ways of interacting with readers. Once home, they help to create more opportunities for children and adults to improve their reading skills.

Excerpts from an interview with Louise O'Rourke, a student in the first Reading West Africa (RWA) study-abroad program, a partnership between FAVL and Santa Clara University in California:

I chose this program because it splits its time between taking classes in the capital city and volunteering in rural libraries. Burkina Faso is a very poor, community-centric place. Even in the capital, everybody knows you. On top of that, working in the villages really sets this program apart. I made much deeper connections in Burkina Faso that I hope I will keep up. The library in the village of Sara was really well-organized, and the librarian did an excellent job setting up programs and engaging with the kids.



Each student did an intensive photo micro-book project to get literature (in local and national languages) into the libraries that actually applies to life in Burkina Faso. We spent a chunk of our time taking photos, then came up with a storyboard and created text for the photos. Mine was on the process of harvesting cotton, storing it, and shipping it to the ginnery. It's for a slightly older crowd so they could see the cotton harvest if they work on it, and also to learn to read in French (the language of schooling).



The program is fantastic! Next year I think RWA will streamline the publishing to get these books produced really fast. When we were there, we were hoping to go back in person and say: "Here are these photos of you in this book about a topic that you understand." I also really hope RWA expands a little to reach more parts of Burkina Faso and West Africa.

Having an ambassador from an American university is a cultural exchange that benefits everybody. When we went back to the villages before we left the country, they kept saying: "Now you are like family...you belong here, this is your home."

Testimonial: From a FAVL reader

How do libraries help children to help themselves and their families? Here is a letter from one FAVL library user:

I'm Tabasseni Doye. I am 12 years old and attend school in Dimikuy. On opening day [of the library], we were present at the ceremony. When the manager told us about free registration day, I immediately informed my parents who approved. The next day I went with my sister who is in CM2 [U.S. fifth grade]. I took out my first book and when I got home, my parents told me to take good care of the books because they are expensive. My favorite books are books of stories and tales. When I read an interesting book, I tell the story to my mother and my sisters. My mother did not go to school; she asks me questions, and I try to answer. Currently, I am very strong in reading and general knowledge from the books I've read. The library has become for me the only place of entertainment in my village. I had a 7 out of 10 average in reading, and I'm 11th of 24 students. My parents encourage me to read, because those who read succeed. My friends and I often go together, and our teacher is pleased with us. I taught two small children at home to read. I thank the donors. I am very happy.

Appeal: We need your help!

You are able to read this thanks to the efforts of so many people in your life. We encourage you to do as Tabesseni does by taking time to thank them, or to remember them.

Most of us were blessed with family members who first read aloud to us and shared their love of books, teachers who helped us learn to read and assigned books that opened our minds, family and friends who loaned, recommended or bought us books, magazines and newspapers, librarians who helped us find books and information on the subjects we cared about, and our favorite authors whose books we devoured.

One way to appreciate their efforts is to donate to FAVL in honor or in memory of them. Simply fill out the card enclosed—or find our address at the bottom of p.1—and mail your check. If you would like, we will send them a letter acknowledging your gift and/or mention it on our website.

Announcement: FAVL Shifts Priorities

Because FAVL is a small organization powered by volunteers in the U.S., our overhead costs are extremely low. However, our income has fallen sharply during this economic crisis due to a decrease in donations, and our purchasing power has diminished when dollars are exchanged into other currencies. Consequently, we have suspended the establishment of new FAVL-managed libraries so that our existing libraries and literacy programs can survive and thrive.

In doing so, we re-affirm our commitment to helping create and sustain a culture of reading. This is the change that will have a lasting impact on Tabessini, and thousands of other FAVL library users, for many generations to come.

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Teachers in Burkina Faso and other countries where FAVL
operates are the first to recognize the importance of libraries!

(photo: Brian Lance, Houndé school, Burkina Faso)

