

Friends of African Village Libraries Newsletter December 2006



friends of **African**
Village libraries



Librarian Koura Ivette reads a story aloud at the Béréba village library.

Five years of successfully building and managing libraries in African villages

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FAVL is five years old! Thanks to donations and volunteer support from people interested in supporting village libraries in rural Africa, the organization is growing and having more impact. This year our newsletter details some of the exciting developments of the past year and plans for the future. We highlight some of the incredible volunteers and donors helping us accomplish our mission. Finally, we let you know what our most pressing needs are for the coming year.

FAVL is dedicated to increasing access to reading material and information in rural villages in sub-Saharan Africa. FAVL-supported libraries, currently five in Burkina Faso and two in northern Ghana, serve all members of the village community. One core public is the local community of readers— schoolchildren, adult learners, and other persons committed to reading. Most children in rural Africa have limited access to books. Even in school they have little opportunity to read age-appropriate material out of the classroom. We believe that every child and adult should have the opportunity to pick up a book and read. Another core public served by village libraries are local farmers, crafts-makers, traders, and others who use the library to acquire specific information— whether about digging a compost pit, building a chicken coop, or treating dysentery. FAVL strives to include in every library collection as much relevant, useful information as is available.

Latest News

Viviane Nébie joins FAVL as coordinator in Burkina Faso! FAVL is so pleased to welcome Viviane Nébie as our Ouagadougou-based coordinator. Viviane has just finished her thesis in linguistics at the University of Ouagadougou, studying how the Bwa language has adopted loan words. She has been visiting the five Burkina libraries every month and most importantly shepherding our application for formal recognition by the government of Burkina Faso as a non-governmental organization now that our five-year probationary period has ended. And lest we forget—she just had a baby girl!... Congratulations!

FAVL building new relationships in East Africa! Over the past year, FAVL has been building a relationship with Dr. Kate Parry, Prof. of English at Hunter College, CUNY. Kate helped to start a library in a small Ugandan village called Kitengesha (see www.kitengesalibrary.org). She has since become active in promoting the formation of a Uganda Community Libraries Association and also in doing research on the impact of libraries. She is the recipient of a Fulbright New Century Scholars Program grant for 2007, which, among other things, includes a research visit to Uganda from April to June. She will be developing FAVL activities in the region, as well as fundraising. FAVL has also begun to work with supporters of the Busia Community Library in rural Kenya, which had its grand opening in April 2006. The library is being supported by Ph.D. graduate students who are working on long-term research projects in the area. Kenya National Library Service (KNLS) has donated a small number of books and a piece of land. Presently, the library lacks the funds to build on that land, so books are housed in a small room rented at the expense of the library's dedicated group of volunteer staff. Busia is located on the border of Kenya and Uganda on a major trucking route between Nairobi and Kampala. As a result of this location, the town is very vibrant and full of cross-border trade, not all of it legal! There are no community spaces in Busia, and the library offers what will become the first safe place for kids to congregate. We will post more details on these emerging relationships on the website, www.favl.org.

Big donations continue to help FAVL! This past year, several large donors generously supported FAVL operations and improvements. The Templeton Foundation donated \$10,000. The law firm of Pachulski Stang Ziehl Young Jones & Weintraub donated \$6,000. Finally, Harriette and McLouis Robinet (see p. 4) donated \$2,000. Many thanks!

University of Illinois students to visit Burkina Faso libraries! Fourteen undergraduates from the University of Illinois will spend two nights in Béréba village in early January. They are part of a study tour being led by Professor Richard Akresh, an economist who has done extensive research on child fostering in Burkina Faso. The students will sleep with village families and tour local development projects, including the library.

FAVL is off to Burkina Faso for six months! Well, not the whole crew, but President Michael Kevane and Vice-President Leslie Gray (yes, they are married) will be taking their kids to Ouagadougou. Leslie has a Fulbright grant to continue her research on the impact of cotton farming in the southwest of the country. Michael is planning to devote his time to FAVL activities and to his research with his Burkinabè collaborator Alain Sissao on the impact of libraries. The blogsite (see below) should get a lot more interesting when they are in Burkina Faso, especially when the kids go to Béréba, where the family has a 'village home'. Nothing like pigs snuffling you awake in the morning to make you realize you're not in the city anymore. The Ghana librarians are set to join them for a workshop in late February. It will be their first time in Ouagadougou.

FAVL joins the YouTube and blogger age! We are very behind technologically; our annual newsletter is not as slick as it might be, and we still encourage children to read books the old-fashioned way—by turning pages one at a time. But we do want to keep you—our donors—as informed as possible and excited about FAVL developments. So we're experimenting with our blogsite (friendsof africanvillagelibraries.blogspot.com), embedding some short video clips and keeping you informed with news tidbits.



YouTube videos, from left: Sumbungu librarian Lucas Aligire explains the importance of the library and critical needs; Koura Ivette reads to children in the outdoor reading area of Béréba library; author Alain Sissao reads (in French) from his collection of short stories.

Volunteers in FAVL libraries

Claudia Entrup, a German library science student at Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, spent two months volunteering in Sumbrungu and Sherigu libraries in the spring of 2006. During her time in northern Ghana, she also implemented a survey of library users as part of her thesis work. She interviewed students using the libraries, and also went out to the village communities to ask about reasons for not using the libraries. She recently sent FAVL a preliminary draft of her thesis, and it has some great observations that are worth sharing. Here are some extracts.

“In the rural areas the provision of books for the students faces a lot of problems. Even though education for the children is granted free of charge, the government is unable to provide enough schoolbooks for every teaching institution in the country. Some of the books need to be bought by the parents. Because of poverty and the high prices for books in general, many people cannot afford the necessary materials. A good performance during primary and secondary education is increasingly important for successfully entering the tertiary education level because of extremely high competition and very few college and university places. If then a library offers access to materials that many students urgently need but do not have, there is no doubt about the priorities in using the library.”



Two Santa Clara University students (Mia Stephenson and Jenevieve Francisco) returned in September 2006 from six weeks of volunteer work in the libraries in Ghana. They spent time living with the family of CESRUD (our local collaborators) board member George Akundiya. They collaborated with Lucas, Bernard and Darius, the troika of librarians in the two libraries of Sumbrungu and Sherigu. But most of all, they tried to inspire the kids in the libraries to think of reading and learning as fun. They helped with story hours, read individually with children, and taught games and songs. They spoke with older students about education as the way to succeed and improve one's life, even in the hard circumstances of Upper East Region, Ghana.



Claudia and Lucas Aligire, Sumbrungu librarian, in front of the evolving Women's Center of Sumbrungu, future site of the library (see page 4).

“Sumbrungu library has had a lending service for several months... the students ... had access to a more diversified collection of materials over a longer period of time. They had the chance to intensely deal with books that are not necessarily school-related. Through this, a part of them might have developed a reading-for-pleasure attitude. This would mark the beginning of a change within the reading habits of the young generation through the establishment of the libraries. It might also underline the importance of offering books of many kinds in the library— in order to encourage the examination of books that are not exclusively school-related.”

Student volunteers are an important way for FAVL librarians to learn new ways of interacting with children. When they return, the volunteers spread the word about the incredible desire by children to improve their reading skills. The volunteers also learn an amazing amount during their stays, especially about generous hospitality. Summer 2007 is likely to see three Santa Clara University students volunteering in Ghana.

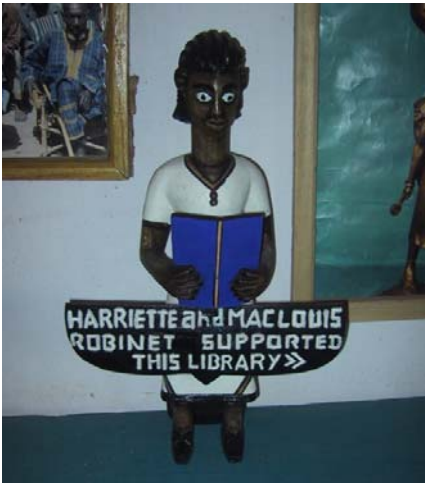


Children learning "Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes"

Donors and Visitors

U.S. Ambassador Jeanine Jackson visits FAVL library in Béréba, Burkina Faso

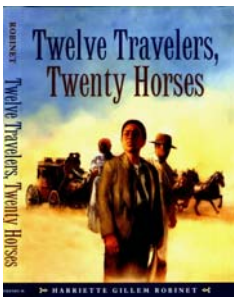
The newly appointed Ambassador of the United States to Burkina Faso, Jeanine Jackson, visited Béréba library in April 2006. The purpose was twofold: first, Ambassador Jackson had wanted to signal her interest, immediately upon assuming her post, of getting out into the countryside to see the country for herself; second, she was able to officially present a gift from the U.S. embassy of 110 wonderful hard-cover children's books in French. Ambassador Jackson toured the library and village, and attended a lunch in her honor. Everyone in the village was so happy and proud to have this very distinguished visitor at the library. More photos are on the FAVL website.



Harriette and McLouis Robinet

— supporting Sherigu library in Ghana

Two of our steadfast boosters over the years have been well-known young adults author Harriette Robinet, and her husband McLouis. Her short novels (stories for young readers and high school students mostly following experiences of African-American children in various historical settings) are great books



for our libraries in Africa. We've sent many copies over to the libraries in Ghana, and asked the librarians to write back about the experiences of readers with the books. Check the blogsite for their responses.



FAVL needs your help!

FAVL's priorities for the coming year:

- We need continued funding to strengthen our management capacity in Burkina Faso and Ghana. FAVL is currently run by volunteers here in the United States. Smart and capable people in Burkina Faso and Ghana are working as our librarians. FAVL wants to train them to take over some of the important middle-level jobs that are currently being done by volunteers: grant-writing, accounting, producing training manuals, and producing materials for use in library programming. Hiring an additional staff member in each country to work for FAVL would increase our annual expenses by about \$4,000 per year per country.
- FAVL wants to support the efforts of our Ghanaian partners CES-RUD to finish their Women's Center in Sumbrungu; the Center would then house the village library, presently in the District Council building. The cost to finish the library wing is estimated to be about \$15,000. This would then have space for 100 readers and have electricity as well as a guest room for library volunteers.
- FAVL would like to build up an endowment to open new libraries in Ghana and Burkina Faso. Our goal is to have \$10,000 allocated for ongoing costs—librarian salary and book purchases—for each
- library before beginning work.

Visit our website to donate using Paypal:
www.favl.org

Send your donation now to:
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