

Donating Books to Overseas Libraries

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As a former Peace Corps volunteer, I saw firsthand the need for appropriate books for libraries and schools in developing countries. What materials they have are few and grossly outdated. Books and materials are extensively damaged due to overuse, humidity, insects and lack of care over several decades. These countries lack the financial resources to develop and purchase appropriate reading materials for their collections, but the interest and need are there. Teachers teach using only their memory and chalkboards. Students learn by listening and memorizing, and illiteracy still prevails.

The concept of donating materials to needy libraries is not a revolutionary one. After the 1871 Chicago fire destroyed several libraries and collections, their rebirth was started by more than 8,000 volumes donated by several notable British authors. The American Library Association has a history of organizing book collection drives for overseas distribution. Following World War I, books were donated to destroyed areas, and this was vigorously implemented during and after World War II to Asian and European

countries. During the 1960s, the Peace Corps provided "book lockers" to their volunteers with a variety of reading materials, from professional resources to children's books. These books remained overseas after the volunteers left. These collections increased over a period of time until 1969, ending with a total distribution of well over 4 million books.

There were several successful U.S. book donation programs in the past, but these have tapered off dramatically in the last two decades. Other countries still conduct active book donation programs today, including the Soviet Union which remains the world leader in book distribution abroad.

The International Relations Committee of A.L.A. has recognized this decline in book donating operations and has recommended a revival of such programs. As librarians our primary objective is to promote literacy and reading motivation, but this does not have to be limited to one geographical area. The IRC strongly supports the development of an expanded international gift program. They recommend that libraries and publishers

donate their unneeded but relevant materials to agencies which can distribute these materials to developing countries.

There are still several agencies that are conducting vigorous book distribution programs. These are non-profit agencies using volunteers for their operations. The agencies receive lists of book requests from various organizations or countries. Usually these request lists are supplied from embassies, UNESCO, UNICEF, the Peace Corps, and several other organizations working within developing countries. Once the request lists are received, the donating agencies match the lists to holdings in their warehouses. The books are hand-picked, then packed for shipment. The organization making the requests is responsible for the distribution of collections to the appropriate libraries or schools. Agencies do not necessarily work independently of each other; instead they often exchange funds, books and lists for total cooperation.

If your library does have a surplus of books, you should consider donating them to one of these agencies. There are several stipulations the agencies impose about the kinds of materials they want to receive.

1. The materials they are soliciting must be in good condition. Broken bindings and torn pages will never withstand the harsh weather conditions and heavy usage in most developing countries.

2. Reference materials are most needed, but preferably items that are not over ten years old. One exception might be dictionaries, however encyclopedias, atlases, and almanacs should be within the ten year time span.

3. Many agencies put less emphasis on religious materials and

American History or U.S. Civics books. Although some requests are made for such material, they are infrequent. Science, math, agricultural, engineering, and nutritional materials are constantly being requested. These books can enhance local development and higher level education in developing countries. Check with the agency you want to work with and inquire about the materials that are needed.

4. Although journals and serials present some of the newest information and articles, the agencies listed at the end of the article do not distribute such items. They all do hope to implement serials distribution in the future, but can not do so at this time. Again, check with the agency you are working with.

5. Catalog cards are not needed when donating materials. Many of the libraries in developing countries are small and basic. They usually devise their own method of organizing the materials: by color-coding books, arranging by subject, or alphabetizing the books by author.

6. Fiction is constantly being requested. The date of publication can exceed the ten year limit. The classics in literature especially are needed, as well as children's books, but the books themselves must be in excellent condition.

7. The most requested materials are school textbooks, preferably for the elementary and secondary grades. Schools in developing countries rarely have textbooks for their students or teachers. Teachers especially need textbooks on which to base their unit and lesson plans or for the content of the lessons. Without such materials teachers often have less direction in their lesson plan content or the

progression of the unit itself. Their lesson plans may jump around without any concrete objectives for the development of the teaching unit.

Donated materials are intended for small school and village libraries. Books written in the English language are always accepted and needed, since English is taught in most developing countries. The books will be used by students, teachers, and neo-literates. Collections will be placed in all types of libraries, including churches and hospitals. These donated materials are not intended for personal collections.

Donating libraries are responsible for getting the books to the cooperating agency or organization. Books may be shipped through UPS, the U.S. Postal Service or may be personally delivered to nearby agencies. The U.S. Postal Library Book Rate allows 70 lbs. of books to be shipped for less than \$10.00. In some cases, the agencies will come and collect materials if there is a large quantity of useful books. Many libraries use money collected from book fines and book sales to pay transportation costs, others use special funds raised through libraries, schools, churches, etc.

Once these books reach the coordinating agency, that agency is responsible for matching the books with the request lists and the actual shipment of the materials overseas. Coordinating agencies usually receive their funding through various foundations or embassies which cover the cost of the shipment. The agencies also make the arrangements for pick-up of the materials and distribution to the receiving institution.

Some state laws prohibit donating property purchased with

state money, but the state law does not effect gift books. Check with your director or the superintendent of schools about donating such materials from your library or schools.

The process is not a difficult one, but it is a much needed service. By implementing such procedures in your library, you will be helping fellow librarians and teachers create worthwhile collections for people who desperately need them. In innumerable ways these materials will enrich the lives of the recipients. The books and materials will establish a foundation of sources for self-education. Emphasis in reading will be established, combating the international problem of illiteracy. Materials on health and nutrition will combat the high mortality rate in developing countries. Agricultural materials will teach the subsistence farmer how to improve his crops. Fiction will teach people about other cultures and universal needs. School textbooks will aid in the educational process for international youth. The needs and desires for libraries are there, and we have the resources to help meet these demands. With a minimum investment of time and money, your library can assist those agencies who are working to improve education throughout the world.

Sponsors of Book Donating Agencies

Darien Book Aid Plan
1926 Post Rd.
Darien, CT 06820
(203) 655-2777

International Book Bank
246 Woodwork
Palatine, IL 60067
(312) 934-5300

International Book Project
1440 Delaware Ave.
Lexington, KY 40505
(606) 234-6771

Send a Book Abroad
17 Mentelle Park
Lexington, KY 40502

The Canadian Organization for
Development through Education
(CODE)
321 Chapel Street
Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 7Z2, Canada
(613) 232-3569

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