



# Biblionef on track

## taking libraries to the people

for reading by donating new storybooks to needy children in their mother tongue. Biblionef commissions the publishing of books in various languages and acquires and donates children's books in all eleven official South African languages. Since its inception in 1998 Biblionef has donated more than 340 000 new storybooks to 3452 children's organisations, giving 1 700 000 children access to books in their own languages.

Experience has taught Biblionef that most of its beneficiaries do not have adequate storage space for their new book donations. Books last much longer if quality storage space is available. As a result Biblionef has started using shipping containers as libraries where no suitable housing facilities were available. Steel trunks proved to be a good option for classroom libraries and other small organisations.

Other storage solutions for safekeeping of library books are suitcases, box libraries, wheelie book wagons, bread crates, plastic roller boxes and cloth bags.

### Setting up a container library

A container library is constructed by using a converted, second-hand shipping container. These 12-metre containers are fitted with windows and doors, clad with a wood grain material, and fitted with carpets and security bars on the windows and doors. Electricity points are also provided. The interior is fitted with shelving, storage cupboards and suitable library furniture and equipment. A container library can house 5000 to 6000 books. Container libraries work well in small communities and in rural areas that are spread far apart.

When a community expresses the need for a library and the local authority is not in

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In South Africa, 85% of the population lives beyond the reach of a public library. Biblionef, a book donation organisation, decided to take books to the people by establishing informal libraries. Although there are several ways of presenting informal libraries, Biblionef prefers to use shipping containers and steel trunks.

South Africa has a moderate climate, impressive mountain ranges, rivers, wildlife, valuable natural resources, vibrant cities, endless wilderness areas and a diverse and flexible population. Despite the positive progress being made since South Africa became a democracy, the country still has an unacceptably high illiteracy rate and an underdeveloped culture of reading.

According to the latest statistics, approximately 30% of the South African population of 15 years and older cannot read or write a simple sentence. This means that these unfortunate people are missing out on a great part of everyday life in modern society, which is all about written communication.

To improve literacy levels every community needs a well-stocked library. Townships, resettlement and rural areas have hardly any library resources since public libraries are still predominantly situated in the former advantaged areas.

In a recent article, Elisabeth Anderson, from the Centre for the Book, pointed out that public libraries used to be the responsibility of local authorities. This responsibility has now been transferred to provincial government without sufficient central government funding.

### Biblionef South Africa

Schools and children's organisations contact Biblionef's office in Cape Town every day for book donations. This proves that there is a dire need for children's books of good quality in all the official South African languages.

Biblionef South Africa, a book donation organisation, is determined to create a love



a position to meet their request, Biblionef investigates their requirements, seeks a donor and establishes the type of library suitable for that community. Biblionef is not in a position to build libraries, but is prepared to set up informal libraries in existing premises or make use of other alternatives.

If suitable premises are not available, Biblionef's solution is an informal library in a shipping container. It is the responsibility of the community to find staff to run the library as Biblionef's main responsibility is the donation of books. The cost to set up a fully-equipped container library with 6000 to 8000 books, is approximately R130 000.

Once Biblionef has determined the library needs of the community, a selection is made of basic reference books as well as books suitable for recreational reading.

While the container is converted into a fully-equipped library by local carpenters, Biblionef, in consultation with the community, sets up a library committee and provides advice and guidance on how to run, maintain and manage the library. To ensure that everybody in the community is aware of their new library an official opening is usually arranged by Biblionef and the library committee.

### Steel trunks a solution

Steel trunks have turned out to be very useful in schools that do not have shelves or room for a library. Each class can have their own classroom library in a trunk. Alternatively two or three trunks can be kept in the staff room or in the principal's office for use by the whole school. Bringing the books into the classroom is very effective as children have direct access to books. In 2005

The National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund enabled Biblionef to provide 90 rural schools with a trunk filled with storybooks.

Early in 2006 Biblionef placed a number of steel trunks with appropriate books at venues close to farm workers and their children. These trunks are often kept at the homes of willing volunteers so that farm workers can borrow books whenever they need them.

Using steel trunks as a storage solution in schools, crèches, hospitals, farms and in small communities has many advantages. Trunks are inexpensive, transportable, sturdy, lockable and accessible. A steel trunk filled with 180 books costs R4000. Trunks can be rotated between organisations to offer a larger selection of books.

The likelihood of most communities having their own public libraries in the near future is very slim. Biblionef offers an interim solution to this seemingly insurmountable problem by supplying suitable books and storage options tailor-made to the needs of each community. When government funding becomes available these communities can look forward to upgraded library facilities as Biblionef will have assisted in establishing a reading culture.

For more information, contact Jean Williams, at (021) 531-0447, <bibsa@iafrica.com>, or visit the web site [www.biblionefsa.org](http://www.biblionefsa.org).



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