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First Lubuto Library opens in Zambia

An innovative library has opened its doors to orphans and street kids in Lusaka, Zambia. The library is the first of many planned by the nonprofit Lubuto Library Project, Inc. that will serve street children throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Located at the Fountain of Hope Street Kids Drop-In Center, this library offers the street children, whose lives have been shattered by AIDS, an excellent collection of books and a welcoming place where they can read, listen to stories, and connect with others who are there to help them.

"We are so pleased to welcome the Lusaka community, especially the street children, to this beautiful new library," said IRA member Jane Kinney Meyers, president of the Lubuto Library Project. "The library, based on indigenous Zambian architecture, will offer a safe haven for orphans and vulnerable children in Lusaka to read, tell and listen to stories and share ideas in a peaceful but rich environment."

The Lubuto Library in Lusaka is the first of at least 100 that are planned for sub-Saharan Africa. These libraries offer a groundbreaking way of reaching street children, who are mostly out of school, with opportunities for self-education and learning.

The library, which opened in September 2007, includes a collection of approximately 4,000 books on a wide



The Lubuto Library allows children to share reading experiences.

variety of subjects. The books were carefully selected to meet the needs of its users and organized according to a system that was specially developed for effective access and simple maintenance. Lubuto Libraries also offer programs of storytelling, drama, and art that empower vulnerable children through self-expression. The book collections are donated and classified by

children in North America, providing them with a better understanding of issues beyond their day-to-day experiences. Books in local languages will be acquired and even created to enhance the library collection.

The Lusaka library's collection ranges from picture books and early readers to fiction, science, and reference books. Fountain of Hope staff members are being trained to help the children learn about the collection and how to use the library. The initial collection is being supplemented by books in Zambian languages, and new books, based on traditional Zambian stories, will be created by a new Zambia Board on Books for Young People that is being established jointly by the Lubuto Project and the Zambia Library Association.

Invited guests at the library's opening included Zambian President Kenneth David Kaunda, members of the diplomatic corps, government officials, and friends of the Lubuto Library Project. The guests and the more than 200 street kids in attendance enjoyed a reading by Kaunda of the book *Caps for Sale*, which was simultaneously performed by the street kids' Barefeet Theatre.

The ceremony also included a performance by storyteller Leonard Mpundu, speeches by Kaunda and Meyers, and the reading of letters of congratulations from U.S. First Lady Laura Bush and others.

"This great service to the orphans and other vulnerable children will go a long way in answering to the needs of many in our country still living in darkness, overwhelmed by ignorance, disease, and exploitation by the greedy and powerful," said Kaunda. "The project has also potential to meet the needs of the young and the old yearning for light, for knowledge to access the best that Zambia and the world offer in the 21st Century."

The highlight of the celebration was the library's opening. A number of guests were more than pleasantly surprised to see what a library for orphans and vulnerable children could be. "This place is magic," said one.

Since the library opened, children have been coming in droves, reports Meyers. She says that it is a pleasure to see them reading and listening to stories in groups and alone, sitting in the warm and welcoming space provided by their library, sharing pictures, practicing their reading skills, and delighting in the knowledge that this place is especially for them.

For further information about the Lubuto Library Project, visit the organization's website at www.lubuto.org.

"The library... will offer a safe haven for orphans and vulnerable children in Lusaka to read."

—Jane Kinney Meyers, president, Lubuto Library Project



The new Lubuto Library in Lusaka, Zambia, houses a collection of approximately 4,000 books.