Library Activity as Development Aid

Maria Wickenberg: University of Borås, Sweden, s110032@student.hb.se Poster presented at BOBCATSSS 2014, Barcelona, Spain

Abstract: This study describes the children's literature program of Diakonia in Gaza, Palestine, in order to illustrate how library activity can function as a development aid. Diakonia is a non-profit development organization of two Swedish churches that work all over the world for a permanent change of the situation for the poorest and the most vulnerable people.

The study is based on a case study carried out in December 2012 with an employee of Diakonia with good knowledge of the children's literature programme in Gaza.

The statements of the respondent show that the children's literature programme of Diakonia in Gaza meets several criteria of the Swedish government and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for what they want the development aid to be used for. The activity also corresponds well with the social dimension of global sustainable development.

The conclusion is that development aid to library activity directed to children and young people can develop the society and be a long-term investment for the future.

Keywords: Book Aid, Children's Literature, Development Aid, Library Activity Aid, Reading Promotion, Sustainable Development



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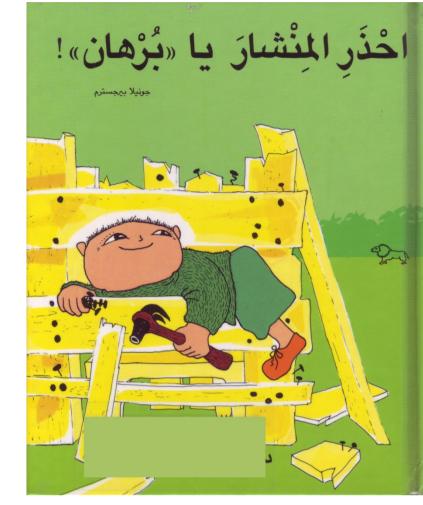
Introduction

Books cannot substitute food, neither can they give shelter. But culture, literature and information can influence the society and change people's lives for the better. The free word and human rights are foundations of the democratic society (see UNESCO).

The public libraries are central in our society. Libraries and library activities are not always financed by tax funds; sometimes they depend on donors or international development aid. Today there are non-profit organizations that work with, or support library activity as a development aid, for instance the Swedish Library Association and Diakonia. There are also non-profit organizations that use children's books as an aid, for instance Unicef. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) used to support national and public libraries in different countries through the National Library of Sweden.

The children's literature program of Diakonia in Gaza is a development aid programme for promoting reading. It provides vulnerable children with children's books translated into Arabic. The programme was initiated 1992 and is an ongoing Swedish library activity financed by Diakonia and Sida. Diakonia is a non-profit development organization of two Swedish churches that work all over the world for a permanent change of the situation for the poorest and most vulnerable people (Diakonia).

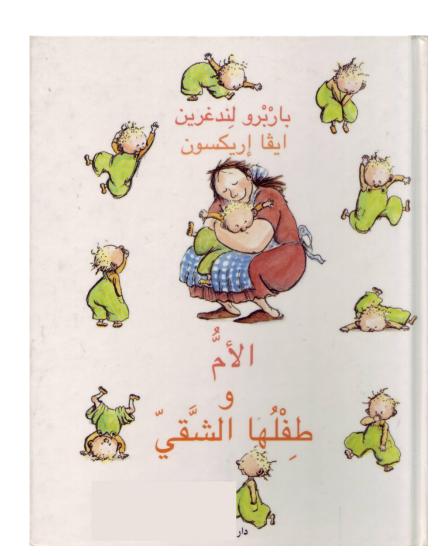
A qualitative semi-structured interview was conducted in December 2012 with one employee on Diakonia with good knowledge in the children's literature programme of Diakonia in Gaza, Palestine, to illustrate how library activity can function as a development aid and examine if it can contribute to a sustainable development.



Gunilla Bergström: Very Tricky, Alfie Atkins

"... I mean Pippi has been in the Palestinian schools since more than 20 years now and she is the rebellious girl and she has made a lot of discussion in our area of work with teachers and librarians [...] but children love her and love Alfons [Alfons is called Alfie in English] and all these stories that come from Sweden and they make plays and animations [...] and all different

sorts of activities on these books."

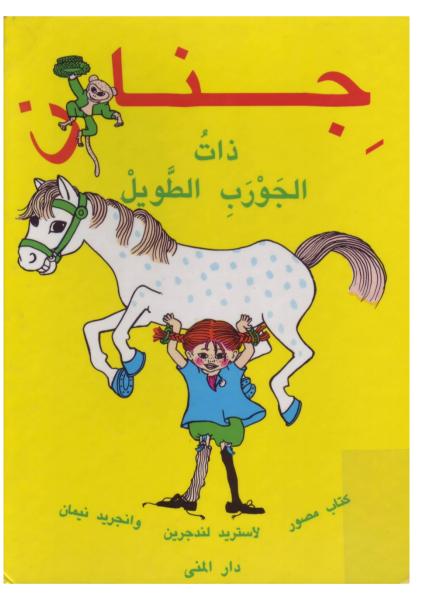


Barbro Lindgren & Eva Eriksson: The Wild Baby

"... it's a very important trauma healing you know tool books, children books in specific.

And that's why also [...] it plays an important role in conflict areas and it also helps young people and young writers and authors to express themselves and to speak about the situation and to write [...] their own stories.

You know to express themselves through the medium of literature and books."



Astrid Lindgren & Ingrid Nyman: Do you know Pippi Longstocking?

"... I think young people are going to play a
more important role in the future of generations
in the Arab world and that's why we believe also
the focusing on children and young people will
have long term effects."

Findings

The statements of the respondent show that library activity can help develop the society as well as people and the national culture.

The activity started in Palestine in 1992 with distribution of Swedish children's books translated into Arabic. Today there is also a local production of Arabic books in the region.

The programme has involved education of about 5000 teachers and librarians in children's literature and reading-promoting activities. The education is today given at three Palestinian universities and research in the topic has started. There has also been an exchange of teachers, authors, illustrators and librarians between Palestine and Sweden.

The activity will be expanded to Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan where educators from the children's literature programme will educate teachers and librarians. A regional educational programme is also planned.

Conclusions

- The children's literature programme of Diakonia in Gaza meets several of the Swedish government's and Sida's criteria for what they want the development aid to be used for (Swedish Government, Sida).
- The activity also corresponds well with the social dimension of global sustainable development (Nolin, 2010).
- Development aid in the form of library activities directed to children and young people can help develop the society and become a long-term investment for the future.

Poster presented at BOBCATSSS 2014, Barcelona, Spain

Further reading

- Nolin, Jan (2010). Sustainable information and information science. *Information Research*. vol. 15, no 2.
- Rozalski, Michael, Stewart, Angela & Miller, Jason (2010). Bibliotherapy: Helping Children Cope with Life's Challenges. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, vol. 47, no. 1, pp. 33-37.

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- Diakonia www.diakonia.se
- Sida www.sida.se
- Swedish government www.regeringen.se
- Tamer Institute for Community Education www.tamerinst.org
- UNESCO www.unesco.org and www.unesco.se

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