

Feature

Pupils start mobile library for slums

By **GEORGE ORIDO**

They say education is the best way to get people out of poverty. Urged on by this ideal, pupils from Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa took time to plan and implement an ambitious programme dubbed Elimu Njema that involves starting a mobile library for children living in the slums of Mombasa.

Thus this past week, they embarked on a mobile library caravan to the Bangladesh Slums. Calling themselves Akam Voices (Aga Khan Music Voices), the students mainly drawn from the music club donated over 50 books to pupils from four schools within the sprawling slum.

The pupils also got to read their favourite and new titles from the mobile Library mounted on a truck. "Reading provides us with knowledge and perceptions. It provides us with the weapon needed to change the world," said the coordinator of the programme and a member of Akam Voices, Noorin Pattni.

Noorin explained that by having a variety of books ranging from children's books to young adults books, they ensure there is something new to learn for everybody apart from what is provided in schools currently. The group of enthusiastic young sponsors also took time to read story books for the children who were equally keen to listen to the stories.

A book titled Splash Splash was particularly interesting. It is a teaser on

spelling and writing of the different names of plants and animals. It ended with a recap of how important it is for the youth to conserve the environment and take part in the fight against illegal poaching and wanton destruction of our forests.

The Read Out Loud program was conducted at St Mary Bangladesh Primary School culminating to a music concert where Akam Voices rendering melodies of inspirational songs. Pupils from the host school also had a chance to sing a few of other songs in a beautiful exchange and air of empowerment.

Within the Bangladesh community there is only one public school, St Mary, and seven other private schools that are mostly informal. Since the schools are primary schools only, secondary students have to travel nearly 2.5km to schools in Mikindani and Changamwe. This is challenging and only a handful of pupils progress to beyond Class eight education.

Besides encouraging a reading culture, Elimu Njema initiative is also an intervention to offer idle individuals an alternative pass time activity away from vices.

"It is mostly through books and positive influence that our character can change for the better," explained the Choir Master and music teacher, Philip Mbinji who accompanied the students at the event.

Akam Voices promises that what happened last week is just but a tip of the iceberg. They are committed to raising funds through concerts and building



partnerships to build a reference point library at St Patrick's children's home and having a mobile library with designated routes around various parts of Mombasa. Another pupil involved in the coordination of the project, Fiona Achieng', announced that the team is organizing a major concert headlining sensational Lipala Afropop group Sauti Sol set for August.

"This will help us raise the necessary money to put up the permanent library at the primary School here," she said. And their work is already receiving a nod of approval from the Mombasa County government. The team met Mr Lewa Mtana the County Education Executive who has

agreed to partner with Elimu Njema and has committed a budget which will further boost the project. The students, teachers, and leaders of the County of Mombasa commit to a coordinated approach to facilitate a positive partnership in the interest of all children," said Mr Mtana after the event adding that the county government agree will strive to make it possible for every child to have access to the books they need as well as a safe reading environment.

The Aga Khan Academy Principal Mr Bill O'Heran who was present to witness this life-changing programme was impressed by his students' initiative and the partnership and committed his full support.

Teen talk

Do you support the movement of some county responsibilities, like the provision of health services, to national government including health sector? Teenagers had their say on this matter:

COMPILED BY GEOFFREY ODHIAMBO

Swaleh Hamza, Mumias Muslim Boys High School

I don't support the move because I feel that the current crisis is an artificial creation by national government who would want to take over running of some sectors from the county governments. The delay of funds release, for instance, makes think that it is a ploy to make county governments appear like failures.



Maaru Kelvin, Masinde Muliro university-Webuye

No, my outlook is that devolution was voted for by the majority and should be given a chance to flourish. The strikes being experienced in some counties does not necessarily mean that the concerned county governments have failed because even the national government suffers setbacks.



Hemstone Lowasikou, Masinde Muliro university-Webuye

Yes, in my view, there is need to revert some sectors back to national government because county governments have demonstrated inability to effectively run some sectors and this is evident by the regular strikes of county workers especially in the health sector.



Jack Karithi, Masinde Muliro University-Webuye

In my opinion, the responsibility of running some sectors is simply too much for county government to handle. Embezzlement of funds by some top officials within the counties is harder to trace because of their numbers compared to the fewer national government officials.

