



A ROUND TABLE OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Success Stories Sister Libraries

Amesbury Elementary School, Massachusetts, U.S.A. / Ebussamba Primary School, Kenya

20 South Hampton Road

Amesbury, MA 01913

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School library programs are blooming like rainforest wildflowers in Kenya. Through the United Nations Sister Communities Program, Amesbury has been able to share its resources with the village of Essabalu, Kenya for the past fifteen years or so. What began as a medical assistance program has grown into a culture awareness effort that includes the primary school library in its range of concern. For almost six years, Amesbury Elementary School has worked with the headmaster of the Ebussamba Primary School to raise funds to build the school library (from bricks that Esabalu families made), to purchase books for the classrooms and the school library, and to build glass windows with shutters to keep the books safe and dry. Upon the library's completion, furniture was built for the reading room and the stacks and the water project brought water to the school for the first time. All of this is spearheaded by our local community association, Amesbury for Africa. Students at Amesbury Elementary and families throughout the community have benefited greatly from this relationship. By having the annual fundraising book swap, our school families have become familiar with the families in Kenya and have developed a sensitivity and generosity to our sister school that is often written about in our local newspaper. We also have had exchange students at Amesbury High School, and have been visited by the headmaster of Ebussamba Primary. This level of character education and

"thinking globally" has been thoroughly integrated in the school library curriculum. Several members of Amesbury for Africa visit the community in Kenya each year, and in the summer of 2005, I traveled to Esabalu to train classroom teachers to take on the responsibility of the school library. It was a remarkable moment: the books were in need of repair, but the determination of these new librarians was abounding. Librarians from the Massachusetts School Library Association sent maps and brochures for teachers and students to learn about the world, and they were posted on the walls for all the students to see. In the year and a half since my visit, local universities have initiated library training courses for local teachers. It seems that the value of community and school libraries has grown since primary education tuition throughout the country has been removed. Amesbury's current project is to develop a micropublishing business in the community to preserve local folklore in regional dialect, and to encourage reading for pleasure in schools and homes. Obviously, fundraising will be our top priority.

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