

Worldreader Pledges \$3.5 Million to Create National Digital Library Network in Kenya

Backed by The Stavros Niarchos Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Worldreader's New Initiative Sets Out to Improve Access to Digital Books for Students, Librarians, Teachers, and Patrons Across 61 Kenyan Libraries

San Francisco, California, April 21st, 2016 - Worldreader, the global nonprofit that believes everyone can be a reader, today announced a new initiative to transform all 61 government-run public libraries in Kenya into digital reading hubs. The initiative is supported by grants totaling \$2.5 million from Stavros Niarchos Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and an additional \$968,600 worth of digital books from Worldreader's local and international publishing partners.

"All too often, libraries in the Global South are under-funded, closed, or simply lack relevant books," said Zev Lowe, Senior Director of Global Insights for Worldreader. "These conditions leave library visitors starved for reading material. In partnership with the Kenya National Library Service (knls), we will establish one of the first networks of digital libraries for sub-Saharan Africa and help ensure a smooth transition to a digital future."

In total, the project aims to reach over 500,000 people across Kenya. Worldreader has built a network of businesses, government agencies, and nonprofits to improve access to digital books across the globe. Increasing access to e-books via mobile devices and e-readers is paired with trainings for local teachers and librarians so that they can better serve students and community members.

"This two-year project builds on Worldreader's successful e-reader pilot, Project LEAP (Libraries, E-Reading, Activities, Partnership), which has tripled visitors in eight libraries in Kenya," said Joan Mwachi-Amolo, Country Manager, Worldreader, Kenya. "The initiative will make more than 580,000 digital books available to Kenyan communities over the next two years, in Kiswahili and English. Our program also includes a training component that will equip librarians with best practices to deploy the devices and engage with local communities, before turning the program over to the Kenyan government to sustain."

Worldreader will supply the libraries with packages of 50 e-readers with 200 relevant book titles, including 100 from Kenyan publishers. Technical support, how-to manuals, and all accessories and needed supplies will be included in the packages. Worldreader is building a sustainable network of digital libraries so that knls will be able to sustain the funding, purchasing and training responsibilities needed to continue growing this digital reading program.

“Project LEAP is the first digital reading project to successfully incorporate a wide variety of Kenyan, African, and international books. The program has been rigorously evaluated for effectiveness and has shown to widen access and bring libraries to the center of communities,” says Richard Atuti, Director of knls. “The initiative has had a major impact on how people find and access information and is now helping transform their reading habits. The rapid nationwide scale-up of Project LEAP will enhance availability of information materials, ultimately positioning libraries as major contributors to Kenya’s development, as defined in Vision 2030 and in the 2010 Constitution of Kenya.”

“Over the years, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation has dedicated significant resources to supporting public libraries and their programs worldwide, culminating in the building of new facilities for the National Library of Greece at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center in Athens,” says Sarah Needham, Program Officer at the Foundation. “Building a network to provide e-books to 500,000 people across Kenya is a transformative initiative that carries great potential to engage and regenerate numerous local communities across the country. By offering books that are culturally relevant to the community, Worldreader is building more readers and improving the lives of millions.”

“I practically grew up in a library, and know first-hand how strong libraries can transform kids, adults, and entire communities,” says Worldreader CEO and Co-Founder, David Risher. “The digital world gives libraries the opportunity to reach millions. Worldreader is thrilled to partner with the Kenya National Library Service so that Kenya’s citizens can be at the forefront of the digital reading revolution.”

About Worldreader

Worldreader is a global nonprofit that believes everyone can be a reader. In its first six years, Worldreader and its hardware, software, and publishing partners have supported over 3 million children, students, and families in 69 countries with a digital library of over 30,000 local and international titles via e-readers and mobile phones. It aims to reach 15 million readers by 2018.

To read free books on your mobile phone, visit read.worldreader.org.
For more information on Worldreader, visit www.worldreader.org.

About knls

Kenya National Library Service (knls) Board is a state corporation established by an Act of Parliament Cap 225 of the Laws of Kenya (1965) to provide library and information services to the Kenyan public. The Board is mandated by the Act to: promote, establish, equip, manage, maintain and develop libraries in Kenya. The knls Board strategic plan 2012-2017 spells out the vision and mission of the Board as **“the hub of information and knowledge for development”** and **“to enable access to information for knowledge and transformation of livelihoods”** respectively. Knls provides a wide range of library and information services to people of all walks of life. The library customers include babies – where mothers can come with their babies and read for them, school going children, teenagers, youth, adults and senior citizens.

About The Stavros Niarchos Foundation

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation (www.SNF.org) is one of the world's leading private international philanthropic organizations, making grants in the areas of arts and culture, education, health and sports, and social welfare. The Foundation funds organizations and projects that are expected to achieve a broad, lasting and positive impact for society at large, focusing on vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly, and also exhibit strong leadership and sound management. The Foundation also seeks actively to support projects that facilitate the formation of public-private partnerships as an effective means for serving public welfare.

Since 1996, the SNF has made grant commitments of [\\$1.8 billion](#) / €1.5 billion, through 3,438 grants to nonprofit organizations in [111 nations around the world](#).

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For further information contact:

Shoshanna Howard

Shoshanna@fcpcommunications.com

510.271.0640x140