Appendix E. Where Do Your Books Come From?

Your books come from various groups in the United States (and occasionally from another country) who have agreed to do a book drive and raise the funds to ship the books to libraries in the African countries with ALP partners. These groups come in all shapes and sizes, from schools to scout troops to church groups to corporations to individuals doing books drives as service projects. Many of these groups are repeat book drive organisers, some having collected enough books for more than 15 libraries so far! The one thing they all have in common is a passion for reading and a desire to ensure that anyone in the world who wants to read has a chance to do so.

Photo E.1. These book drive organisers are ready to sort and pack the donated books.

Each of these enthusiastic groups is matched with a specific library in Africa. We receive applications from each African library containing information about the community that will enjoy the library, the people
responsible for establishing and maintaining the library, and the kinds of books desired. These applications are incredibly valuable to our book drive groups, as they seek to fill the specific needs of each library project.

Each book drive collects 1,000 gently used books from the homes of American families who bought them for their children, then donated them so they could be enjoyed by African children. They also raise enough money to ship the books to Africa. To raise the money, many youth groups make and sell items, wash cars, hold raffles, and do jobs for people to earn money. The books have a long journey ahead of them. They are first shipped to our shipping partner in New Orleans, Louisiana. They combine 30–60 of these libraries into a large shipping container destined for a single African country. From New Orleans, the container of books sets off by ship to a major African port, at which point they transfer to rail or truck, depending on the final destination. Once they reach our African partner’s headquarters, they are further sorted and distributed until each recipient library has all of their books. As of 2017, the African Library Project has started more than 2,100 libraries with 2.1 million books!

Our United States book drive groups would love to know more about their partner library and how the books are being used. Letters from students, teachers, administrators, librarians, parents, and community members are deeply appreciated. We see ongoing communication between book drive groups and libraries as a great way to facilitate cultural exchange and foster ongoing relationships between our countries. Many book drive organisers decide whether they will do another book drive depending on if they hear from their library project. Drawings, photographs, and even stories about the books would be enjoyed. Especially meaningful are personal stories of how a special book or group of books affected an individual. In your boxes of books, you should find a piece of paper with the contact information of the book drive organiser who sent you the books.
As the parent organisation, the African Library Project would also love to get feedback on how well the books we deliver meet the needs of the community for which they are intended. Were the books at the right reading level? Were they in good physical condition? Were some books more popular than others? Is there a category of book that you wish you had received? You can always communicate with the African Library Project directly via email at info@africanlibraryproject.org, or by mail to this address: PO Box 2162, Berkeley, CA 94702 USA, or through the lead partner in your country.

Figure E.2. These high school students collected enough books for three libraries. They are now ready to take them to the post office.