

# MOBILE LIBRARIES, CROSS EXPERIENCES THROUGH COMOROS AND MADAGASCAR

Information sheet

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## CONTEXT

Reading, one of the pillars of children's independent learning, allows children to reinforce their learning outside of class time - and at a distance - while gaining independence and openness. Mobile libraries allow children to have access to books, even when there is a lack of infrastructure, or when it is difficult to travel. It is a very adaptable device and a local service for which children do not need to have digital access.

**Vahatra** (Madagascar) launched a mobile library system in 2020, in response to travel restrictions and school closures, related to the Covid-19 crisis. Started with 18 trunks in 18 agencies (the centers where the children usually meet), the program continues to evolve. In the Comoros, **Maecha** launched its first experiments with decentralized libraries in 2003 - a system that has constantly evolved since then between mobility (motorcycle library then bookmobile) and decentralized mini libraries.



## Mobilized resources

- 01 A means of transporting books (motorcycles, mini-buses, trunks, donkeys, etc.) and the means to operate it (drivers, fuel, etc.);
- 02 Facilities, such as a library corner in the district agencies of **Vahatra** or in the schools accompanied by **Maecha** (the device can also be mobile only);
- 03 A variety of books (e.g. each **Vahatra** trunk contains about twenty books, the scheme was launched with about 400 donated books but it is possible to start smaller); a budget to buy books later;
- 04 A system for identifying and tracking books ( in this case, tracking books and a list of available books);
- 05 Facilitators to bring the system to life.

## What is important to bring a mobile library to life?

- 01 Choose the device based on the availability of books and resources, and ensure the quality of the books;
- 02 Convince teachers, inform parents;
- 03 Work on the animation of the device and emphasize the notion of pleasure;
- 04 Organize the follow-up to evolve the device and the available books.

## Steps

### Adapt the system to the availability of books and the means available at the outset

The mobile library poses 4 questions of means:

- 01 Where and how to get the books?
- 02 How to select books?
- 03 How will they be made available to children?
- 04 How much availability do we need to make the system work?

### Get the books

In many countries, books are expensive and not widely available. To gather books, the call for donations is the cheapest and fastest solution, the trick being to start with the available books. It is also possible to set up a partnership to bring in books from outside the country, although there are issues of language and transportation costs, and in some cases the "filter" of the partners can have an influence on the type of book offered. Finally, in the case of purchases, it is possible to sign a partnership with one or more local booksellers from the start, but the cost of building up the initial stock can be high.

*In Madagascar, **Vahatra** called for donations from its hundred employees to launch its mobile libraries. This made it possible to start quickly with a collection of about 400 works, ranging from comic books to story books, from novels to school books, or even children's magazines. If we consider the purchase price of new books in Madagascar, we can estimate that this fund represents a value of 3000 to 6000€ (for a base of 7,5 to 15€ / book). In order for this system to work, the animators of the 18 Vahatra agencies were sensitized and invited to mobilize their team, then an official call was launched. The criteria was broad, for books aimed at 5-15 year olds, and then a final selection was made.*

## Choose the books

The choice of books to be included in the library is important, even if the constraints at the start of the system can be strong (few books available, dependence on donations...).

The implementation of a policy of choice and selection of books from the outset puts the library on the right track, and can be strengthened as the system grows (means, number of books available, and identification of books that please...).

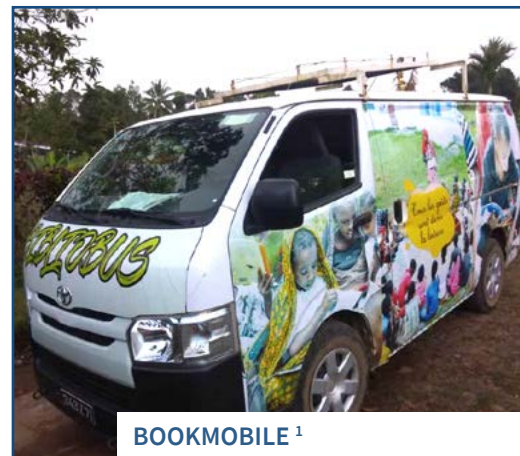
It is a question of finding criteria flexible enough to allow the implementation of the system without aiming too high, but to have, from the beginning, a desire for appropriate selection.

*Vahatra* has set up simple criteria to make its call for donations to its employees and then choose the books after its first collection:

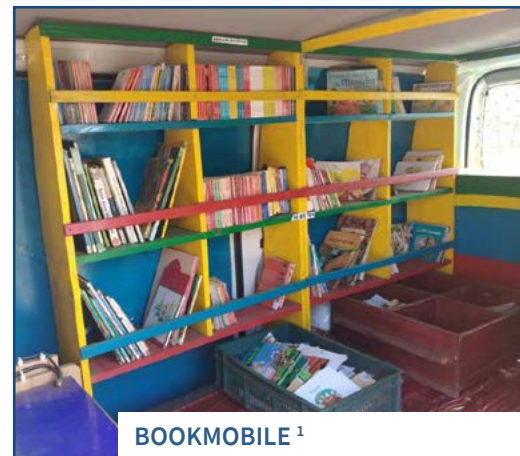
- 01 The book must be in good condition
- 02 The book must be suitable for 5-15 year olds and not carry cultural, political or religious messages that are too established / open to debate
- 03 The book must be in French or local language

*It is important to have a variety of books (counts, stories, comics, educational books...).*

*In a second phase, this selection was enriched on a more voluntary basis, according to the shortcomings observed, for example by looking for more books in local languages, or by looking for classics of local literature (see last point on the evaluation of the system).*



BOOKMOBILE <sup>1</sup>



BOOKMOBILE <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> - Maeеча's bookmobile now carries books.

## Make the books available

The distribution strategy must be adapted according to the number of books available at the outset and the distribution area. In the case of a small number of books, trunks or other devices that can be transported with small means are suitable (motorcycle, donkey, car ...); the books can be easily moved between different areas. If the means are there, it is possible to develop the device with a dedicated vehicle, like a bookmobile. With a larger number of books, it is also possible to consider less mobile devices where the books are distributed among different fixed points and rotate regularly.

*After having collected 400 books, Vahatra wanted to distribute them among its 18 agencies. But this limited the number of books per agency to about twenty. The team chose to use trunks to easily transport the books from one agency to another and to rotate them quarterly, so that the books available would be quickly rotated for the children.*

*When Maeеча started in 2003, it only had a stock of books and a box for transportation. The facilitator at the time (Youssouf Dainane) had created a list of the stock of books available to the schools, so that each teacher could indicate which ones they were interested in. On his next visit, he brought the requested books in the box and on a motorcycle. Later, Maeеча acquired a bus to transport the books and serve as a library. But the bus is frequently stopped because of technical problems (repairs) or road conditions. Maeеча continues to use other solutions such as reading and leisure centers located directly in schools.*

## Make the system work

The resources needed to run the mobile library differ greatly depending on the ambition of the system and the frequency of visits (or opening hours in the case of relocated mini-libraries). It is quite possible to operate with reduced time resources to allow the borrowing of books. However, this may not be enough to get children excited about reading if they don't have time or space for "pleasure" reading. For a more sustained animation, and in particular time on site with the child, it is necessary to foresee animation positions, or work in partnership with teachers, volunteers...

Transportation and acquisition of books also takes time. The more books are limited, the more often they need to be transported or the number of beneficiaries reduced.

*At the start of the system, Vahatra only opened its libraries once a week for one hour, during which time children could choose books to borrow. This did not mobilize the social workers very much. The system was then reinforced with more opening days. In 2022, faced with the fact that the format did not allow for on-site reading and was an obstacle for some children, Vahatra decided to open the library 2 half-days a week in each branch. Each branch initially had about twenty books, which rotated among the branches, allowing for many small local points rather than one larger library with the same number of books.*

*Maeеча tested until 2012 the animation of mini-libraries placed in schools by trained volunteer teachers, to provide access to books. However, teacher volunteers had little time to devote to the library during school hours. In 2012, a 1st facilitator was hired for one of these mini libraries. Today Maeеча operates a mobile library, for which a driver and an animator have been recruited, in order to visit 3 schools per day, from Monday to Thursday (2 in the morning, 1 in the afternoon). As well as reading and leisure centers located in certain schools and which are animated by animators supervised by the school council - the animator of the mobile library also visits them regularly.*

## Inform parents, convince teachers

Mobile libraries are entering the world of parents and teachers. At first, the parents do not necessarily know about the existence of the system (they must be informed). They are not all at ease with books either, some are illiterate, so it is also necessary to explain the use and interest of the system to them and their children, so that they assimilate the rules.

Teachers are also sometimes wary of mobile libraries: if the activities take place during their class hours, they "take up their time", and outside of class, they do not always see the connections that can be made with their job.

Since November 2021, **Vahatra** has incorporated information about the mobile library into the general information meeting about its services, which all parents attend. This prevents parents from coming to the agency without knowing the rules and choosing the books themselves, for instance - the rule being that the child must choose the book.

**Maeеча** reminds teachers that reading will enhance the child's ability to follow and understand the lesson, to participate, to be comfortable. This will help them in their work, with students of a higher level. The teachers are also reassured about the workload that this requires, since the animations are taken care of by Maeеча's animators. Once teachers are convinced, they are better at promoting the system to students.

## Work on the animation of the system to encourage and inspire

Reading does not come "naturally" to children, especially when the mobile library is new to them. To help them develop an interest in reading, it is important to accompany and encourage them.

The notion of "reading for pleasure" - in Nyumakele (Maeеча Comoros intervention area) - strongly contributes to the development of reading, and it is transmitted through animation. The animation can be done everywhere with very little means and equipment (1 animator, 1 mat, books), the trick is to vary the animations well.

At the launch of the program, the **Vahatra** agency facilitators showed the children who visited the agencies how to use a book: how to take care of it, how to open it, in which direction to read it... The logic was really that of appropriating a new object, of not leaving the child alone to read, while gradually becoming independent. The child chooses the book.

At **Maeеча**, reading is above all portrayed as a pleasure. When we read to children, we invite them to close their eyes, to escape, to listen attentively... Children can also spend time with the book, whereas at school they are often several around the same book. The animation then consists of games ("spell me"), questions... to provoke the child's feedback. The facilitators create sheets with the level, the objectives, the material for each animation?

## Use other media around the book so that reading is associated with a moment of pleasure

All means are good to interest children in reading: propose theatrical animations, movie sessions, games in the reading places. The playful aspect, the images, the collective challenges are all opportunities to put the book forward and to associate it with a moment of pleasure.

**Vahatra** has started to set up a mini toy library with its mini libraries. Each child who has borrowed at least 2 books has the right to borrow a game, to be played alone or as a family. This strengthens the child's desire to read.

**Maeеча** organizes many activities around reading. The new bookmobile has a video projector powered by solar panels. Artists or members of the book club led circus (clown) and theatrical animations to promote reading.

ANIMATORS<sup>2</sup>DISCOVERING BOOKS<sup>2</sup>ANIMATORS<sup>3</sup>ANIMATIONS<sup>4</sup>

2 - Vahatra's animators help children discover books.

3 - Maeеча's animators read to the comfortably seated children.

4 - Animations such as clowns or projections are part of Maeеча's strategies to draw people into the pleasure of reading.



[www.partage.org](http://www.partage.org)

**French association of international solidarity created in 1973**

The association PARTAGE helps the most disadvantaged children in the world to grow up in the respect of their fundamental rights.

PARTAGE supports actions that help remove the obstacles to the global development of children.

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