

THE BOOK LADY, BISILA BOKOKO

Bisila Bokoko grew up in a home where reading was encouraged. Now she is giving that gift back to people in different parts of the African continent.

Born in Valencia, Spain, to parents from Equatorial Guinea, Bisila Bokoko fell in love with Ghana when she first set foot there five years ago. As she spent time in the West African country, she realised that there were no books recording its beautiful history. And so her dream to share books started to take shape. The chief of the village Kokofu, near Kumasi in Ghana, presented her with the title of 'Queen' and a piece of land for her to do with whatever she wanted. Bokoko chose to build a library for the community on the land and this project birthed the The Bisila Bokoko African Literacy Project (BBALP).

THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

Bokoko personally funds the BBALP and uses her contacts to acquire donations of books. She gets about 20 000 books from Spain alone and Zimbabwe and Equatorial Guinea, amongst other countries, are her biggest supporters. The work that Bokoko was doing had such a positive effect on the Ghanaian village where she started that she decided to spread the project to other countries on the continent.

According to Bokoko, the best part about what she does comes in the form of the feedback she gets from the different communities she works with. "Some of the things that keep me going are instances such as a boy in Malawi who, after spending time reading and doing research in one of my libraries, built a windmill that led to the process of producing electricity for his community," Bokoko explains.

"Similarly," she adds, "a lady from Zimbabwe who went on to become a photographer and did her internship in Germany expressed her gratitude for the work we do." The BBALP has even spread to Thabazimbi in Limpopo province of SA. "Most of the schools in this area don't have paper for books, so that is my next project," Bokoko says, explaining that most projects take about six months to complete with most of the libraries being built on school premises for effective management by the schools.

THE GIFT OF INSPIRATION

One of the major challenges faced by the BBALP is the transportation of

books – a costly exercise. However, Bokoko remains undeterred. As part of her initiative to inspire the locals in the communities, she has friends accompanying her on school visits. "When travelling to schools to do motivational speeches for learners," she explains, "I bring along friends in different occupations so that the children know that there are more options for their future than typical childhood choices of teacher, doctor or nurse."

Even with a jam-packed schedule, Bokoko lives with passion and makes it a point to enjoy the journey even when times are tough. "It's all about the way you carry yourself and how you feel in your own skin," she says as she shares her personal motto, "It's never too late and it's never too early."

For more information on the Bisila Bokoko African Literacy Project, visit bbalp.org and see how you can get involved. **E**

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