



Beyond the Stacks:
Mapping Kenya's
Libraries



Reflections from a National Journey into the Heart of Public Knowledge Spaces

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Lionel Odhiambo – Migori & Homa Bay County.

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Dennis



Jonathan



Marion



Maureen



Nereah



Syokau



Trevas



Yvette



Polycarp

thank
you

Libraries Are Still a Thing

If you spend enough time in Kenya, you're bound to hear familiar refrains:

"Kenyans don't read."

"We don't have a reading culture."

"If you want to hide something from a Kenyan, put it in a book."

Over the years of engaging with libraries, we've heard many versions of these, from:

***"Haiya, are libraries still a thing? Me, I only know the one in Upper Hill," to
"People still go to libraries? What for?"***

But 2022 data from the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) tells a different story. Of 112,157 libraries recorded across 22 African countries, Kenya is home to 49,172 – most of them in schools. It's a striking number, and one that led us to ask more questions. And we like questions.

Since 2017, Book Bunk Trust has been working to transform three of Nairobi's most iconic public libraries: McMillan Memorial Library and its branches in Kaloleni and Makadara. Though our focus has been on these sites, we quickly realised that to build truly connected, functional library spaces, we needed to understand the broader network they exist within. Unfortunately, very little comprehensive data exists on Kenya's libraries beyond the official numbers.

In response, we launched the Library Ecosystems research project in 2020 to explore the forces shaping public libraries in Nairobi and beyond. We didn't stop at standard metrics like foot traffic or circulation. We asked: What makes a library ecosystem thrive? What roles do users, librarians, communities, policymakers, and partners play in that thriving? And what conditions are necessary for libraries to remain relevant, resilient, and rooted?

Public libraries are often seen as quiet places for books. But at their best, they are vibrant, adaptive infrastructures of knowledge and culture. Centres where people gather, ideas cross-pollinate, and communities care for one another. This report emerges from the belief that libraries are not passive repositories of information, but dynamic systems shaped by – and shaping – the world around them.

Our research process was collaborative, iterative, and grounded in lived experience. We interacted with every public and community library across the country,

conducted interviews and focus groups, and collected stories that reflect the diversity of Kenyan library users. We listened not just for what libraries are, but what they mean to the people who use and sustain them.

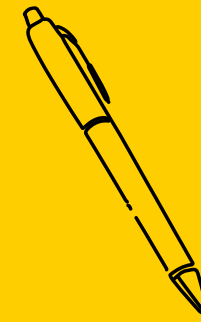
What we found is complex and inspiring. Libraries serve as job centres, quiet refuges, childcare spaces, creative studios, and sites for civic engagement. They reflect their surroundings; political, social, and economic; and they adapt, often through the ingenuity of those who care deeply about them.

This report is structured around five key elements: infrastructure, people, policy, programming, and partnerships. We also examine the risks libraries face: underfunding and outdated technology to climate vulnerability and shifting expectations. The common thread in every library we encountered was the urgent need for operational support and better networks to share knowledge and resources.

This research is both diagnostic and aspirational. We hope the insights it offers contribute to stronger, more inclusive library systems across Kenya. Libraries are part of our past. We must nurture them so they remain a vital piece of our collective future.

We thank all the librarians, users, researchers, partners, storytellers, designers, and service providers who contributed to this work. Special thanks to the Book Bunk team, past and present, who touched this project over the five years it took to complete – particularly Syokau Mutonga, who led the work at its onset, and Trevas, who concluded it in 2023. Both continue to carry this research forward in their own academic pursuits.

Your insight, labour, and imagination are what bring these pages to life.



**Wanjiru Koinange,
Co-Founder & Managing Trustee, Book
Bunk Trust.**



Lamu Fort Library



Content

A Brief History of Libraries in Kenya 06

The Language of Libraries 08

Methodology 12

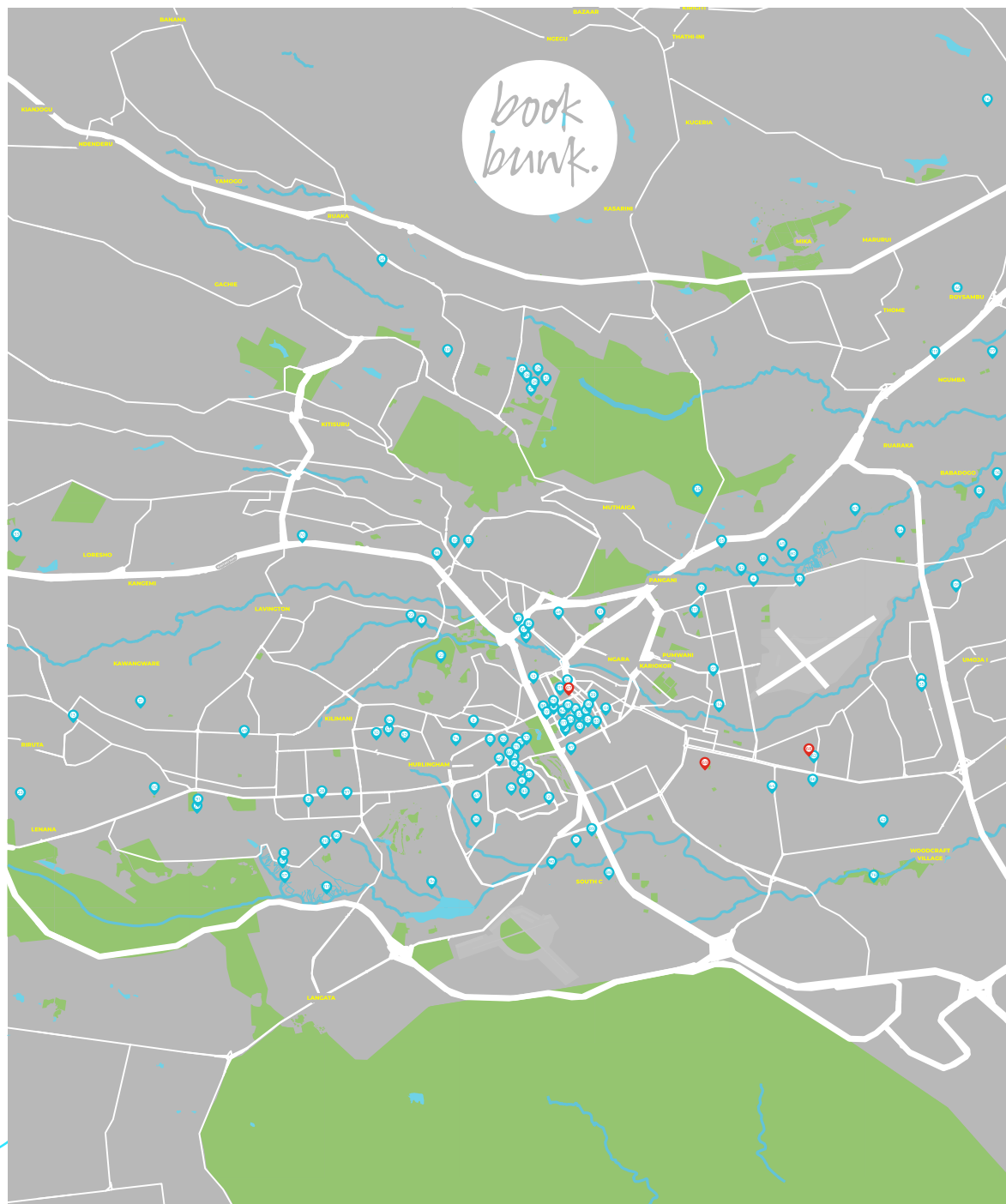
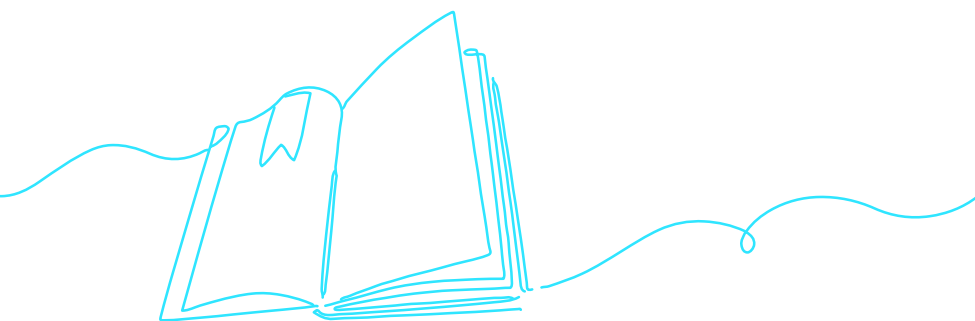
Research Findings 15

Library Profiles 43

Library List 44

References 50

What Next 51



A Brief History of Libraries in Kenya



High Court of Kenya Library - Mombasa

One of the earliest government libraries, it was established alongside the then Supreme Court to serve colonial administrators and legal professionals. (Source)

1902

1910

Kenya National Assembly Library

was established in Nairobi to provide information to members of the legislative council; it played a crucial role in supporting legislative functions of the colonial government.

1942

The Desai Memorial Library

The Desai Memorial Library is established in Nairobi, initially to serve Asians exclusively. This changed in the 1960s.

1956

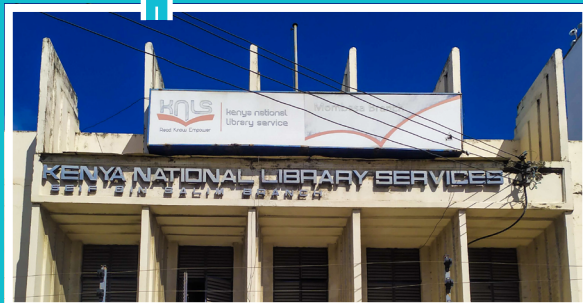
Saif bin Salim Library

moves into its current location on Msanifu Kombo Street in Mombasa.

1965

The Kenya Library Association

The Kenya Library Association is created to support professional development among librarians.



Saif bin Salim Library - Mombasa

1903 and Free Reading Room was established by the Indian community, this is Kenya's first public library. It was open to all, though primarily utilized by the Indian population due to its collection in Indian languages. (Moonlion Safaris)

1931

Nairobi

receives its first library, the McMillan Memorial Library. Established by Lady Lucy McMillan and the Carnegie Corporation, it served Europeans during the colonial era.

1961

Eldoret Municipal Library

Eldoret Municipal Library is the first library service initiated by a local government authority in Kenya.

1962

McMillan Memorial Library

McMillan Memorial Library became accessible to all members of the public ending a thirty one year history of restricted access.



1967

Kenya National Library Service (KNLS)

Kenya National Library Service (KNLS) Board established through an Act of Parliament to oversee public library services. The Kaloleni Library is built.

1974

KNLS expands

KNLS expands library network across Kenya, including book-mobile services to reach rural communities.

1986

Lamu Fort Library

Lamu Fort Library is established within the historic Lamu Fort. The library serves as a cultural and research center, preserving Swahili literature and local history.

2010

New constitution

Kenya adopts a new constitution introducing a devolved system of government although libraries are not explicitly mentioned.

2020

Restoration of the Kaloleni Library

Book Bunk completes the restoration of the Kaloleni Library and commences work on the Eastlands Library.

2018

Book Bunk signs a milestone

Book Bunk signs a milestone, first of its kind, agreement with the Nairobi City County granting it the mandate to restore and manage the Kaloleni, Eastlands, and McMillan Memorial Libraries.

2023

Every public library in Kenya

Book Bunk visits every public library in Kenya and in 2025 launches ecosystem research to map Kenya's national library infrastructure.

1990s

Community and NGO-led libraries

Community and NGO-led libraries begin to emerge in informal settlements and underserved areas.

2013

County governments take office

County governments take office, but KNLS retains operational control over most libraries due to lack of a clear transition policy.

2021

Formal process of devolving library

National government begins formal process of devolving library functions to counties; a legal and policy groundwork is laid. The newly rehabilitated Kaloleni & Eastlands Libraries are reopened to the public.

1969

The Eastlands (then Makadara) Library

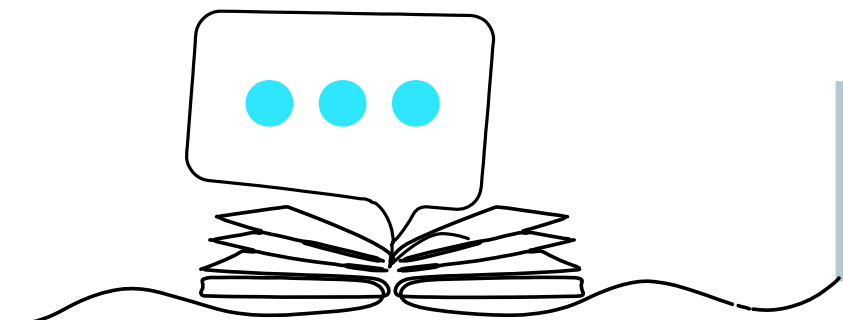
The Eastlands (then Makadara) Library was established by the Nairobi City Council. KNLS opens its headquarters in Upper Hill, Nairobi.



The Language of Libraries

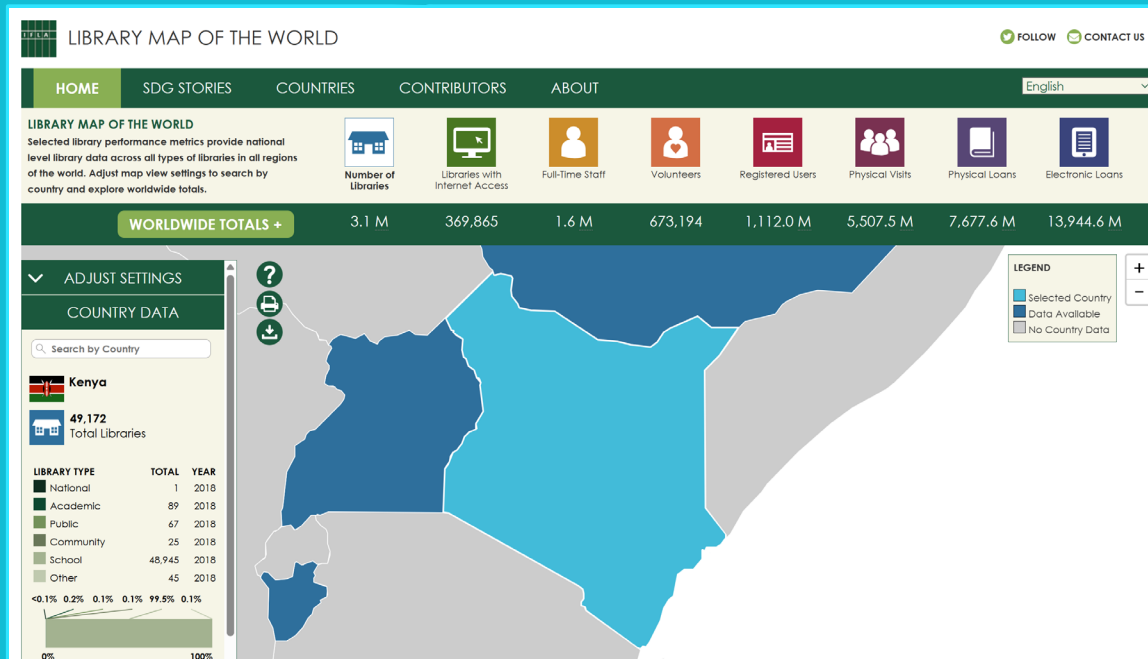
UNESCO and the International Federation of Library Associations IFLA define public libraries as the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status.

IFLA's data in 2022 recorded a total of 112,157 libraries operating across the twenty two African nations from which data was collected. Kenya is home to 49,172 of these libraries. This discovery prompted further research into the manner in which libraries are defined/ categorised both globally and locally.



Library Type	IFLA Definition	Kenyan Interpretation / Legal Status
Public Library	Open to all, publicly funded, promotes lifelong learning, literacy, and access to information.	Managed primarily by Kenya National Library Service, considered official public infrastructure for knowledge access.
National Library	Preserves a nation's published heritage, usually non-lending, includes legal deposit functions.	KNLS HQ plays the national library role; legal deposit and preservation not fully formalized.
Academic Library	Supports higher education and research, and serves university communities.	Operates under universities, regulated by the Ministry of Education; not under KNLS.
School Library	Serves primary and secondary schools, supports literacy and learning.	Managed by schools and the Ministry of Education; no formal integration with KNLS.
Special Library	Serves specialized user groups (law, medicine, etc.), often within institutions.	Found in government, NGOs, or professional bodies; not standardized nationally.
Community Library	Not officially defined by IFLA; typically grassroots-led, non-formal public access spaces.	Operates in legal grey areas; often run by NGOs, family or charitable trusts & KNLS; vital in underserved areas.
Mobile Library	Not a core IFLA category but recognized in practice; delivers library services to remote communities.	Operated by KNLS and partners; extend access to rural areas; not standalone legal category.

librarymap.ifla.org



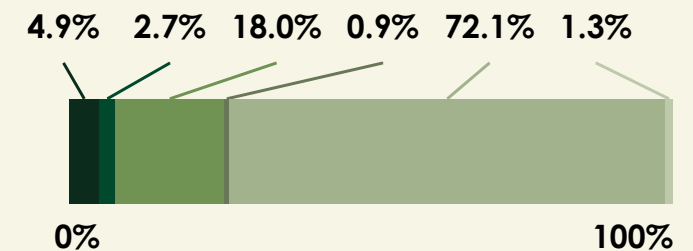
DATA



3.1 M

Total Libraries

LIBRARY TYPE	TOTAL	YEAR
National	153,029	2025
Academic	85,759	2024
Public	560,197	2024
Community	29,295	2024
School	2.3 M	2024
Other	40,691	2024



N/A' Not Applicable '-' No Data '0' Zero



Public Library [\[Identified-251 • Visited-155\]](#)

noun

Any library that formed part of the KNLS network at the time of this research; or that was established and/or managed by any kind of government funding and is therefore considered national or county infrastructure; or that was granted to or managed by any government body.

School Library [\[Identified-99 • Visited-80\]](#)

noun

Any library located within a primary, secondary or university regardless of management and establishment.



Private Library [\[Identified-56 • Visited-44\]](#)

noun

Libraries established by individuals, groups, organisations, institutions outside those of higher education, to which access is restricted to members of that group or institution.

Community Library [\[Logged • under public libraries\]](#)

noun

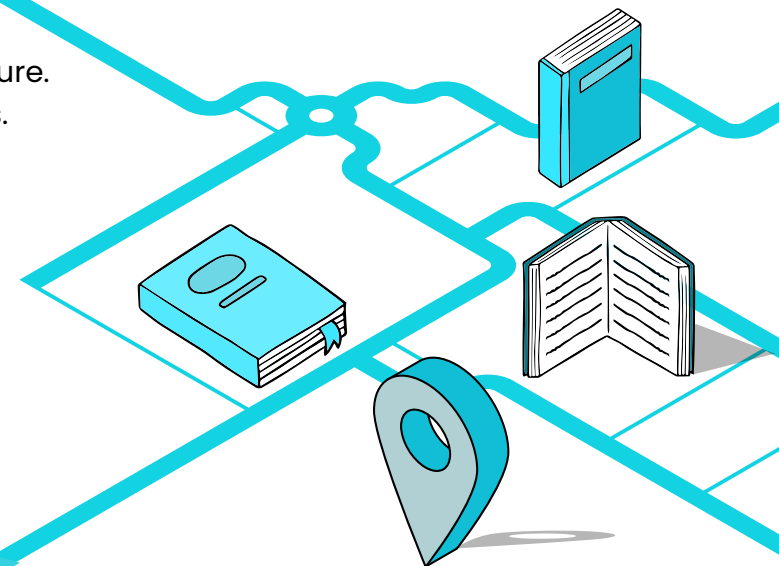
These are libraries established by private individuals or groups, access to which is often unrestricted and open to members of the public or larger communities.



Methodology

This research sought to map out Kenya's library infrastructure. The fieldwork to collect this data was divided into four phases.

Data was collected in the form of recorded oral interviews that were transcribed alongside participant observations at the research sites. In some cases where multiple respondents wished to participate, a focus group discussion was organised to enable this. Interviews were conducted in English or Kiswahili and other Kenyan languages.



Phase 1

Phase 1 started in August 2020 with comprehensive desktop research of the libraries that are listed online and text review of existing work that has been done on the libraries in Kenya by institutions such as the Kenya National Library Services. This process unearthed a total of 855 public, private, institutional and community libraries in Nairobi; and 266 public libraries across Kenya. [Read the report on Nairobi's libraries here.](#)

Phase 2

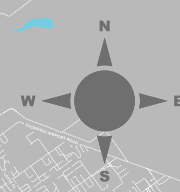
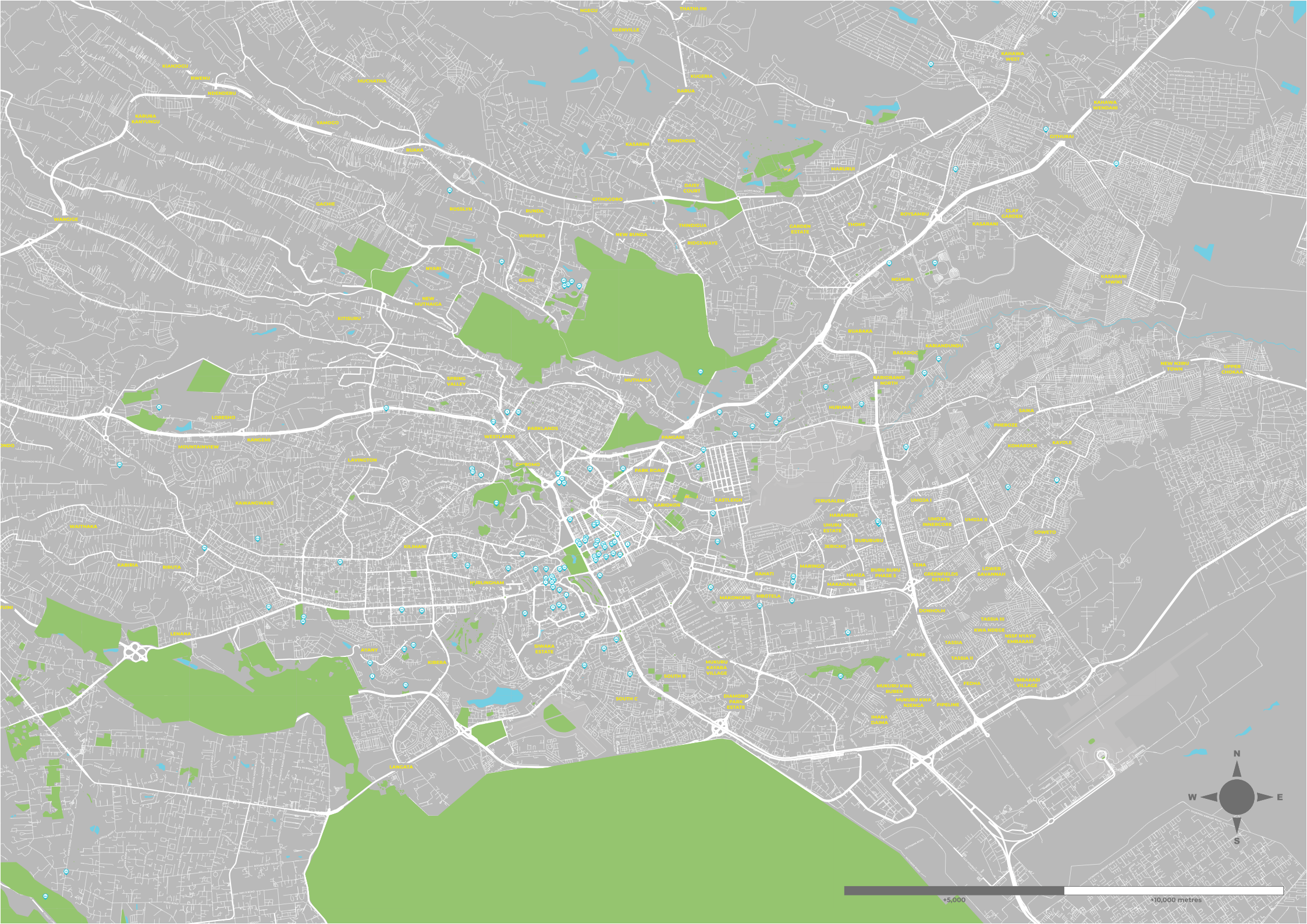
Phase 2 involved mapping out the libraries in Nairobi county. It mapped out their physical location, information about their patronage and collection. This exercise yielded 148 public libraries spread across Nairobi county.

Phase 3

Phase 3 started in June 2021 and extended the library mapping beyond Nairobi to 12 other counties: Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi, Kitui, Makueni, Machakos, Kiambu, Nyandarua, Laikipia, Kisumu, Kericho and Siaya. This sample represented 25% of Kenya's counties. Reconnaissance studies were conducted by 8 local guides who identified 52 libraries; 47 of which agreed to participate in this research.

Phase 4

Phase 4 started in June 2021 and extended the library mapping beyond Nairobi to 12 other counties: Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi, Kitui, Makueni, Machakos, Kiambu, Nyandarua, Laikipia, Kisumu, Kericho and Siaya. This sample represented 25% of Kenya's counties. Reconnaissance studies were conducted by 8 local guides who identified 52 libraries; 47 of which agreed to participate in this research.

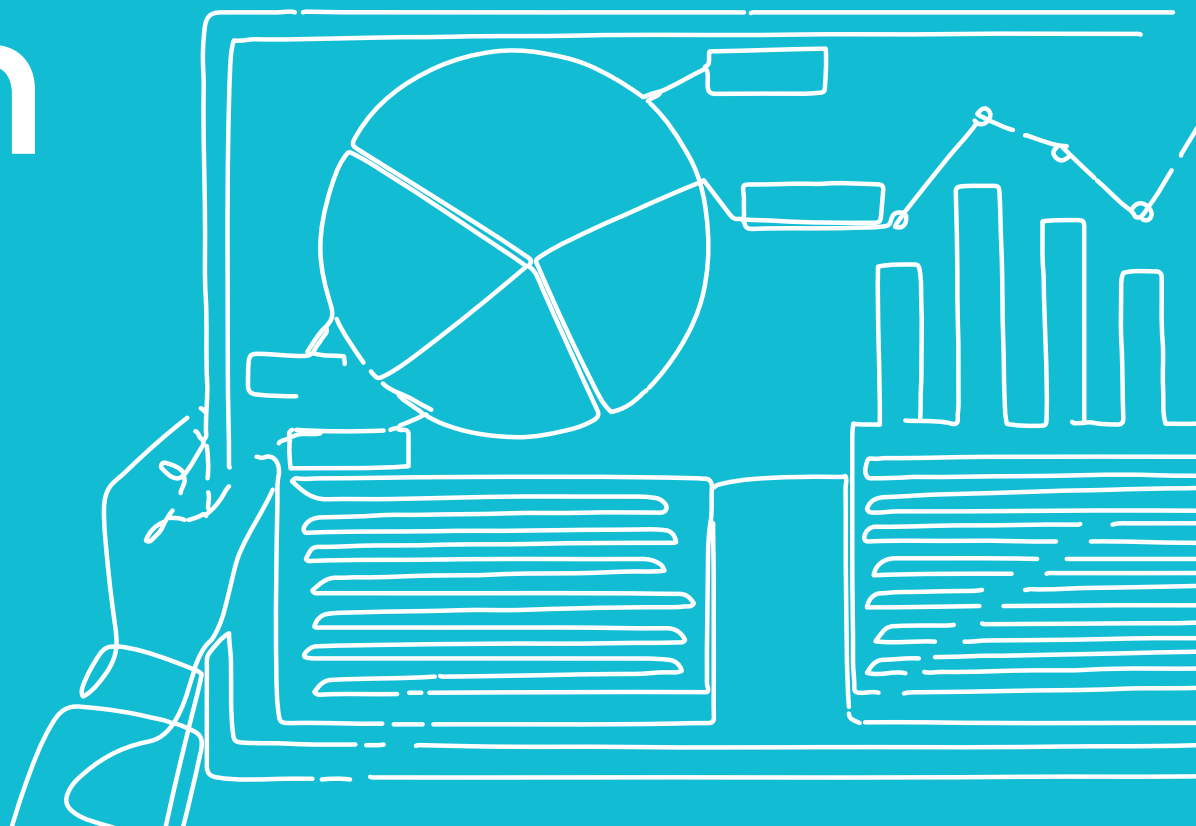
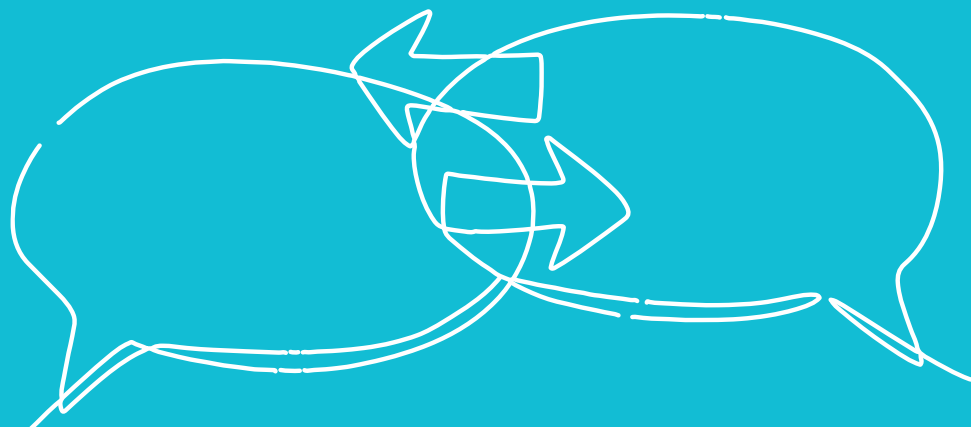


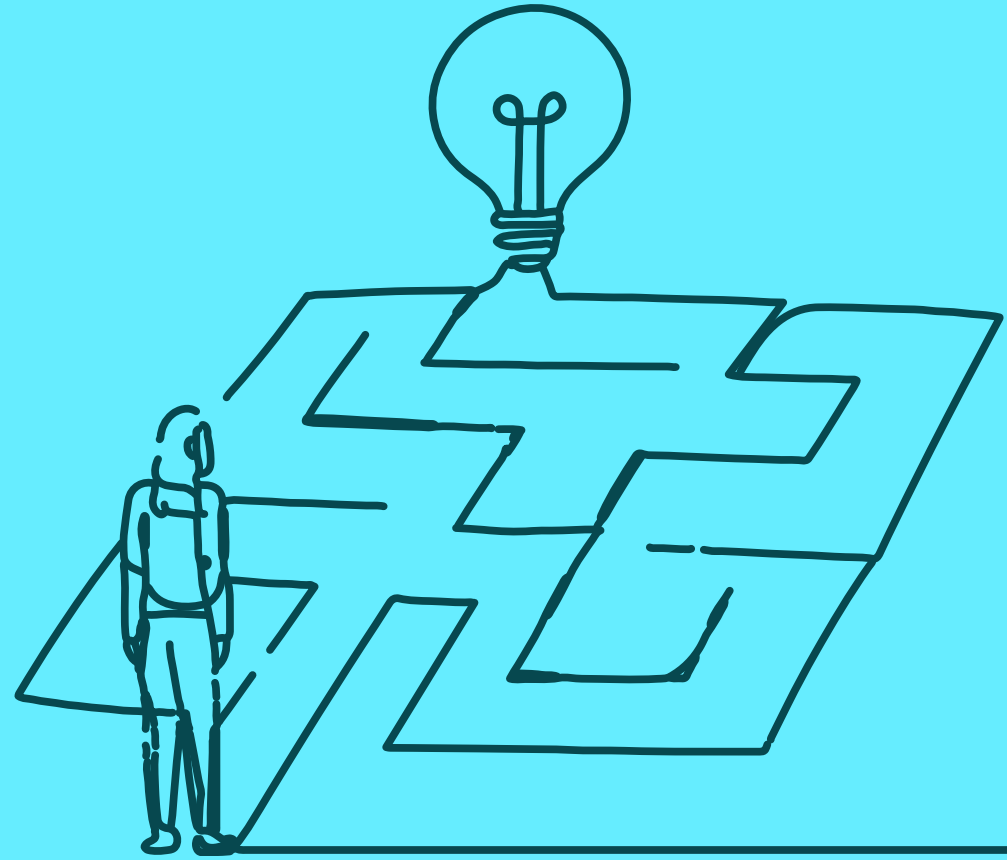
Research Outputs

This project visited a total of 279 libraries (155 Public, 44 private and 80 school libraries). This process took place over the course of four years. Alongside this comprehensive report, findings from the research are presented in the following formats on a physical map of Nairobi's libraries that is installed on a large wall at the Eastlands Library in Nairobi. Inspired by IFLA, we also created an online map of Kenya's libraries that we hope to continue to grow into a platform that evolves to connect Kenya's libraries in more meaningful ways.



Research Findings



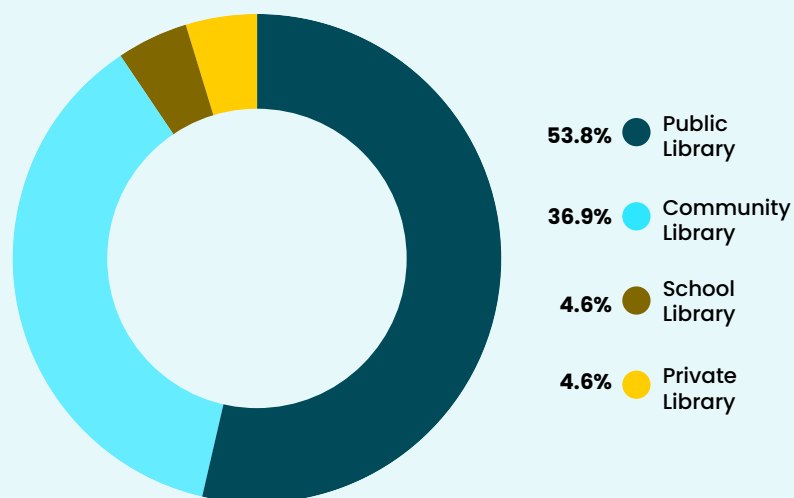


1 Understanding the Landscape

1 Understanding the Landscape



What kinds of libraries did we visit across Kenya?



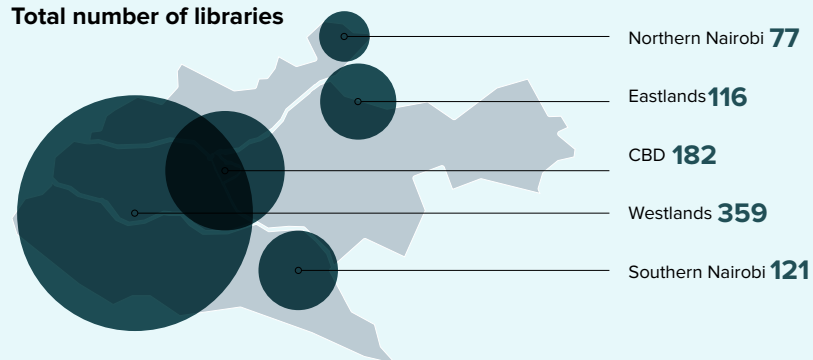
Our library visits took place at different times throughout the year. The Nairobi phase occurred in 2021, shortly after many libraries had reopened following COVID-19 restrictions. At the time, social distancing measures were still in place, limiting the number of patrons allowed inside.

Phases 3 and 4 of the project were intentionally scheduled to align with both school terms and holidays, allowing us to observe how libraries operate during different periods of activity.

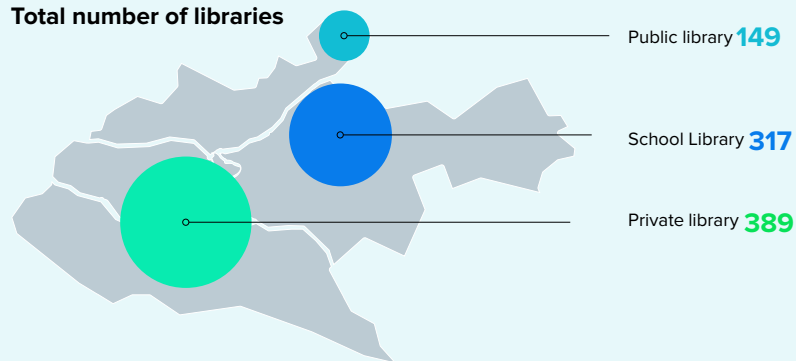
All visits were pre-approved through outreach by local county scouts. We did not require that interviews be conducted exclusively with the head librarian, as we quickly learned that libraries in Kenya are managed by a wide range of individuals; both formally trained and not. For our purposes, the most important factor was not job title, but rather the length of time the respondent had been involved in the library's operations.

Where exactly are these libraries located?

Total number of libraries



Total number of libraries



"To access a public library here you have to travel far, because if you look at the next library from here (KNLS Bute) is about 300 KM to Habaswein where the next public library is."

– Abdisalan Rashid, Wajir County Local Guide

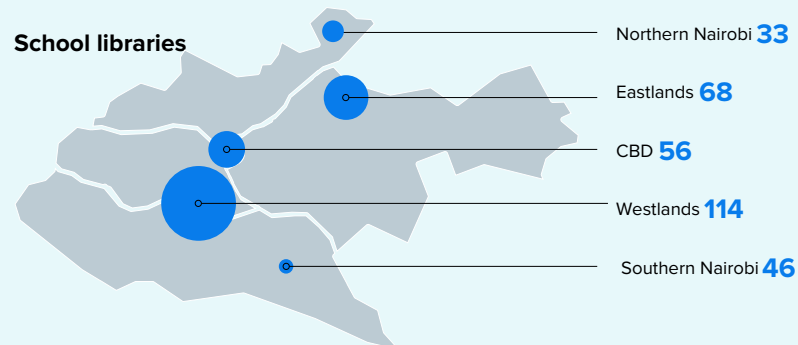
Public libraries



Private libraries



School libraries



1 Understanding the Landscape



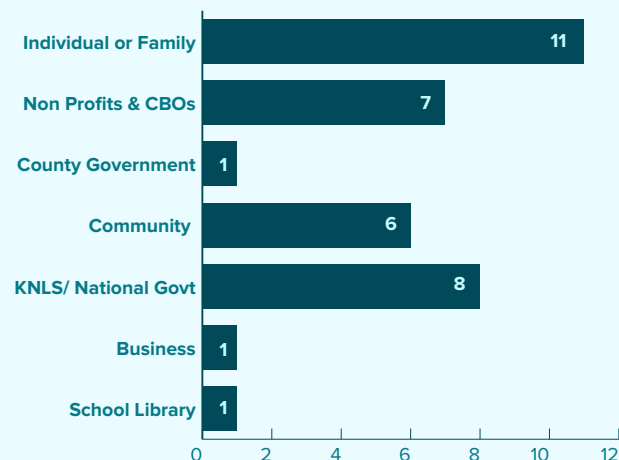
The distribution of libraries across Kenya reflects the enduring legacy of colonial urban planning and infrastructure investment. During the colonial period, public amenities such as libraries were concentrated in settler zones and administrative centres, prioritizing towns like Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, and Nakuru. As a result, some of the country's oldest and best-resourced libraries remain clustered in these areas.

This pattern of spatial inequality persists today, with urban centres enjoying relatively dense library networks, while many rural and historically marginalized regions remain underserved or entirely excluded. In Nairobi, this colonial imprint is particularly stark: library infrastructure aligns closely with the city's original segregated layout, leaving former indigenous-designated areas with limited access to public knowledge institutions. Similar dynamics are evident nationwide, where the expansion of Kenya National Library Service (KNLS) branches has improved reach, but has not fully corrected the imbalance.

In many counties, libraries are still established through community or NGO initiatives and often struggle with funding and sustainability. While progress has been made since independence, the current distribution of libraries underscores the deep-rooted infrastructural inequalities inherited from colonial rule, continuing to shape who has access to information, education, and cultural resources in Kenya today.

1 Understanding the Landscape

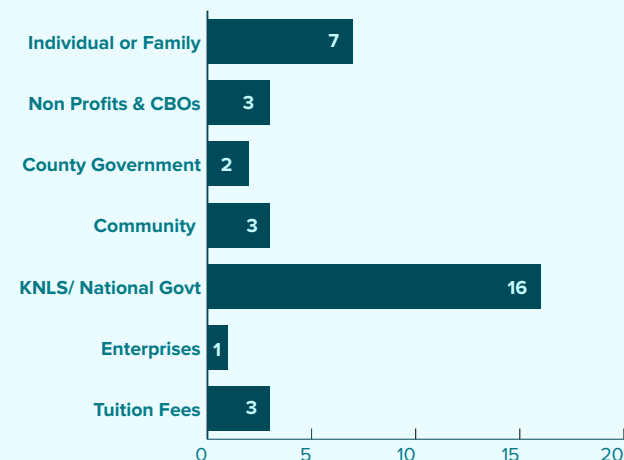
Who built these libraries?



Institutions, family trusts, and community-led initiatives make up the vast majority of libraries identified by this research project. One of the key benefits of this diverse ownership is the ability of these spaces to adapt services sustainably and responsively to the unique needs of the communities they serve.

A significant number of the libraries visited are either run by or affiliated with government agencies; the majority being KNLS facilities. A notable trend among county libraries is that many begin as community-led initiatives and are later absorbed into the KNLS network. Once integrated, KNLS would assume responsibility for staffing, book acquisition policies, collection updates, and other operational roles. In several cases, libraries expressed a strong desire for this affiliation, viewing it as a gateway to resources and support they would otherwise lack.

Who is funding Kenya's libraries?



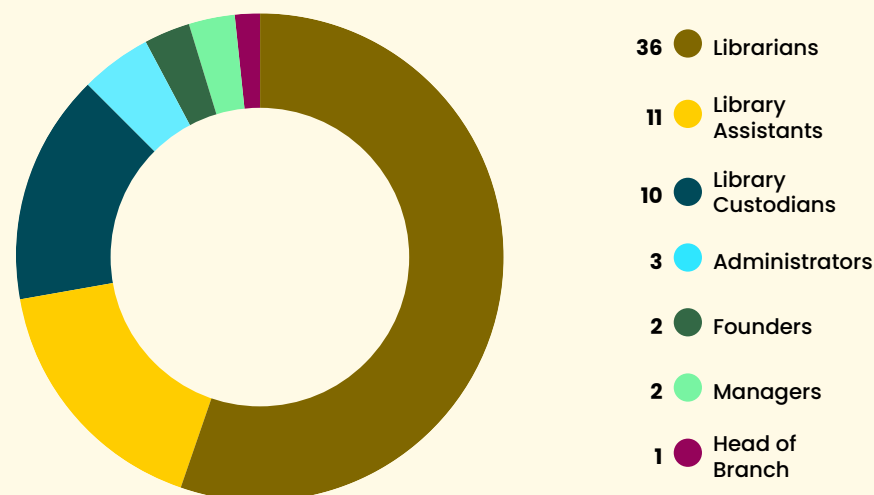
Libraries in Kenya are funded through a mix of public, private, and philanthropic sources. The Kenya National Library Service (KNLS) receives government funding to run public libraries across the country, though budgets remain limited. County governments are beginning to support libraries through devolved funds. Organisations like Knowledge Empowering Youth (KEY), Book Aid International, and Book Bunk build/restore and resource libraries, in schools and underserved areas. Community trusts and religious institutions also contribute by establishing and maintaining libraries. International donors and corporate sponsors provide books, infrastructure, and digital tools, though sustainable funding remains a significant challenge.



2 Meeting the People Behind the Libraries



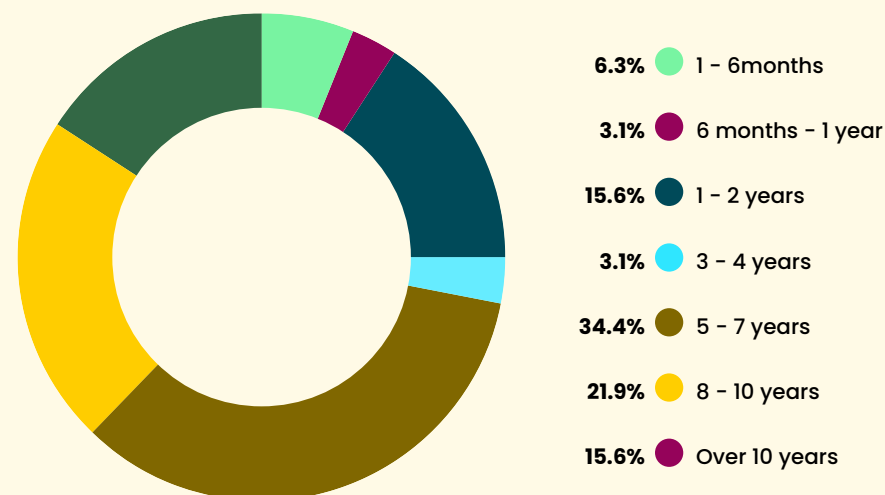
Who did we speak to at these libraries?



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How long had they worked there?



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3 Library Use and Community Engagement

Are people really still using public libraries in Kenya?

66

Average Number of User during school term

216

Average number of users school holidays

5

Library with the smallest average number of users

650

Library with the largest average number of users

The libraries we visited received a cumulative average of 66 users per day. Across the country, library patronage is determined by the school term and children under 15 are the main demographic. The smallest library we visited reported an average of 6 users per day across seasons while the busiest library has an average of 250 during the school term and up to 3000 per day during the holidays!

"Library attendance is actually dependent on the times. Our library is mostly used by the schools and the students, and you find when the schools are closed, we usually get even past capacity, we cannot go beyond 50. But you see when they come they usually even use the outside space. During the peak period, we usually get above 50. But during the normal days, at most it is around 10."

– Margaret Mbithuka, Librarian
KNLS Mwingi Community Library, Kitui County



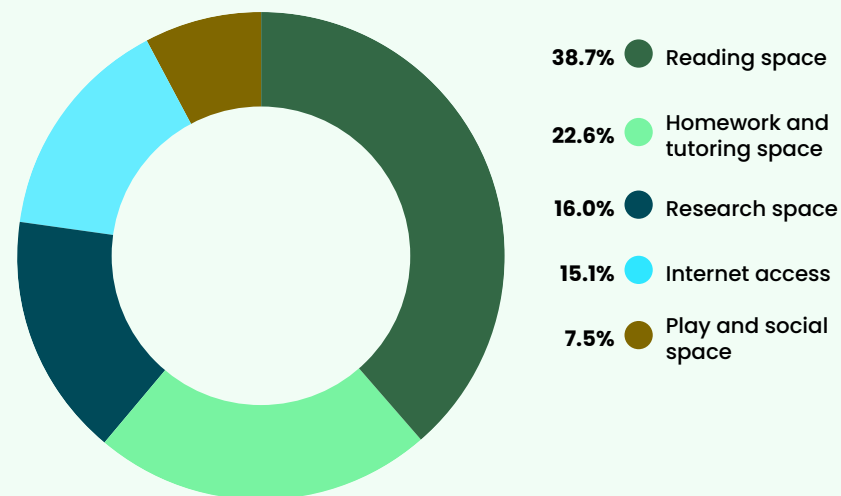
3 Library Use and Community Engagement



"On a daily basis I can put it at 50 to 70 for the adult section, the junior section it can be around 80 to 100 patrons."

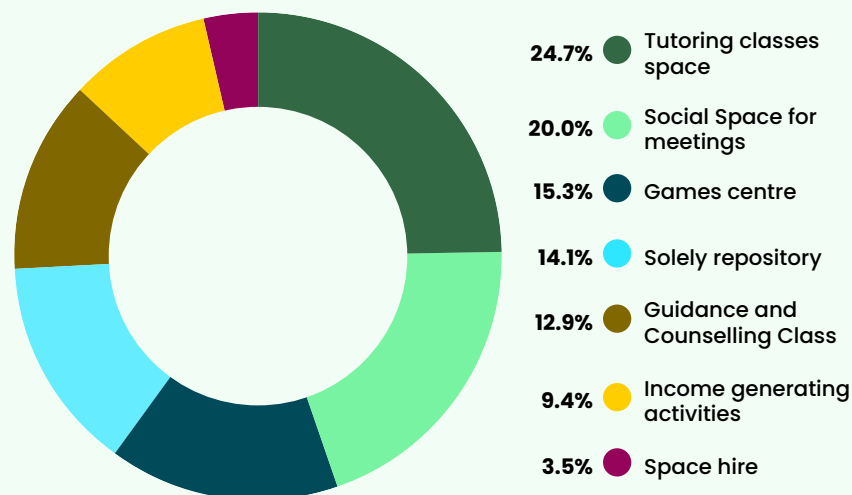
– Antony Omondi, Librarian KNLS Nyilima Library,
Siaya County

How are these spaces being used by their communities?



However, across the country, access to the physical library space is the main incentive for visiting the library. A majority of the users visiting the libraries are looking for a place to focus on their academic pursuits. Study space and desk space was prioritised by many of the libraries we visited, with other activities serving secondary or revenue generating purposes.

What else is happening inside these libraries beyond reading?



Libraries in Kenya are rapidly transforming from static repositories into vibrant, community-driven spaces that reflect local priorities. No longer bound by a single definition, many libraries now serve multiple roles shaped by the needs and aspirations of their users. In Kirinyaga County, Kentaro Ogawa Community Library caters not just to nearby schools but also to the agricultural community, with its programs and collections tailored to farming livelihoods. Their vision is clear: "A graduate in every homestead."

"We are digitising these letters which comes with even translating the letters so that others can learn and pass on the knowledge of the people."

– Khadija Issa Twahir,
Librarian Lamu Fort Library



"There is an improvement because since 2017, the university grades have risen where we have more than five people going to the university now. So there is that improvement of the grades."

– Joseph Kabuchu Njogu, Librarian
Kentaro Ogawa Community Library, Thaita



"So we have a competition for modelling called the little Miss Kenya. So we train the kids then they go for competitions, then when they qualify they compete for little Miss World. So last year one went to Thailand and next year two of them will be going to Greece."

– Cyril Otieno Dance Program Coordinator,
Angels Care Library, Kisumu County

3 Library Use and Community Engagement

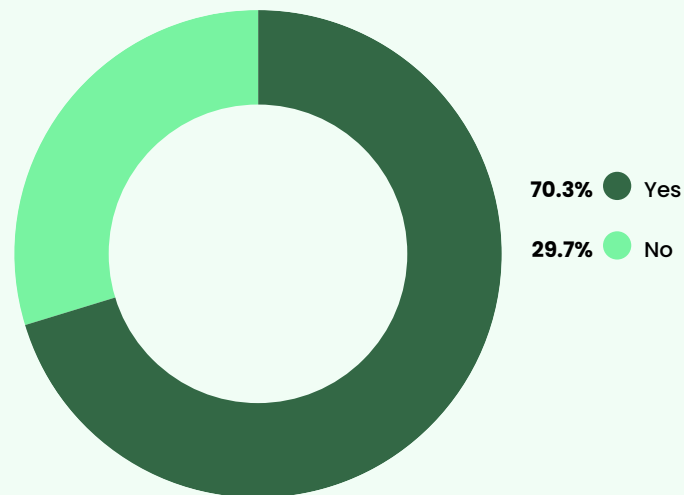
Also in Kirinyaga, Liberty Library Services is redefining what a rural library can be. Focused on children, it offers a garden, kitchen, and even a horse! This library brings classroom learning to life through real-world experiences. This model doubles as a sustainable enterprise, providing income for custodians and a replicable template for libraries everywhere.

Libraries across Kenya are emerging as social and cultural hubs. In Kisumu, Angels Care Library blends academic support with recreational spaces, while Turkana's Bishop Mahon Library combines worship, sports, and learning under one roof. In Nandi and Siaya, libraries also function as cultural archives that house artefacts, reflecting domestic architecture, and preserving heritage. Lamu Fort Library, with documents dating back to the 15th century, leads the way in digitizing Kenya's fragile historical records.

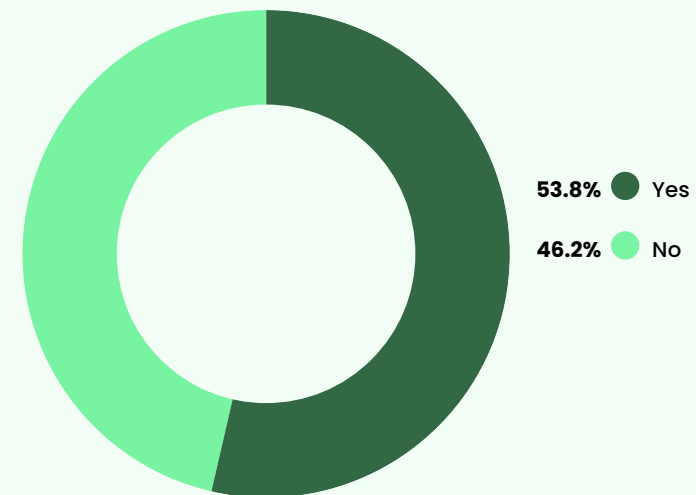


How inclusive and accessible did you find them to be?

Does this library serve people with disabilities?



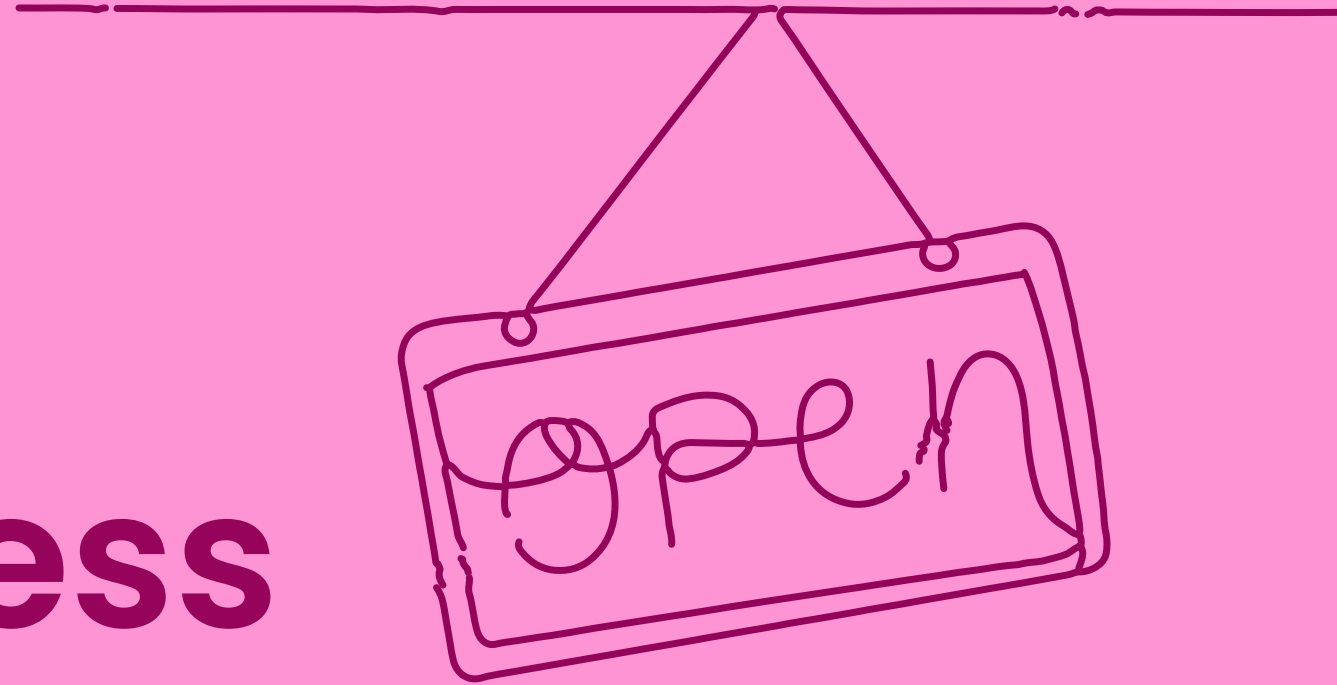
Does this library have a policy in place for people with disabilities?



Over 70% of the libraries we visited reported that their library patronage included persons with disabilities, signalling that this particular group deemed the libraries as spaces they felt safe and welcomed, primarily by the people who run the spaces.

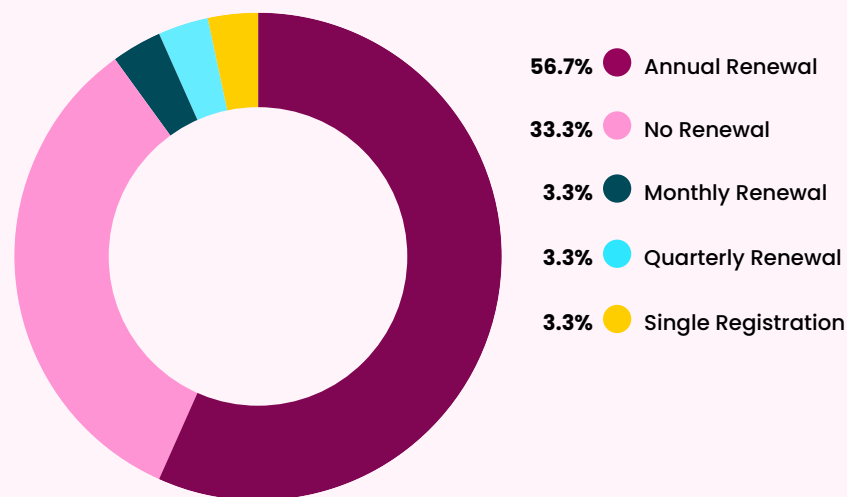
However, only a handful of libraries had a clear policy in place to address the specific needs of persons with disabilities. While several libraries reported having such a policy, what they actually had were isolated features, activities, or materials intended for this demographic with no structured approach to acquisition, management,

or consistent service delivery. In many cases, libraries had invested in improving physical access to their buildings, but little attention was given to what users would experience once inside. This highlighted a significant gap between infrastructure and inclusive service provision.



4 Access and Membership Models

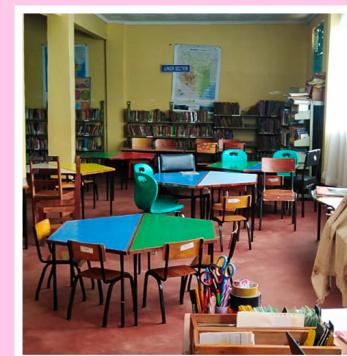
How do people access library services; do they need to register or pay?



Library users remain central to how these spaces operate and evolve. In county libraries, 64.6% of the sampled facilities have adopted some form of membership system, most of which is renewed annually through a subscription model. Membership can be acquired and maintained in several ways: some libraries charge a daily usage fee averaging KES 20, while others offer annual subscriptions ranging from KES 100 for community libraries to KES 3,000 for institutional ones.

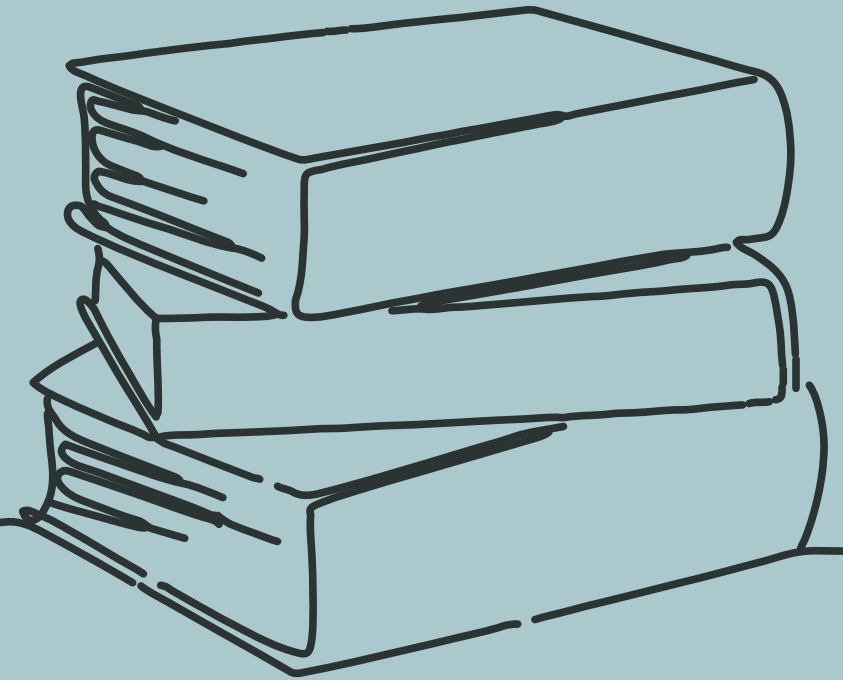
These subscriptions are the means by which libraries are able to run and sustain themselves. For KNLS libraries, these funds are collected and transferred back to KNLS central.

"Angels Care Library is a community library, there is nothing we are charging for it. It's totally free. Anybody can access it. At the same time, I feel it's a friendly library to kids. Because apart from reading storybooks and doing their homework, we also give them access to co-curriculum activities like dancing, building their confidence, working on their public speaking etc..."



"For library usage adults pay 20 Ksh per day. For standard 8 pupils and below you don't pay. So when you pay the 20 Ksh you have access to each and every space, even the cyber when it is working... with printing and photocopying chargeable."

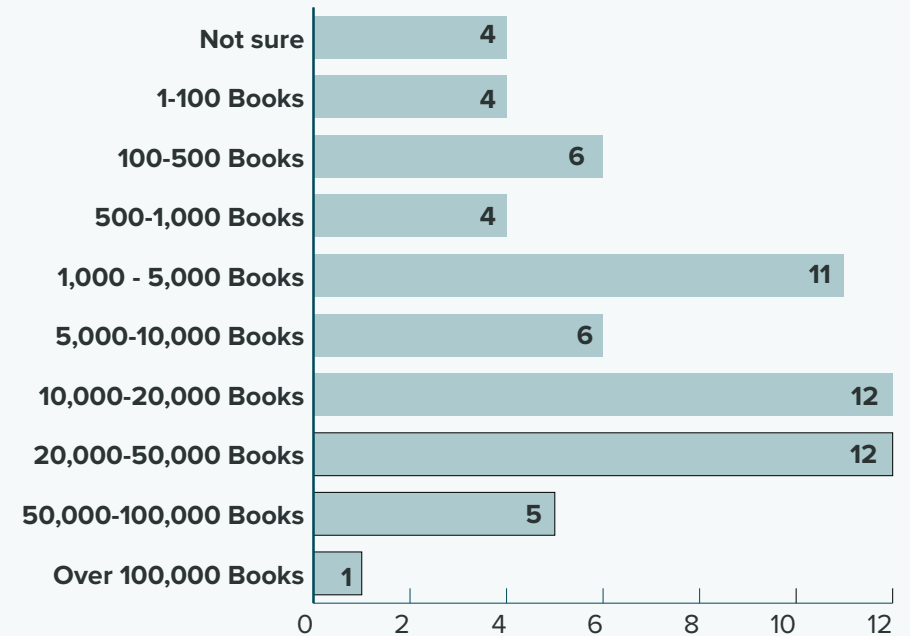
– Augustine Mutiso, Librarian
KNLS Seif bin Salim Library, Mombasa County.



5 Inside the Book Collections



What's inside the libraries?

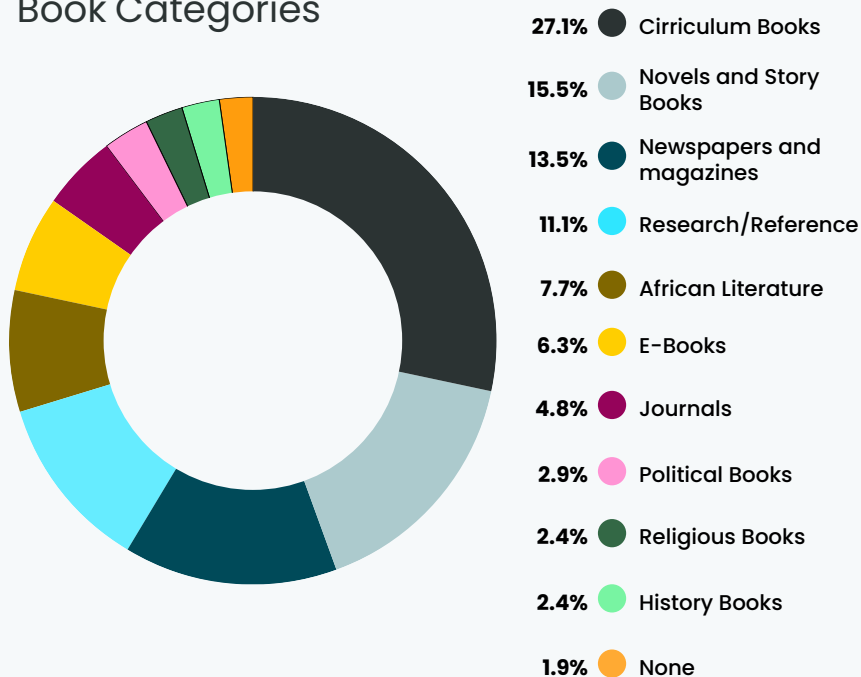


Books are still the largest and most prized of all the possessions of the libraries we visited.

The smallest collection was 300 books, and the largest approximately 112,000. With the average collection being approximated 25,000.

What do the book collections actually look like?

Book Categories

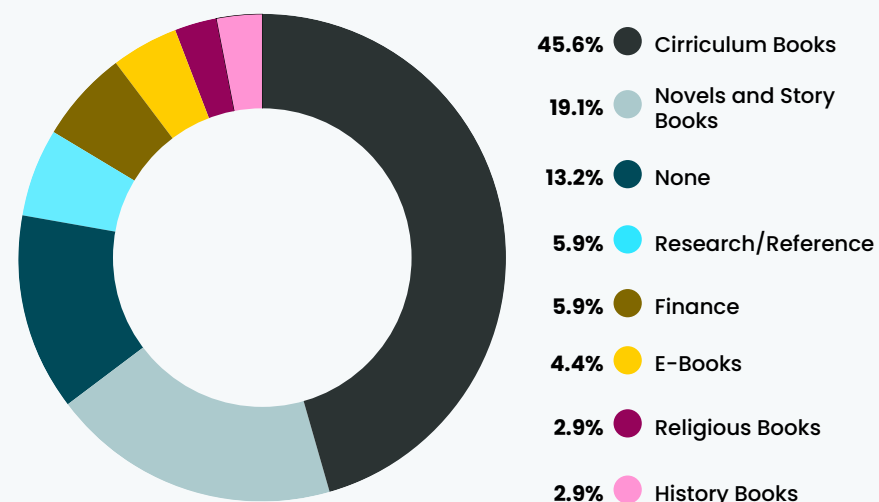


Interviews revealed that many libraries do stock books by African authors, which librarians actively acquire and prioritize in their shelving. This intentional placement is meant to encourage African readership among patrons. These titles are storybooks and educational materials, reflecting both demand and available supply.



How big are the book collections, on average?

Book Count





"Tuko na African books written by African authors in our different shelves ambao tumeitenga kivyake ambayo tunapanga tuipanue iwe kama kisub-library chake. Yeah, African books written by African authors. Hatujali kama ni kitabu gani kimeandikwa, bora kimeandikwa na Mwafrika na ni cha Kiafrika." James Mwadiga, Librarian, Hatua Community Library, Mombasa County.

(English translation)

"We have African books by African authors in our different shelves that we have designated and intend to categorise to its own sub-library. We take in all African books regardless of author or type, with the main priority being that they are by an African author."

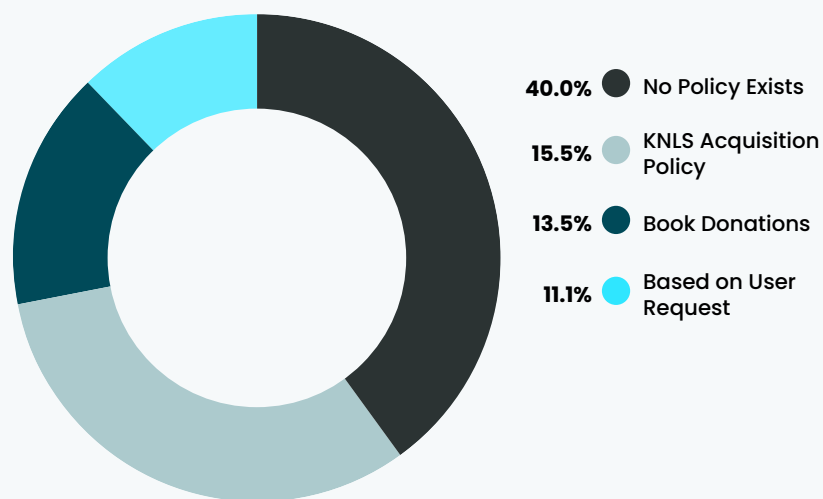
5 Inside the Book Collections



"How do we acquire our books? Some people offer us books, you can get, as a parent, the child has been using our library, after school, he or she brings the books back for others to use, because he or she benefited from our library and then others are being bought by the office."

– Victoria Kemunto, Librarian
Bishop Dr. Andrew Kimaru Memorial Community Library,
Kiambu County.

How are books acquired and managed?

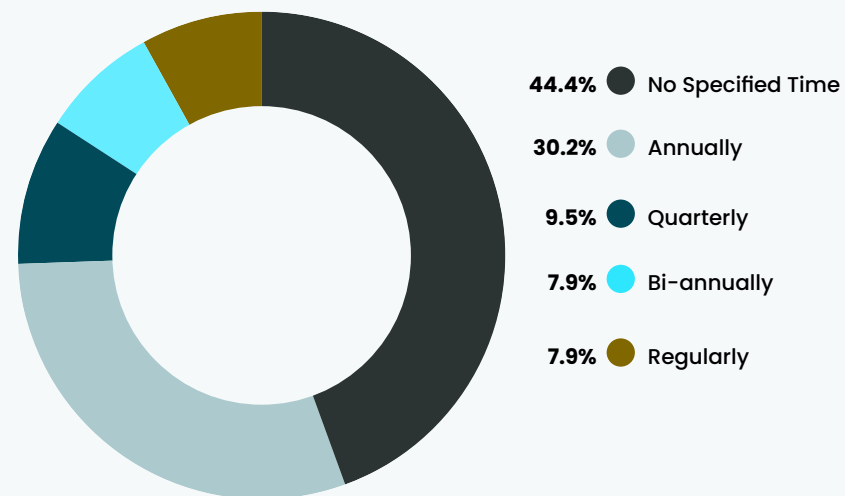


Libraries acquire their collections in various ways. Most KNLS Library collections are acquired via an exchequer system that allocates books across KNLS libraries twice or thrice a financial year.

Outside of these libraries are also highly dependent on book donations either at a corporate level through institutional donations like Book Aid International. Everyone we spoke to agreed that donations were the most effective way to acquire relevant collections.

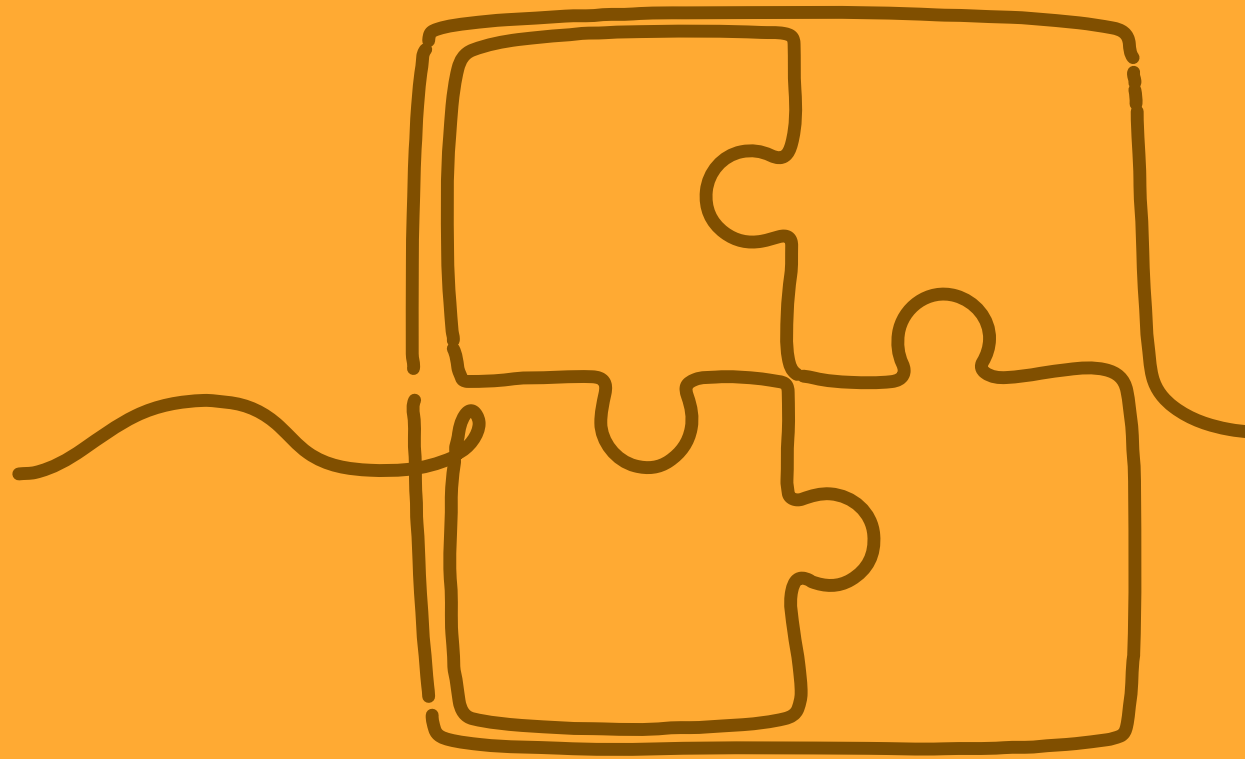


Are the collections updated regularly?



Books updates can be twice a year or three times a year, depending on how frequently we receive new books from headquarters or donations. So we don't have a time limit."

– Antony Omondi, Librarian
KNLS Nyilima Library, Siaya County.



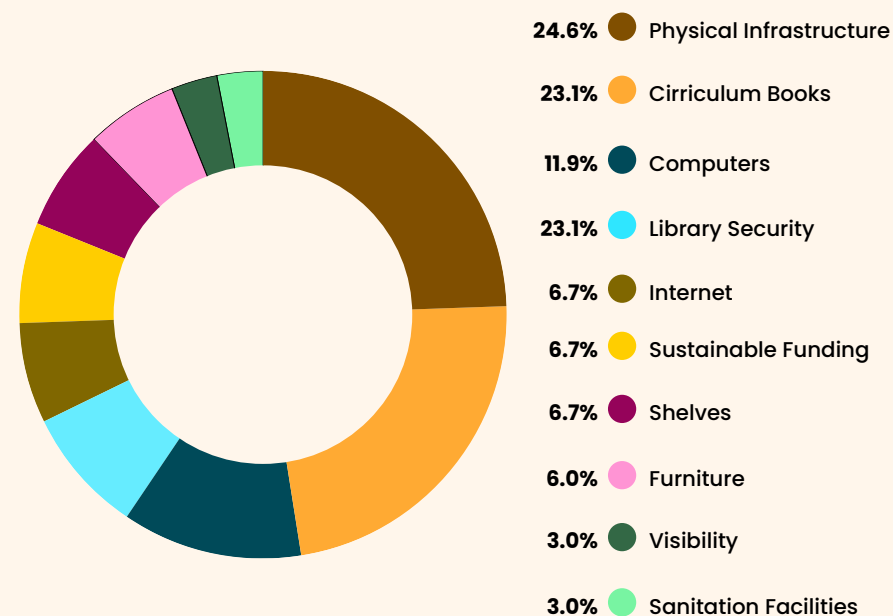
6 Challenges and Opportunities



More Capacity

The quality of responses revealed a high level of professional expertise among library staff across the counties. Many librarians demonstrated a deep understanding of library operations and the specific needs of their institutions and users. This expertise is strengthened by a rotational system, particularly within KNLS libraries, where librarians

What did you find to be the most urgent needs or challenges facing these libraries?



ians serve in different parts of the country. Through these transfers, staff gain diverse experience, broaden their skill sets, and deepen their knowledge of the profession, ultimately enriching the library ecosystem nationwide. Across the board, librarians are playing multiple roles due to limited resources for full time, or incentivised part time staff. This leaves the librarians little time to focus on their core functions.



Better Accessibility

At the fieldwork stage we were keen to assess the overall accessibility to the library for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).

Libraries have distinct policies to accommodate PWDs with the vast majority of libraries not having any form of policy to accommodate PWDs. Ramps were common and some libraries like Siaya Community Library, Siaya County have wheelchairs on standby to accommodate PWD users.

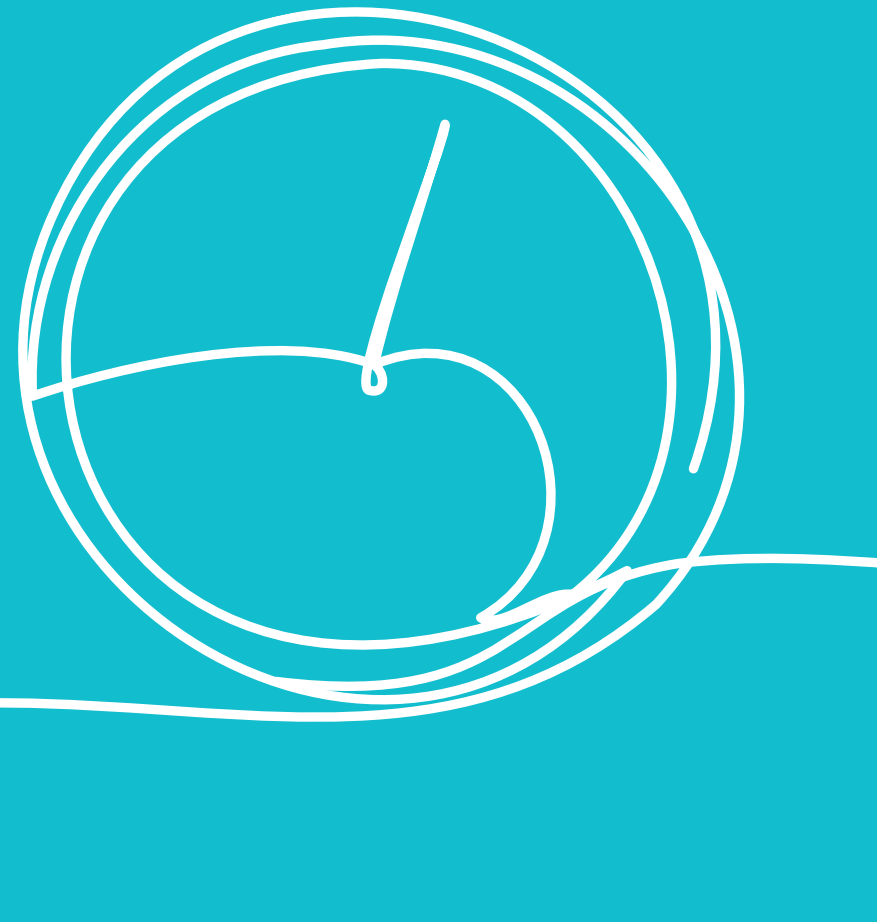
Better Networking

There exists enormous potential to share library resources within the ecosystem network. For some libraries we found out that they had capacity to donate the books that they had excess of. In contrast, others had empty and outdated shelves and were in need of book donations.

Building Repairs and Janitorial Services

Visits to the sampled libraries across Kenya revealed the wanting state of the physical structure of the libraries. The physical structure and support infrastructure for these library functions like computers, shelves, furniture and security stand out as library strong library needs. Sadly, like the McMillan Memorial Library, libraries across the country are in a state of disrepair with features like leaking roofs, displaced and unusable furniture. At KNLS Ukunda in Kwale County for example, there is a strong need to have the library renovated owing to the rundown state of the building that needs urgent repairs.

The Future of Kenya's Libraries



Effects of Devolution

Since the 2010 Constitution of Kenya introduced a devolved system of government, the management of libraries has existed in a grey area. While the Constitution lists functions to be devolved, it does not explicitly mention libraries, leaving the Kenya National Library Service (KNLS), a national body, to maintain operational control. The shift only began in earnest much later. In 2013, county governments assumed power, but most libraries remained under KNLS due to a lack of policy and infrastructure at the county level. It wasn't until 2021 – 2023 that the national government began formally transferring library functions to county governments marking the true start of library devolution in Kenya.

As of now, some counties (including Nairobi, Kisumu, and Mombasa) are beginning to manage or co-manage public libraries, especially those outside the KNLS network. While devolution offers opportunities for more localized and responsive services, it has also created legal and logistical ambiguities around funding, staffing, and infrastructure. Many counties still lack formal policies or budgets for library services.



Library Profiles & Research Team

Meet some of the members of the research team. We asked each of them to introduce themselves by stating which library stood out the most to them and why. Here's what they had to say.



List of Libraries Visited

Name of Library	Category	County
USAID Kenya	Public	Nairobi
Kenya Medical Research Institute	Private	Nairobi
KNLS Kibera Community Library	Public	Nairobi
Ebenezer Children's Home Library	Private	Nairobi
Denise C Hogan Library	Public	Nairobi
MYSA Mathare North Library	Public	Nairobi
National Braille Library	Public	Nairobi
Slin Mradi Community Library	Public	Nairobi
KNLS Buruburu Community Library	Public	Nairobi
Bob Collymore Safaricom Community Library	Private	Nairobi
Kenya Law Reform Commission Library & Archives	Public	Nairobi
Children's Fortress Africa Library Container	Public	Nairobi
Nairobi Gallery	Public	Nairobi
Nairobi Railways Museum	Public	Nairobi
Cultural Council of Islamic Republic of Iran Library	Public	Nairobi
Kenya Forest Service Library	Public	Nairobi
National Climate Change Resource Centre Library	Private	Nairobi
Kenya National Library Service	Public	Nairobi
Kenya National Archives	Public	Nairobi
East African Herbarium Library	Public	Nairobi
IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre	Private	Nairobi
Centre for Democratic Resolution and Development	Private	Nairobi
Waithaka Community Library	Public	Nairobi
Institute of Primate Research	Private	Nairobi

Name of Library	Category	County
Dagoretti Empowerment Center Library	Public	Nairobi
Communications Authority of Kenya	Public	Nairobi
National Museums of Kenya Library and Archive	Public	Nairobi
African Economic Research Consortium Library	Private	Nairobi
Kabiro Community Library	Public	Nairobi
Ngong Road Children's Foundation Library	Private	Nairobi
British Institute in East Africa Library	Public	Nairobi
CEMASTE Library	Private	Nairobi
SHOFCO Community Centre Library	Public	Nairobi
KNLS Saif-Bin Salim Library	Public	Mombasa
Abdul Rayt Centre	Private	Mombasa
Fort Jesus Museum Library	Public	Mombasa
KICODEP Resource Centre	Private	Mombasa
Hatua Community Library	Private	Mombasa
KNLS Ukunda	Public	Kwale
Kinango Community Library	Public	Kwale
MTVAF Library	Private	Kilifi
KNLS Malindi	Public	Kilifi
Dabaso Community Library	Private	Kilifi
KNLS Kilifi	Public	Kilifi
Pwani University Library	School	Kilifi
KNLS Dzitsoni	Public	Kilifi
Lamu Fort Library	Public	Lamu
American Corner Library	Private	Lamu
Lamu Youth Alliance Library	Private	Lamu
Riyadha Mosque Library	Private	Lamu

Name of Library	Category	County
KMTC Mokowe Library	School	Lamu
Mary Patch Turnbull Memorial Library	Private	Taita Taveta
Kenya National Library Service Wundanyi	Public	Taita Taveta
Taita Research Station University of Helsinki	Private	Taita Taveta
The Tubules Foundation Library	Private	Taita Taveta
Birikani Library	Private	Taita Taveta
Kenya National Library Service Voi Branch	Public	Taita Taveta
Toto Library	Private	Taita Taveta
The Amy Nicholls Memorial Library	Private	Taita Taveta
Tana River Life Foundation Mobile Library	Private	Tana River
KNLS Giriftu community library	Public	Wajir
Kenya National Library Service –Wajir Branch	Public	Wajir
KNLS Habaswein Community Library	Public	Wajir
Kenya National Library Services–Bute	Public	Wajir
KNLS Tarbaj community library	Public	Wajir
KMTC Garissa	School	Garissa
Kenya National Library Service Garissa Branch	Public	Garissa
KNLS Mandera	Public	Mandera
Kaaga community library	Private	Meru
KEMU University Library	School	Meru
Pamoja Community Library & Center	Public	Meru
Rueben Marambii Library	School	Meru
Kenya Medical Training Center	School	Meru
Kenya National Library Services –Gatimbi	Public	Meru
Kenya National Library Services – Mikumbune	Public	Meru
Kenya National Library Services – Timau	Public	Meru
KNLS Meru Town	Public	Meru
Mount Kenya University Meru Campus Library	School	Meru

Name of Library	Category	County
Meru National Polytechnic Library	School	Meru
Meru Teachers College Library	School	Meru
Hodi Library Marsabit	Private	Marsabit
Don Bosco Technical Institute–Marsabit	School	Marsabit
KNLS Isiolo Town Library	Public	Isiolo
KMTC Isiolo Library	School	Isiolo
Tharaka University Main Campus Library.	School	Tharaka Nithi
Chuka University Main Campus Library	School	Tharaka Nithi
Chuka University Embu Campus Library	School	Embu
Embu College Library	School	Embu
Manyatta Youth Empowerment Centre Embu	Public	Embu
KMTC Embu Campus Library	School	Embu
University of Embu Main Campus Library	School	Embu
KNLS Embu	Public	Embu
COL(Rtd) Geoffrey King'ara Empowerment Centre Kiritiri	Public	Embu
Mash Foundation Library	Private	Machakos
CIDC Library	Public	Machakos
Machakos Youth Centre Library	Public	Machakos
Kenya National Library Services–Kithsayu	Public	Makueni
Kenya National Library Services–Kinyambu	Public	Makueni
Kenya National Library Services–Mutyambua	Public	Makueni
Kasanga Mulwa Library	School	Makueni
KNLS Mwingi Community Library	Public	Kitui
Limuru Public Library	Public	Kiambu
Cardinal Otunga Library	Private	Kiambu
Bishop Dr Andrew Kimaru Memorial Community Library	Private	Kiambu
St. Paul's University Library	School	Kiambu
KNLS Thika	Public	Kiambu

Name of Library	Category	County
Kenya National Library Services–OI Kalou	Public	Nyandarua
KNLS Munyu	Public	Nyeri
Karatina Community Library.	Public	Nyeri
The Nyeri National Polytechnic Library.	School	Nyeri
Dedan Kimathi University of Technology Library.	School	Nyeri
Mt. Kenya University. Nyeri Branch.	School	Nyeri
Kenya National Library Services. Nyeri Branch.	Public	Nyeri
Inspire Library.	Public	Nyeri
Mukurwe–ini Technical Training Institute Library.	School	Nyeri
KNLS Chinga Community Library	Public	Nyeri
Gitugi Library	Public	Nyeri
Mukurwe–ini Community Library.	Public	Nyeri
Kentaro Ogawa Community library– Thaita	Public	Kirinyaga
Litmed Institute Library	Private	Kirinyaga
Kenia University college library	School	Kirinyaga
Kerugoya School for the Deaf.	School	Kirinyaga
Liberty library Services	Private	Kirinyaga
Kirinyaga University Library	School	Kirinyaga
Chelmsford Library	School	Kirinyaga
KNLS Murang'a County	Public	Muranga
Kenya Medical Training Campus Muranga	School	Muranga
Murang'a University of Technology Library	School	Muranga
KNLS John Michuki Memorial Library Kangema	Public	Muranga
Gacharage–ini Community Library	Public	Muranga
Kinyona IT resource Center –Library	School	Muranga
KNLS Eldama Ravine Community Library	Public	Baringo
Eldama Ravine Bible College Library	Private	Baringo
Eldama Ravine Technical and Vocational College Library	School	Baringo

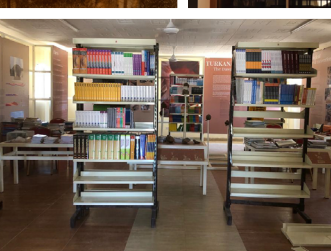
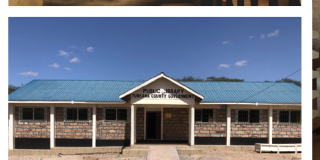
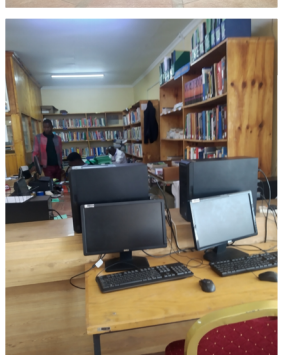
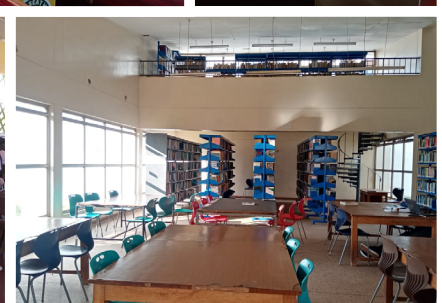
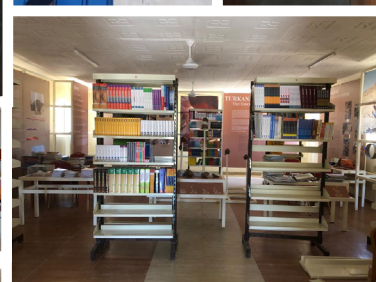
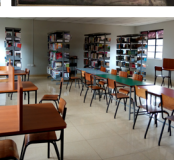
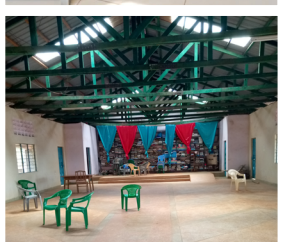
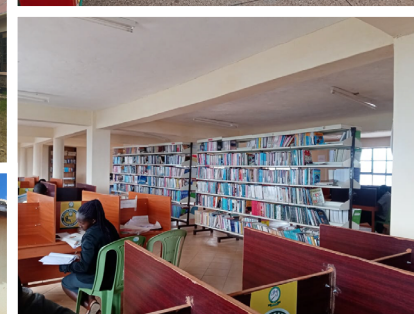
Name of Library	Category	County
Baringo Lembus Community Library	Public	Baringo
Tinet Community Library	Public	Baringo
Meisori Community Library–KNLS	Public	Baringo
Kapchepkor Technical College Library	School	Baringo
Salawa Community Library and Resource Centre	Public	Baringo
Tenges Community Library	Public	Baringo
Bawabu Community Library–Ebenezer	Public	Baringo
Polkadot Library	Public	Baringo
KMTC Kabarnet Library	School	Baringo
KSG Philemon Chelagat Library	Public	Baringo
Keturwo Community Library	Public	Baringo
Lelian College Library	School	Baringo
KNLS Silibwet library	Public	Bomet
Bomet University library	School	Bomet
KMTC Bomet Campus Library	School	Bomet
Mugango Community Library	Public	Bomet
Sotik Community Library/University of Kabiana Sotik Campus	School	Bomet
Kapenguria Public Library	Public	West Pokot
West Pokot TTC Library	School	West Pokot
KMTC Kapenguria Campus	School	Elgeyo Marakwet
KMTC Kapsowar	School	Elgeyo Marakwet
KNLS Lagam Community – Chesongoch	Public	Elgeyo Marakwet
Simba For Kids Library	Private	Elgeyo Marakwet
KMTC Iten Campus	School	Elgeyo Marakwet
Kipepeo Safe Space	Private	Kajiado
Judith Thomas Library (Adventist university of Africa)	School	Kajiado
Embulbul Educational and Counselling Centre	School	Kajiado
The East African University Library	School	Kajiado

Name of Library	Category	County
Dr AbdulRahman Al-Sumait Library, UMMA University	School	Kajiado
Management University of Africa	School	Kajiado
Masai Technical Training Institute Library	School	Kajiado
Kenya Medical Training Center (KMTC) Loitoktok Campus Library	School	Kajiado
Loitoktok Adult Education Resource Center	Public	Kajiado
The County Government of Kajiado Library	Public	Kajiado
Njoro Community Education Library	Public	Nakuru
RVST Library	Public	Nakuru
KNLS Gilgil	Public	Nakuru
Disability Resource and Information Center Library	Public	Nakuru
KNLS Naivasha	Public	Nakuru
KMTC Nakuru Campus Library	School	Nakuru
KNLS Nakuru	Public	Nakuru
Bondeni Maternity Library	Public	Nakuru
MKU Library	School	Nakuru
Kabarak University Library	School	Nakuru
Egerton University- Nakuru Town Campus Library	School	Nakuru
Kenyan National Library (Kapsabet)	Public	Nandi
University of Eastern African Barton(UEAB)	School	Nandi
Kaiboi Technical Training Institute Library	School	Nandi
Koitalel Samoei University College Library	School	Nandi
Mosoriot Teachers College Library	School	Nandi
Golden Gate College Library	School	Nandi
Ollessos Technical Training Institute Library	School	Nandi
Moogon Community Library	Public	Nandi
Kabirirsang community library	Public	Nandi
Eliud Kipchoge Library	Public	Nandi
Kenyan National Library Narok	Public	Narok

Name of Library	Category	County
Lelechonik KNLS	Public	Meru
Olorukoti Resource and Knowledge Center	Public	Meru
Turkana University Library	School	Marsabit
KMTC Lodwar Library	School	Marsabit
Anna Nanjala Library	Public	Isiolo
Turkana County Public Library	Public	Isiolo
Holy Family Library	Private	Tharaka Nithi
Bishop Mahon Centre Library	Private	Tharaka Nithi
University of Eldoret Library	School	Embu
KNLS Eldoret	Public	Embu
The Margaret Thatcher Library	School	Embu
CSH Learning Resource Centre	School	Embu
Kisii University Library	School	Embu
Neema Institute Library	School	Embu
Loreto Library	Private	Embu
Equip College Kitale Library	School	Machakos
Kitale National Polytechnic Library	School	Machakos
Kitale Museum Community Library	Public	Machakos
Vi Agroforestry Kitale Library	Private	Trans Nzoia
Kenya Broadcasting Corporation Kitale	Public	Trans Nzoia
JKUAT Kitale Campus Library	School	Trans Nzoia
Aminia Resource Centre	Public	Trans Nzoia
Rhodia Mann Mini Library	Public	Samburu
Maralal Public Library	Public	Samburu
KNLS Kericho	Public	Kericho
Rugutts Library	Public	Kericho
Nyahururu Library	Public	Laikipia
Sipili Community Library	Public	Laikipia
Ng'arua Resource Centre	Public	Laikipia
Kahia Academy Library	School	Laikipia

Name of Library	Category	County
KNLS Rumuruti	Public	Laikipia
KNLS Nanyuki	Public	Laikipia
MPALA Library	Private	Laikipia
Queens Pasha Centre.	Public	Busia
Netfoundation West Kenya library	Public	Busia
Teresa Oyiolo Library	Public	Busia
District Information and Documentation Centre	Public	Busia
Sidonge Community Library	Public	Busia
Kiwimbi Community Centre Library and Museum Magoro	Public	Busia
Growth point centre	Private	Busia
Centro de Recursos Juvenil	Public	Busia
de Kakemer	Private	Busia
Singi CBO Farmer Resource Centre	Private	Busia
The Border Hub-Idealist	Private	Busia
Sigalagala National Polytechnic	School	Kakamega
KMTC Kakamega	School	Kakamega
Kakamega County Polytechnic	School	Kakamega
KNLS-Lusumu Community Library	Public	Kakamega
KNLS Kakamega	Public	Kakamega
Masinde Muliro University Kakamega Library	School	Kakamega
Kongoni Community Library	Public	Kakamega
SAIDE Community Library	Public	Vihiga
North Maragoli Resource Centre	Public	Vihiga
Busali S-CBO Library - Saniaga	Public	Vihiga
Kidundu Community Library	Public	Bungoma
Kabuchai Community Library	Public	Bungoma
Rebnass Community Library	Public	Bungoma
Kibabii University Library	School	Bungoma
African Institute Of Research & Dev. Library	School	Bungoma
Kimilili KNLS	Public	Bungoma

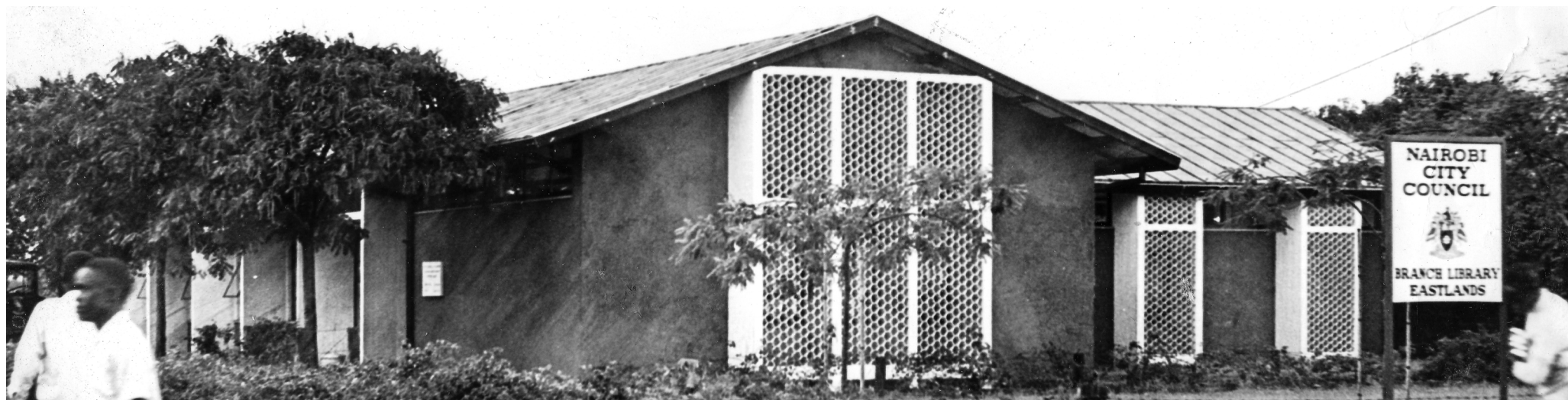
Name of Library	Category	County
Siaya Community Library	Public	Siaya
Usonga Community Library	Public	Siaya
Ndwara Community Library	Public	Siaya
Kenya National Library Services- Ukwala	Public	Siaya
Kenya National Library Services- Ugunja	Public	Siaya
Kenya National Library Services- Nyilima	Public	Siaya
Kenya National Library Service- Kisumu	Public	Kisumu
Wima Community Library	Public	Kisumu
Orange Community Library	Public	Kisumu
Kadibo Community Library	Public	Kisumu
Youth Community Library	Public	Kisumu
Sondu-Miriu community library	Public	Kisumu
Angels Community Library	Private	Kisumu
KNLS Koru Library	Public	Kisumu
SRI Community Library	Public	Kisumu
Sondu Miriu Community Library	Public	Kisumu
Kenya Medical Training College - Nyamira	School	Nyamira
Country Library Services - Nyamira	Public	Nyamira
Ogembo Community library	Public	Kisii
Gisesa Community Library - Keroka	Public	Kisii
Prof Maranga Memorial library	School	Kisii
KNLS Kisii Branch	School	Kisii
Ram Training College Kisii	School	Kisii
Kenya Medical Training College Library - Kisii Campus	School	Kisii
Kenyan Library	Public	Kisii
Franco Pini Public Library	Public	HomaBay
Ndhiwa Community Library	Public	HomaBay
Awendo Kenya National Service Library	Public	Migori
Mohochi Community Library	Public	Migori
Maclyne Community Library	Public	Migori



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Kingoriah, G. K. (1983). The causes of Nairobi's city structure. *Ekistics*, 246–254.

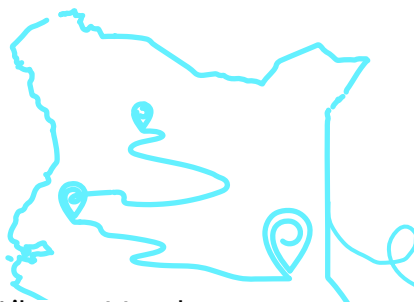
What Next?



This is a final draft of the library ecosystems research report that we are making available to a select group of individuals for peer review over the month of July 2025. Thank you for reading this report – here are some ways to further engage with this research:



Share feedback that will help improve this document. We welcome it via email hello@bookbunk.org your insights matter.



Explore the Library Map here on <https://bookbunk.org/findalibrary/>, get to know your local libraries and contribute information like images that allows us to improve the website listings.



Visit the Eastlands Library and check out the physical library map in all its glory.



Stay tuned for updates on the **final report!**



NAIROBI CITY
COUNTY

