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THE TEACHER

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- ▶ [MAIN INDEX](#)
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- ▶ [BACKCHAT](#)

A library against the odds



A champion librarian puts his own resources into serving the community, writes PATRICK BURNETT

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WITH no money and few resources, librarian and teacher Hlabje Juju has succeeded in setting up a library in the Transkei which will benefit thousands of pupils in poor rural schools. Next month the Elliotdale project involving 22 schools will be visited by Minister of Education Kader Asmal and provincial MEC Stone Sizani for an official launch.

The library is situated at Kwantfhunqe Junior Secondary school in Elliotdale near Umtata and has roughly 500 fiction, non-fiction and subject-related books donated to the provincial Department of Education.



**Committing personal resources:
Hlabje Juju in his library**

For Juju, establishing the library meant explaining to a community steeped in illiteracy what a library is. He also had to overcome logistical problems such as a lack of shelves and transport to get books to the school. Now he sees a fledgling library growing in scope from a regional to a district level that will enhance rural education and boost the government's outcomes-based education (OBE) aims. "The aim is to establish a library in every school, but at the moment this library acts as a resource for

many schools."

He says while the project is presently confined to schools, the way forward is to establish a central district library so smaller regional libraries can access books. Juju has been a teacher in Elliotdale since 1994, but his involvement in the library came after the Swedish government offered assistance in the form of human resources development for librarians.

After a two-week visit to Sweden in May last year, Juju became involved in a project initiated by Swedish-based NGO Bibliotek I Samhalle (BIS) that began in Elliotdale in September 1998. The project is part of a national project being piloted locally in Elliotdale for South Africa.

An initial research phase involved meetings with teachers and parents to discuss the establishment of the library -- meetings which Juju says revealed how important libraries are to OBE. "Rural areas are very disadvantaged, and we can see that if libraries are established OBE will be successful."

Juju says because the OBE system aims to encourage the creativity and initiative of learners, the new system "will never even move without a library". But establishing the library posed considerable challenges for Juju, who said local headmen, community members and teachers did not know what the term meant. "Because of illiteracy it is difficult to explain and I had to show them what I was talking about."

Juju says after the research process he met with teachers and parents, using pictures to explain what a library can do for the community. This led to the forming of a library committee and further workshops with teachers.

But even once the idea had been accepted, making the library a reality was still hampered by a lack of shelves for the books and transport for donated books. Juju found a college of education in Umtata willing to donate shelves but there was no transport to fetch them. The college principal volunteered the use of his private car.

There was also no transport to fetch donated books held by the provincial education department in Umtata to the school, and Juju used his own money to buy petrol so the books could be fetched. Juju says he also organised educational wildlife and mathematics video cassettes for the library which he shows to pupils on his own

television set.

Ultimately, he hopes to include computers as part of the library to train teachers and pupils in computer literacy. He says the library is having an impact on learners -- especially those in grade one and two, who are already following the OBE curriculum.

Department of Education regional co-ordinator Melrose Makongwana praised Juju for doing "wonderful work" in "very tough" conditions. She said the library complemented the OBE system and would help pupils to cope with the new curriculum.

In a province where the education department's budget is enough to cover only the bare necessities, Juju says much can be achieved simply through dedication. Referring to the process of showing the community how it is possible to have a library, Jaju says: "Everybody can see that for nothing you can do something."

--- *Eastern Cape News Service, October 28, 1999.*

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