

Focus IBBY

by CAROLINA BALLESTER

IBBY Yamada Fund 2026

The IBBY Yamada Fund is one of IBBY's pillar programs. Along its twenty-year history, the fund has benefited over 150 projects in more than forty-five countries. Thanks to the continued support and generosity of the Yamada Bee Farm, we are happy to announce that the fund has been renewed for a five-year period.

Described below are seven quality projects selected for the 2026 campaign. More information about the projects that were developed in 2025 is on the IBBY website.



IBBY Armenia

Safe Space around Books

A bibliotherapy-based project creating emotionally safe and inclusive spaces for children aged six to twelve in vulnerable borderland communities. Through capacity-building for librarians and interactive reading workshops led by experts, the initiative uses literature as a tool for emotional expression and healing to foster social inclusion in post-conflict recovery.

IBBY Dominican Republic

Weaving Voices: Planting Stories, Harvesting Futures

A six-month literacy and cultural memory

project in Santo Domingo's vulnerable barrios, utilizing stationary reading kiosks and community circles to bridge reading gaps. By combining intergenerational storytelling with digital tools like podcasts and QR murals, the initiative empowers youth leadership and preserves oral histories while promoting eco-friendly practices.

IBBY Latin America and the Caribbean

Young Voices: Reading Experiences among Ibero-American Teenagers

A cultural initiative strengthening the reading experiences of teenagers across Latin America and Spain through webinars, interactive workshops, and audiovisual testimonials. Focused on freedom of choice and co-creation, the project will produce a digital methodological guide to promote equitable and replicable reading engagement strategies for youth.

IBBY Lebanon

Reading for Resilience: Stories of Children in Conflict

A documentation and bibliotherapy project curating a collection of children's literature that reflects the experiences of young people living through war and conflict. By capturing emotional and psychological journeys, the initiative aims to provide trauma-informed resources that foster resilience and help young readers recognize that they are not alone in their struggles.

IBBY Mongolia

Knowledge Sessions for Mongolia's Emerging Children's Book Creators

A professional development initiative supporting young Mongolian book creators by enhancing their understanding of the market and readership. Through interactive knowledge sessions facilitating dialogue between emerging artists, children, parents, and publishing stakeholders, the project fosters a sustainable ecosystem for local children's literature.

IBBY Nepal

Stories and Fundamental Community Studies for Cognitive Advancement

A cultural preservation project compiling folktales and community heritage studies into bilingual books for Indigenous Sunuwar and Magar children aged nine to thirteen. The initiative distributes these resources to rural schools; by documenting local history, rituals, and social practices in both native languages and Nepali, it seeks to strengthen cultural identity and cognitive development.

IBBY Uganda

The Silent Voice Project

An inclusive literacy initiative developing and donating visual picture story books designed specifically for children with hearing impairment aged four to ten. The project includes teacher training workshops and the establishment of reading tents in participating schools to promote communication, visual expression, and physical interaction through accessible literature.

Echoes from the Sections

When a Library Fits in a Backpack: Reading and the New IBBY Section in Yemen

by Salwa Al-Ahdal; translated by Hamza Ebrahim

In Yemen, a “library” doesn’t always have shelves... A volunteer unzips a backpack, lays a few books on a table, and watches children edge closer, the way you move toward warmth. Someone turns the first pages carefully, as if the paper might bruise. A younger child “reads” the pictures before any words begin.

The first minutes are rarely shipshape. There is shyness, teasing, the small courage it takes to try. Then a story starts—one voice, then another. A new word is repeated, first quietly, then with pride. A child points to an illustration and insists the character should have been depicted differently. For a moment, the day’s noise recedes, and the page becomes a place where childhood can feel steady again.

This is why reading matters in Yemen today. It is the gateway skill that makes school meaningful and, when offered with care, one of the

gentlest ways to rebuild confidence and connection after disruption.

Yemen’s education crisis is often analyzed through the issue of access, and the figures are stark. UNICEF reports that 3.7 million children aged five to seventeen are out of school, and that 2,783 schools have been destroyed or damaged. Yet the deeper emergency is learning itself. UNICEF also reports that 94.7 percent of ten-year-olds in Yemen cannot read and understand a simple text. The World Bank categorizes the situation as “learning poverty,” which describes the inability to read and understand a simple text by age ten. It is a measure designed to highlight a painful reality: children can be enrolled in schools and still be locked out of the learning curve.

The consequences are immediate. Reading difficulty leads to a risk of dropping out of school. Dropout narrows choices and increases exposure to harm. When children cannot read, they lose access not only to textbooks but to information, imagination, and self-expression—tools that matter even more when families are under stress.

Stories are sometimes treated as something to postpone until “things improve.” The work of IBBY Yemen wants to teach the opposite. A strong children’s book offers language for feelings, models for problem-solving, and a small rehearsal space for empathy and courage. Read aloud in a circle, it becomes social again: children listen together, disagree together, laugh together, and practice being seen. But reading cannot become a habit without the presence of books. Yemen’s children’s book ecosystem is fragile: specialized children’s publishing is limited, access to libraries is scarce, and culturally relevant materials are difficult to obtain. The result is a double gap—many children struggle to learn to read, and they also struggle to find books that invite them to keep reading.

This is precisely where IBBY’s mission becomes urgent. On January 1, 2026, Yemen officially joined IBBY for the first time. The new section is hosted by Nabd Al-Tufula Initiative, a volunteer initiative founded in 2023, working at the intersection of child education, psychosocial

support, reading promotion, and the creative arts. Becoming an IBBY Section is more than a milestone; it is a bridge that leads to mentorship and exchange. It establishes a national doorway through which Yemen can nominate its creators, books, and projects to IBBY's international programs.

From Urgency to Routine: What We Are Building in 2026

IBBY Yemen's first-year approach is shaped by Yemen's reality. Our unstable context requires simple designs that can travel easily: low-cost, community-based, and partnership-ready. In 2026, we want to focus on three practical commitments:

- Consistent reading access: twenty-four to thirty-six reading sessions across regions—circles in schools and community spaces where children meet stories often enough for fluency and confidence to grow.
- Psychosocial support through books and art: twelve to eighteen safe, book- and arts-based sessions integrating stories with drawing and creative writing, offering indirect language for what is hard to name directly.
- Strengthening the children's literature ecosystem: two capacity-building workshops for Yemeni writers and illustrators, emphasizing quality and cultural relevance—so children increasingly read books that “sound like home”—while meeting artistic standards.

Across all of this, safeguarding is not a footnote; it is a foundation. In a context shaped by displacement and vulnerability, “do no harm” must guide every photo, every quote, every session design. Dignity, neutrality, and confidentiality are practical protections.

Yemen's education story is often told in large numbers, and the numbers matter. But change is also made in small units: a repaired classroom, a trained teacher, a book that finally reaches a child.

IBBY Yemen's contribution is to ensure that



© UNICEF/UNI873886. A class in the new school building, September 2025.

within and beyond those spaces, books are present, not as decorations, but as tools for learning, healing, and imagination. For a new section, the most valuable partnerships are often steady and practical: mentorship, training, exchange, introductions to children's literature networks, support in developing culturally appropriate materials, and opportunities to participate in IBBY programs and awards. This kind of collaboration strengthens an ecosystem.

In Yemen, childhood is lived amid interruptions. But a child who reads aloud without shame experiences a different kind of continuity: “I can begin. I can try. I can understand.” That is why our work starts where hope is most concrete—on the page, in the circle, inside the backpack library that will return again next week. One story does not end a crisis. But stories, offered consistently, can return a child to learning. And returning a child to learning is one of the most future-shaping acts a community can do.

Works Cited

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Salwa Al-Ahdal manages the executive operations of IBBY Yemen, overseeing functional units dedicated to enhancing program delivery and literacy initiatives for children in crisis. She is committed to fostering a collaborative environment to advance the organization's mission in Yemen.

The Core Value of Today: Living in Harmony with Our Planet—2025 IBBY Asia-Pacific Regional Conference

submitted by the Korean Board on Books for Young People

On August 30, 2025, at the tail end of a sweltering summer, the 2025 IBBY Asia-Pacific Regional Conference opened in Suwon, Korea. The event brought together approximately 400 participants from twenty-eight countries—including writers of children's and young adult literature, publishers, activists, researchers, and readers—and served as a forum for lively discussion and mutual understanding centered on the theme of "Living in Harmony with Our Planet."

IBBY President Basarat Kazim opened the conference by posing an urgent question for our times: Amid global efforts to halt the devastation against nature and the environment, what must we do? To her, the answer is in children, as she expressed her hope that the gathering would become a meaningful starting point—one that not only encourages us to reconsider our current perceptions, actions, and ways of life in relation to the theme, but also inspires innovative plans for future action.



The conference began in earnest with a moving performance by Suzy Lee, winner of the 2022 Hans Christian Andersen Award (HCAA), inspired by the traditional culture of Korea. Through her performance, she shared a mysterious creative journey where time and space converged: the porous traces left by bookworms in Samilpo and an old painting by the eighteenth-century Joseon-era painter

Shim Sa-jeong unfolded into the space of Lee's picturebook *Snowfall at Samilpo*, giving rise to a mystical story of creative process. Lee's story demonstrates how the tiny holes left by insects—creatures of nature—could, through the artist's imagination, transport us to a world of narrative. When her picturebook merged with traditional Korean melodies performed on piano, piri (a reed wind instrument), haegeum (a two-string instrument), and jeongga (traditional vocal music), the story opened up an entirely different dimension that resonated deeply with the audience.



World-renowned artists including Lee, Jeannie Baker from Australia, Hiroshi Abe from Japan, 2024 HCAA winner Sydney Smith from Canada, and 2020 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award recipient Baek Hee-na also shared reflections on how their awe of nature shapes their creative work, granting the audience members an opportunity to step into their innermost creative worlds. Over the two-day event, the masters met participants through lectures,



conversations, and workshops.

More than ninety speakers presented their projects and research efforts through oral presentations and poster sessions, all addressing issues centered on children, literature, and nature. Speakers from Iran were unable to attend in person due to the circumstances in their home country, but they demonstrated their passion by delivering their presentations online via Zoom. Over the two days, experts in children's and young adult literature across the



Asia-Pacific region shared their diverse perspectives, exchanged updates on the work unfolding in their respective countries, and encouraged one another's efforts in the purest spirit of IBBY.

Carolina Ballester was born in Paris and studied in Spain and France, obtaining an MA in political science from the Madrid Complutense University and degrees in Chinese and Arabic from the French National Institute of Oriental Studies (INALCO). She worked as a translator and as cultural attaché at the Consulate of Spain in Shanghai. In 2013, she joined the Shanghai International Children's Book Fair team as program manager, and over ten years she promoted and developed international interest in children's illustration as well as served on juries for children's illustration catalogs and contests. She brings to IBBY an interest and wide knowledge in children's literature and illustration, as well as international experience and fluency in several languages, including French, Spanish, English, and Mandarin. She joined IBBY as executive director on September 1, 2022.



Tina can't wait to tell her classmates and teacher about her newborn brother. Of course they all want to know his name. Tina knows that little Mateo's name means "gift of God," but she wonders why Mon and Dad chose that name. Also, what does "Tina" mean? Her name doesn't sound very special at all, she thinks. Later, the teacher asks the children to explore the meaning of their own names at home. Several pages of the book show how they do that.

The next day Tina takes some treats to school for her classmates—sugared zwieback (a Dutch tradition to celebrate a new baby). Now she's even prouder than she was yesterday, because she has discovered that her name means "strong and brave"—perfect for a big sister!

An appropriate story to start a conversation about identity and diversity.

Simone Arts, IBBY Netherlands



Daarom heet ik zo!
(That's Why I'm Called That!)

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