



[Fati and the Honey Tree](#),
an original story by the
[Osu Library Fund](#),
published by [Sub-Saharan
Publishers](#), and illustrated
by Therson Boadu

Good Stories Don't Grow on Trees

How much does it cost to
produce high-quality
reading resources?

Lisbeth Levey, Consultant
levey180@gmail.com



1

Costs depend on many factors

- Determining the real cost of a children's story is complicated and nuanced.
- Traditional publishers might have higher costs, partially because of author and illustrator fees and royalties.
- Many local NGOs encounter high costs because of community capacity-building efforts.
- The cost of international NGO engagement is high, in part because of international salaries and the need for long-distance travel.
- Writing fees can vary. STEM storybooks and graded readers may require specialist authors.
- NGOs, like [StoryWeaver](#), [African Storybook](#), and CODE Ethiopia depend primarily on volunteer authors. But they sometimes pay illustrators.
- Traditional publishers and NGOs sometimes differ on what is considered an overhead cost and how overhead is calculated.

2

Adaptation issues

- Not every story is adaptable. A story's topic may be relevant in one country, but not another.
- Alemu Abebe of CODE Ethiopia explains:
Stories are reflections of each community's realities and every community has its own particular characteristics. It cannot be assumed that all stories are suitable someplace else or can be adapted to be so. Context matters as do cultural differences!

3

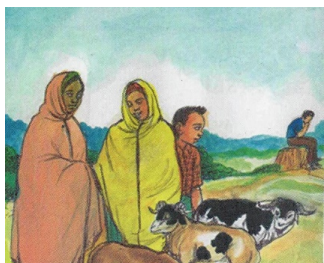
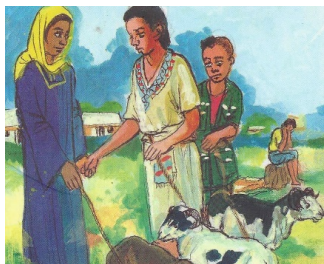


Illustration issues

- Stories must be relevant to the children who read them, which may require different illustrations for each community, even if the basic story is the same.
- Both stories on the left are called *New Year* and *Children*. The content is common in different parts of Ethiopia. The top one is in Amharic; the one below in Somali. Note the different clothes and animals. CODE Ethiopia paid for two sets of illustrations; editing; translation; design and layout; and printing for both books.

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Translation issues

- Good translation is NOT word-for-word translation. Different languages, cultures, countries, and regions have varying expressions to convey meaning.
- According to Jenny Katz of the [Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy](#) in South Africa, the vast majority of early readers in African languages are directly translated from an English source document. This leads to the creation of complex texts that are not commensurate with the learner's level of reading. She gave an example of direct translation from English to Isizulu at a [2018 NBA early literacy workshop](#):

English	Soccer
Isizulu	ibhola likanobhutshuzwayo
One word	6 Letters 2 syllables
Two words	24 letters 10 syllables

- Good translations can be expensive. Translators must be fluent in both languages.

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Issues pertaining to online platforms

- Platforms such as [African Storybook](#), [StoryWeaver](#), the [Bloom Library](#), and the [Global Digital Library](#), use open licensing to increase the availability of large numbers of children's stories, enhance adaptation possibilities, and lower costs. Even so:
 - ✓ Platforms are expensive to set up and maintain.
 - ✓ The number of stories and languages may be less important than their pertinence and appeal to the young reader.
 - ✓ Story quality can be uneven.
 - ✓ Platforms have different criteria to determine which level is appropriate.
 - ✓ Infrastructure and technical issues can make it difficult to upload and access stories.
 - ✓ Some platforms are not clear on which stories they recommend or approve. These rules are important because they determine a story's visibility on the platform.

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The merits of open licensing

- Open licensing permits users to share and, under some licences, translate or otherwise adapt the work of others without requesting written permission. They do not replace copyright but do revise 'all rights reserved' to 'some rights reserved.'
- Unless stated otherwise, all open licences require full acknowledgement.
- Print can continue to sell even when an openly licensed version is available. Suzanne Singh, Chair of Pratham Books, wrote in an email that a very popular book, *Fat King, Thin Dog*, sold 12,000 copies in 2017, even though the free version was downloaded 20,000 times.
- Value-added services can complement open licensing. [Siyavula Education](#) in South Africa openly licenses its math and science textbooks, which are approved by the Department of Basic Education, but sells its examination preparation and online practice programs.
- Molteno resources are open licensed and donor funded, but Molteno now has excellent visibility and the [Eastern Cape](#) paid for a print run.
- **Remember: open licensing is only sustainable when all costs are fully and fairly met.**

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The importance of community stories in Ethiopia

- CODE Ethiopia works with 97 community libraries throughout Ethiopia to provide access to much needed books.
- Librarian salaries are paid for by the local government, usually the culture and tourism office. Some libraries are built by the community, others by the government. Teachers, librarians, parents, and students are all involved in the libraries.
- Everyone strongly believes that community members should write down and illustrate their own stories. Otherwise, the stories might be lost in a world that relies increasingly on written rather than oral traditions.

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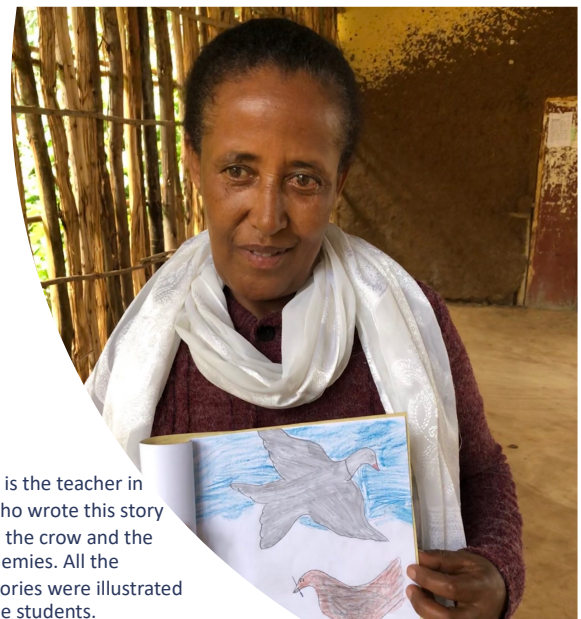
CODE Ethiopia Methodology

- In 2017, NBA gave CODE Ethiopia a small grant to collaborate with 6 libraries to create stories in the community's mother tongue. This work continues in 2019 with a grant for 3 new libraries and 3 libraries from 2017.
- The new libraries focus on story creation; the 2017 libraries concentrate on utilization.
- CODE Ethiopia organizes training workshops for 3 people in each library—the librarian, a teacher, and the head teacher. The team then trains 30 others, including teachers, and other community members.
- Each story-writing library submits its 10 best stories to CODE Ethiopia.
- Training includes how to select the best stories and illustrations.
- All authors and other community members are a part of the evaluation committee.
- Evaluation criteria include:
 - ✓ Appropriateness of story content for children
 - ✓ Appropriateness of language and dialect
 - ✓ Appropriateness of illustrations

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Cost of community story production

- CODE Ethiopia cost drivers:
 - ✓ Staff salaries
 - ✓ TOT workshop costs
 - ✓ Community-library workshop costs
 - ✓ Monitoring and evaluation, including mentoring reading and writing clubs
 - ✓ Typing stories, editing; professional illustration costs when necessary; and layout
 - ✓ Story production of 10 stories in e-format and 20 in print



Metegiash is the teacher in Durbete who wrote this story about why the crow and the hen are enemies. All the Durbete stories were illustrated by 6th grade students.

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Benefits of community story writing

- Story writing, illustration, and selection of the best stories involves the entire community.
- Because of TOT training, there are now 30 people at each library familiar with story writing and illustration; CC licensing; and using the library.
- All of the selected community stories, 85 to date from the NBA and other projects, are mounted on the community-library tablets. Some are printed.
- Story writing continues at many libraries, even at those that have already met their targets.
- All stories are neatly bound with covers.
- Story utilization will be evaluated during this current project. From anecdotal evidence, it appears that the stories are popular.



The Kuy story writing team—all of them 8th-11th-grade students.

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How overreliance on textbook publishing in Africa can disrupt the market

After the government of Tanzania reasserted control over textbook publishing, [Walter Bgoya](#) wrote the following:

My intention is to explicate the effect that such policy insecurity can have on any publishing industry that relies heavily on textbooks, which is pretty much the situation in all African countries. The disruption of the process of building up human resources capacity: publishing managers, editors, typesetters, book designers, illustrators, book distributors and bookshops, will have a far-reaching negative impact on developing a book and literary culture. And this is the experience in most countries, including South Africa, which has the most developed publishing industry in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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What constitutes overreliance?

- Exact numbers are difficult to find because, with the exception of South Africa and Morocco, few African countries produce publishing surveys. (See [Hans Zell](#).)
 - ✓ According to the [Publishers' Association of South Africa](#), in 2016-17, educational publishing (k–12) accounted for almost 2/3 of the market.
 - ✓ In 2017, Akoss Ofori-Mensah of Sub-Saharan Publishers in Ghana emailed that textbook publishing accounts for about 70% of the Ghanaian market.
 - ✓ In 2012, the [Goethe Institute](#) conducted a survey of the publishing industries in 8 African countries. In 6 of the countries covered (Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal, and Tanzania), textbook and educational publishing made up the bulk of the country's publishing output.

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The overdependence of publishers on government and donors

At the 2018 NBA workshop, Bibi Bakari-Yusuf, head of [Cassava Republic](#) in Nigeria, said:

Publishers need to stop our over-reliance on government and instead see them as just one of the markets rather than the primary one. Our focus should be on producing early literacy books that we can market directly to parents so that they can get into the habit of buying books. We therefore need to create a robust marketing campaign targeted at parents. Use donor funding as seed funding to jump start our initiatives and use it to develop long-lasting marketing campaigns the way we do for fiction and other products.

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Quality, sustainability, and funding for local content creation

- Quality and the capacity-building necessary to produce storybooks come at a cost.
- Training, mentoring and other interventions require sufficient funding, which can be substantial. These expenses must be fully understood by both project implementers and donors **AND** written into project budgets. Remember that open licensing is only sustainable when all costs are fairly paid for.
- African publishers must adapt and innovate as new publishing models emerge.
- The emergence of sustainable revenue models for local content creators is essential to:
 - ✓ Put in place organizational mechanisms to produce new and relevant materials
 - ✓ Reduce overreliance on textbook publishing.
 - ✓ Ensure continuity when donor support ceases.
 - ✓ Ensure that global initiatives support African publishing rather than rely on international NGOs.

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Sustainability questions

- Why do some African publishers, such as Sub-Saharan Publishers and Cassava Republic, succeed without depending on government or donors? Both have a diversified publishing portfolio.
- What value-added services can a publisher offer to enhance revenue and promote sustainability? Think of the Siyavula example.
- What about publisher visibility? Many African publishers have inadequate websites. Some have none.
- Is there a role for APNET:
 - ✓ In researching and exploring sustainable business models?
 - ✓ In representing member publishers at trade fairs, like Frankfurt and Bologna?
 - ✓ In representing the publishing community with governments and donors?

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