African Children Deserve Stories about Themselves

The Intersecting Roles of African Authors, Illustrators, Communities, and Languages in Story Creation

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early literacy resource network

Stories created in and about Africa

I took on the task of creating the kind of children's books that I would have loved to have when I was a child. At that time, most books that we saw were written and published abroad and imported to Ghana. My goal then was to create books in which local children engaged in their usual activities and real-life experiences in environments and conditions that were familiar to them.

Meshack Asare, *Culture to Free Our Children: Looking Back at My Work over Five Decades*, *2015*
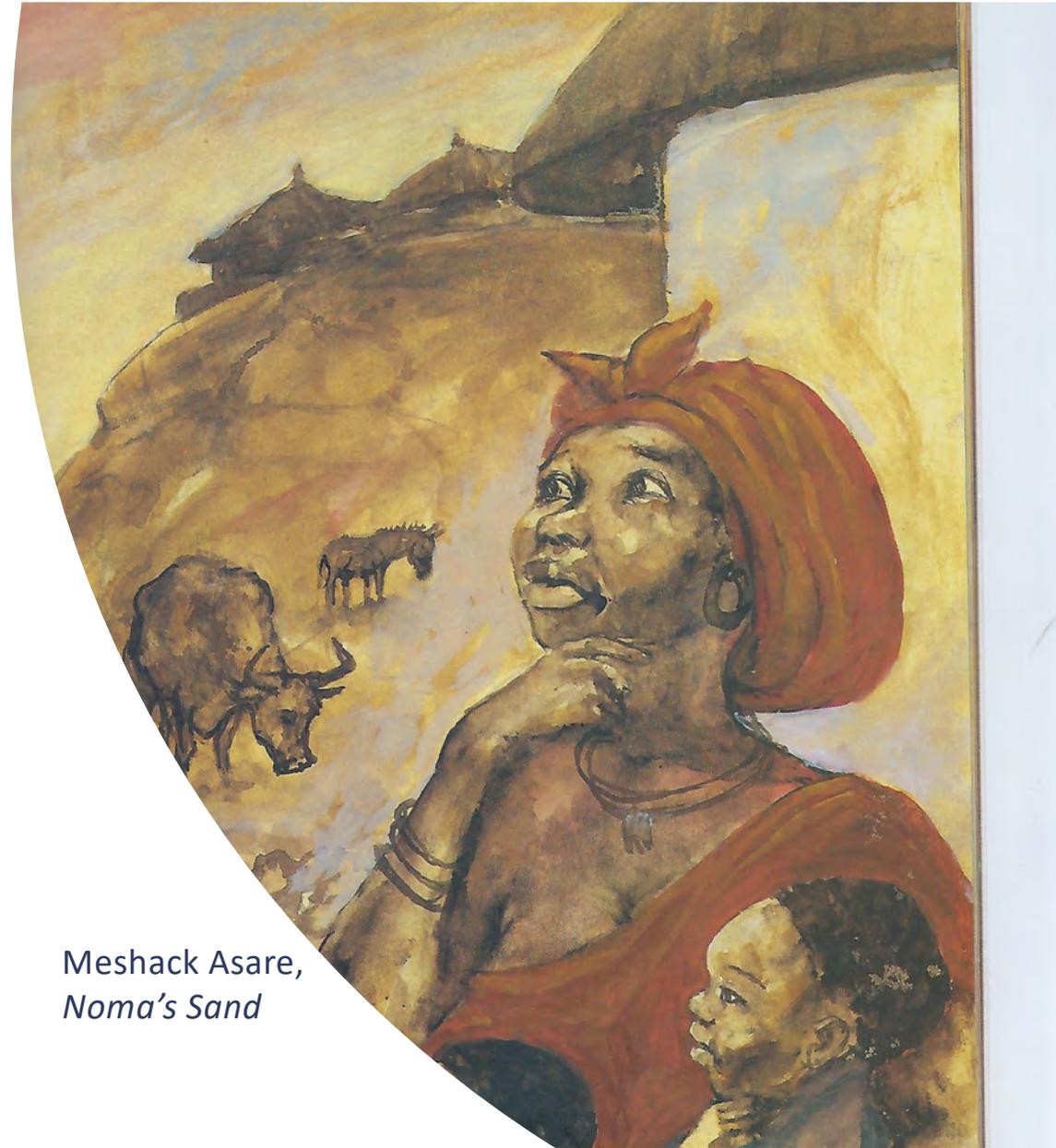
Meshack Asare,
Noma's Sand

The importance of reading for pleasure

- Studies show that children who enjoy reading do better in school.
- In 2011, Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, the Nigerian publisher, said:

  In contrast to their Western and Asian counterparts, many African children grow up without ever having seen, let alone owned, beautiful, well-illustrated books which inspire them to a life of reading, beauty, learning and curiosity for the world. With a youthful population, there is a pressing need to produce more content that will invite children to dream, to question, to imagine, to look to the past with a view to understanding the present and provoking the future.

- The stories on which we focus are those that children want to read.

Children's books in which language?

- Young children learn to read more effectively in their mother tongue.

- Many African publishers publish children's stories in English because international and national markets are greater.

- Mkuki na Nyota can sell its children's books in Ki-Swahili because of the prevalence of that language in Tanzania and customer demand. Rwandan publishers can do the same in Kinyarwanda.

- Ethnikids in South Africa is an online bookstore specializing in children's books that feature characters of color in various South African languages.

Supporting African authors, illustrators and publishers

- Awards to recognize excellence.
- Capacity-building:
  - ✓Examples include CODE and Save the Children in Rwanda
- Sustainable business strategies and markets for all components of the content creation and production ecosystem.

Awards recognize excellence in writing and illustration

Examples include:

- Caldicott Medal for US illustrators and Newbery Medal for US authors.

- Sweden's Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award to promote interest in children's and young adult literature around the world. The Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa won the award in 2015.

- IBBY's Hans Christian Andersen Award for lifetime achievement of authors and illustrators. No African has won this prize.

- Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature. Meshack Asare won in 2015.

- African Studies Association Children's Africana Book Award, frequently won by African publishers.

- Awards for African books: Bologna Prize for the Best Children's Publishers of the Year (Africa); Burt Award; Meshack Asare Prize for Ghanaian illustrators; and the Golden Baobab award.

- Where are the awards for children's books in African languages?

THE COLLECTION

31 LOCALLY-PRODUCED BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS
FROM GRADES 1 TO 6
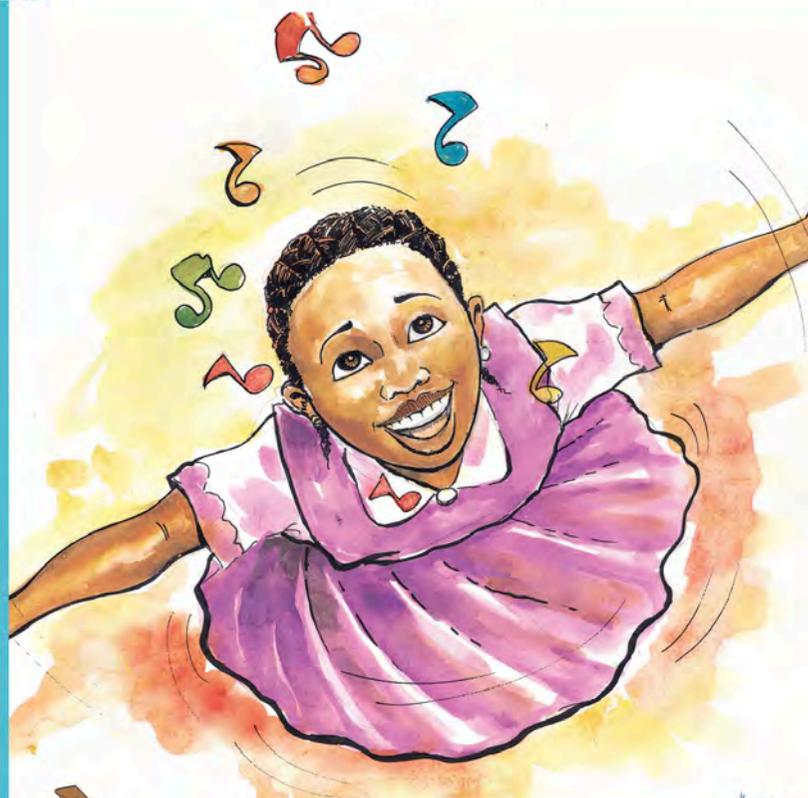
Capacity-building: CODE

- Mission: to advance literacy and education by supporting publication and distribution of 'engaging books' for children.'

- Programs in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone.

- Subsidizes book production costs in order to build local publishing capacity and encourage sales.

Capacity-building: Save the Children, Rwanda

- Mission: to support children's literacy development, including capacity-building for the book sector and Kinyarwanda story creation.

- Rwandan Children's Book Initiative to train publishers, authors, and illustrators.

- Three organizations emerged:
  - ✓ Rwandan Children's Book Organization (for publishers)
  - ✓ Abana Writers' Café (for authors)
  - ✓ Rwandan Illustrators (for illustrators)

The role of communities in story creation: CODE Ethiopia

- Communities can play an important role in story creation and re-telling—originally orally and now in writing.

- CODE Ethiopia (CE) works with 97 community libraries throughout Ethiopia.

- CE collaborates with 8 libraries on writing community stories.

- Community story writing uses old traditions in new and dynamic ways.

- Community stories are written in mother-tongue languages.

CODE Ethiopia Methodology

- In 2017, Neil Butcher & Associates gave CE a small grant to collaborate with 6 libraries to create stories in the community's mother tongue. Efforts continue in 2019.

- The new libraries focus on story creation; the 2017 libraries concentrate on utilization.

- CE organizes training workshops for 3 people in each library—the librarian, a teacher, and the head teacher. They train 30 others.

- Each story-writing library submits its 10 best stories to CE.

- 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

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, 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.

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

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.

The impact of open licensing on income, 1

- Users share the work of others without requesting written permission. Open licenses do not replace copyright but revise 'all rights reserved' to 'some rights reserved.'

- Creative Commons licences are most frequently used for open licensing in publishing and education. They range from very permissive, allowing copying, modification, and commercial use (CC BY), to those that are more restrictive, for example, permitting distribution of a work in its original form, but no modification (CC BY-ND).

- Unless stated otherwise, all open licences require full acknowledgement.

The impact of open licensing on income, 2

- Donors, such as USAID, require open licensing in grants and contracts.

- Several organizations mount online openly licensed stories, including African Storybook, StoryWeaver, Bloom's Book Library, and Global Digital Library.

- Print can continue to sell even when an openly licensed version is available. Suzanne Singh, Chair of Pratham Books, emailed that a very popular book, *Fat King, Thin Dog,* sold 12,000 copies in 2017, even though the free online version was downloaded 20,000 times.
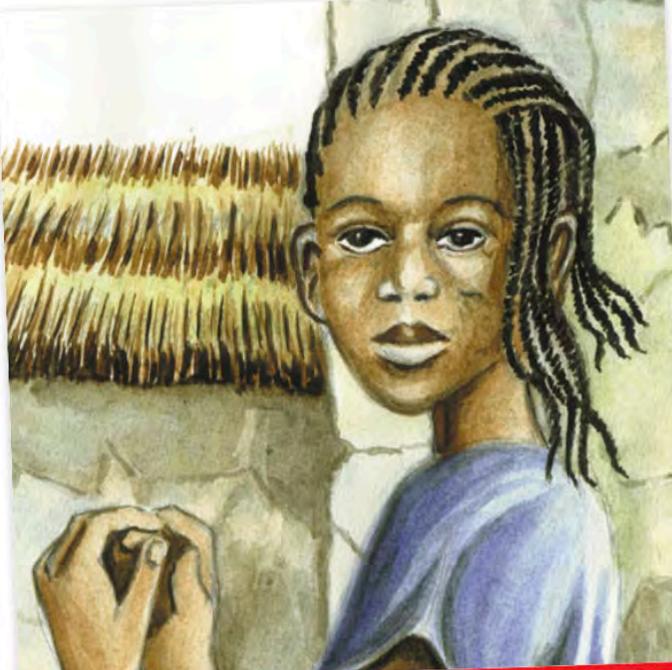
ENGLISH - LEVEL 2

Fati and the Honey Tree

Osu Library Fund

Therson Boadu

Fati and the Honey Tree on Storyweaver

👍 RECOMMENDED

♡ 99   📖 900

# The impact of open licensing on income, 3

- In commercial publishing, authors typically receive payment through royalties based on sales. Illustrators usually receive a flat fee.

- In their negotiations with publishers and NGOs wishing to produce content under an open licence, authors and illustrators should ensure that they receive fair compensation for their work.

- Contracts for openly licensed books should be understood by all parties concerned and negotiated just as carefully as those for fully copyright protected materials.

- Open licensing is only sustainable when costs are fully and fairly met.

Translation and illustrations: Getting the elements right, 1

- Many stories can and should be translated, but some should not.

- Lorato Trok, a language expert, explained in 2017:

  There is some inter-connectedness to African languages even if they do not fall under the same language group. When translating from one African language to the other, the translation is based more on the cultural aspect of the language and its people, unlike in English where some translators concentrate on finding meaning of words in English to translate to an African language.

Translation and illustrations: Getting the elements right, 2
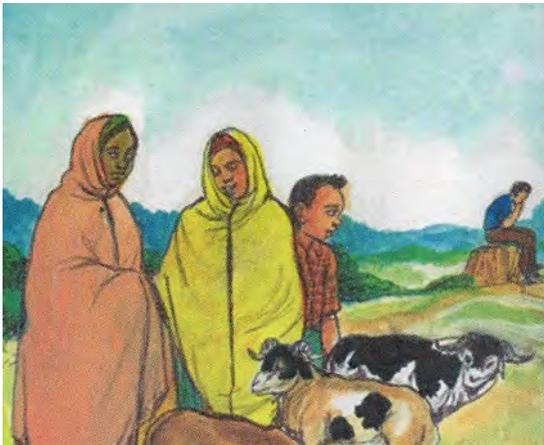
- Stories must be relevant to the children who read them, which may require different illustrations for each community, even if the basic story is the same.

- 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. CE paid for two sets of illustrations; editing; translation; design and layout; and printing for both books.

Markets for African-language children's publishing, 1

- Who funds African-language children's literature?
  - ✓ International donors and governments
    - ✗ But they frequently rely on international consultants to produce and distribute content rather than contract with local experts.
    - ✗ Books used in schools must receive government approval, such as in Kenya. The evaluation and approval process is lengthy. Not all children's books fit neatly into the government curriculum.
  - ✓ Schools and libraries
    - ✗ But budgets are limited.
    - ✗ Some governments rely on international book donation programs, which depresses the market for local books.

Markets for African-language children's publishing, 2

- ✓ Parents
  - ✗ But incomes are so low in many countries, particularly in rural areas, that parents lack sufficient purchasing power.
  - ✗ Although parents understand the importance of textbooks, they do not always appreciate the significance of storybooks to a child's development, nor the value of reading in mother-tongue languages.

- *Africa Language and Literacy*, a study commissioned by CODE and written by Espen Stranger-Johannessen:

  Publishing in African languages is only financially viable if there is a market for those books, either in the form of government guarantees or incentives, or other ways in which publishers can be confident that there is a market for their books.

Conclusions: markets and sustainability of African children's literature, 1

- African publishers depend on textbook production for the bulk of their income. Most publish children's books only when they are a part of the school curriculum because they do not believe that there is a market for them otherwise.

- What must be done to change market dynamics? Bibi Bakare Yusuf:

  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.

Conclusions: markets and sustainability of African children's literature, 2

- Online platforms and open licensing have merit, but more thought must be given to establish criteria for selecting which stories are suitable for adaption and translation.

- Quality and capacity-building come at a cost.

- Training, mentoring and other interventions require sufficient funding, which can be substantial. These expenses must be fully understood by publishers, project implementers, and donors AND written into project budgets.

- Global initiatives should support African content production rather than rely on international NGOs.

Further reading

- Neil Butcher, Lisbeth Levey, Kirsty von Gogh: *Good Stories Don't Grow on Trees: A Guide to Effective Costing of Storybooks in the Global South* http://www.earlyliteracynetwork.org/search?search_api_views_fulltext=Good+stories

- Neil Butcher, Lisbeth Levey, Kirsty von Gogh: *Open Licensing Made Plain: A Primer on Concepts, Challenges, and Opportunities for Publishers* *http://www.earlyliteracynetwork.org/content/open-licensing-made-plain-primer-concepts-challenges-and-opportunities-publishers*

- Espen Stranger-Johannessen: *Africa Language and Literacy. A Landscape Review of Language and Literacy Research in African Contexts* https://code.ngo/sites/default/files/code-africa-language-and-literacy-report-aug2017-web.pdf

- Agnes Gyr-Ukunda, *Publishing in African Languages Using Editions Bakame as a Model* http://www.ibby.org/index.php?id=723

- Hans M. Zell: *Publishing in African Languages: A Review of the Literature* https://www.academia.edu/36334936/Publishing_in_African_Languages_A_Review_of_the_Literature?email_work_card=view-paper (Zell discusses a number of publications specifically about children's publishing in African languages.)

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