Early Literacy and Open Licensing Workshop Report

Johannesburg, South Africa

26-27 August 2018

early
literacy
resource
network

With funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and as part of its work on the early literacy ecosystem and open licensing, Neil Butcher & Associates (NBA) convened a small workshop, which brought together key players in early literacy in Africa. Participants, who came from Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, represented commercial publishers, NGOs, and other stakeholders working in the early literacy field.

A list of participants and the agenda, including the workshop objectives, can be found at the end of this report.

NBA has also created a website, the Early Literacy Resource Network (ELRN), to share information on toolkits and research about open licensing, teacher training, national language and book policies, access and distribution, and key players in early literacy. The resources on the ELRN website gather together work carried out by the major organizations and researchers in this field.
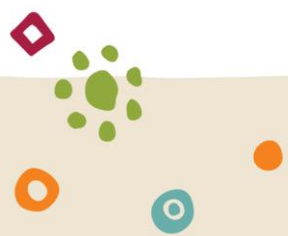
early
literacy
resource
network

Contents

Key Discussion Points

The workshop was organized around a few key questions, followed by wrap-up sessions on 'bringing it all together' and 'where to from here'. Two or three participants led off each question from an organizational or personal perspective. Because the number of participants was small and each person was both knowledgeable and outspoken, discussions were lively every step of the way.

1. Publishing and Reading in Africa

Questions discussed:

What are the key factors inhibiting growth of sustainable markets for stories in local languages? How can content creators ensure that their books speak to the needs of children? Is there a role for traditional publishers in early literacy in Africa in the context of digital disruption and open licensing drives by donors and governments?

In opening the workshop, Neil Butcher noted that government and donor spending have significant unintended consequences on publishing and literacy in Africa because publishers depend so heavily on education and textbooks for their income. Donors further distort the market because of their focus, requirements, and selection of grantees or contractors. Open licensing is part of a global shift in content creation and distribution. Because open licensing is not going to disappear and will be increasingly required by governments and donors across Africa, we need to ensure that it does not further distort the economics of the publishing industry.

Publishers that depend on educational and textbook publishing as their core business might find themselves out of business, as their market depends on the vagaries of government policy and procurement. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf of Cassava Republic put it as follows:

> *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.*

Markets, languages, and publishers

Publishers should see themselves as part of a cultural industry rather than following the money and focusing on textbooks. David Waweru of WordAlive Publishers told us that, in Kenya, local languages flourish in theatre, music, and the broadcast media, but books, particularly, for children, have lagged. Additionally, the debate around language and translation on the continent is also taking place on social media. Young people are pushing for the use of local languages.

Why do local languages flourish everywhere other than in high-quality children's books? Going back to governments, they spend the bulk of their funding on core textbooks, with little left over for supplementary readers. This policy militates against the procurement of local-language storybooks. Further, government policies often stipulate the language of learning and teaching based on the area in which schools are situated. This may not be the language spoken at home by all learners. In addition, schools may not adhere to government policy and teach in local languages in the early grades.

But what about the parents' role? Many parents want their children to achieve more than they were able to do and education is the key. Some parents who can afford books and buy them, choose books in English (or French or Portuguese) because they see these languages as being beneficial to their children's success. Others want their children reading in mother-tongue languages.

Ineke Aquarius of Mango Tree urged marketing directly to parents:

> We need a marketing model that will work in rural areas. Books need to appeal to parents. Parent and community attitudes about the value of local language can be an inhibiting factor initially, but parents quickly see the value once they see their kids reading with fluency.

She used as an example an experiment selling Leblango-language alphabet books to 'guys on bikes,' who marketed them to parents. Nine thousand copies were sold. The price point was affordable and parents saw the value of these books to their children. The key, everyone agreed, is to identify the right price point and suitable distribution channels.

Too often, discussions on early literacy are detached from the overall need to stimulate interest in local languages across the continent. We need to spark interest in local languages among younger readers, not just to teach them to read but also to cultivate a new generation of authors.

In Nigeria, publishing in Hausa is seen as commercially viable and literature titles are published in Hausa, but not yet children's stories. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf believes that Hausa-speaking parents, who want their children to speak Hausa, will understand the importance of buying children's stories in Hausa.

The issue of orthography in the creation of local content has become a political matter; therefore whoever has the money can dictate the dialect in which content is created. This means that government will retain its stranglehold on the creation and distribution of local content as long as publishers prioritize government requirements. But the DWW[1] community library project in Uganda, which uses online tools and open licensing, has been able to produce books in the Lumasaaba Ludadiri dialect, which is the one spoken in this community. The government, however, officially recognizes the Lumasaaba Lubuya dialect. Government-funded books are therefore published in Lubuya, not Ludadiri.

Demere Kitunga of the Soma Book Café in Dar es Salaam posited that the Tanzanian liberation struggle promoted Kiswahili and other local-language publishing (poetry and newspapers, for example). She further believes that there is a false dichotomy between oral and written culture, that someone who is drawn to an oral story will then be interested in the story written down. In a follow-up email, she pointed out that Kiswahili has a 500-year-old tradition of written poetry.[2]

---

[1] The library is named DWW in memory of community member and father of the library's founders, Damien Wadika Wamai.
[2] Personal communication from Demere Kitunga to Lisbeth Levey, September 18, 2018
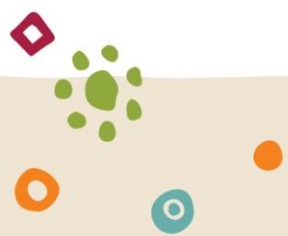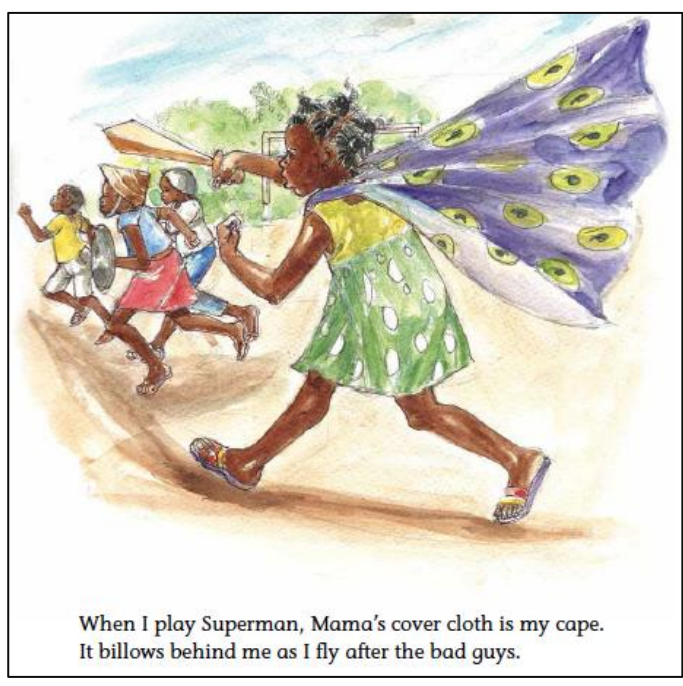
Figure 1   A page from Mama's Amazing Cover Cloth

Akoss Afori-Mensah of Sub-Saharan Publishers in Ghana spoke about the need to publish beautifully illustrated children's books that children can relate to because the illustrations and stories are about the lives that they lead. She used *Mama's Amazing Cover Cloth* as an example. The story is about a little girl who tells us the various ways that mama, papa, and she use the cover cloth that comes with each, *kaba* and *slit* that her mother buys.

> When I play Superman, Mama's cover cloth is my cape.
> It billows behind me as I fly after the bad guys.

Publishers in an advocacy role

Governments sometimes institute tax and other policies that work to the detriment of effective book production. In Kenya, the import duty on imported paper is now 35 percent, with an added VAT of 16 percent on books. The Kenya Publishing Association has been protesting these levies, to no avail thus far. In Nigeria, when the Finance Ministry tried to institute tariff of 62.5 percent (a mix of levies, duties, and VAT) on imported books, the Nigerian Publishers Association protested, and the tariff was dropped.

2. Local Content Creation and Digital Disruption

Questions discussed:

Is open licensing enabling or destroying local content creation capacity for local publishers and NGOs? What elements of alternative content creation models and open licensing can be adopted by publishers and NGOs to spur the production of local-language books for early literacy and promote long-term growth of a vibrant publishing industry in low-income countries?

Early literacy donor funding in Africa imposes constraints on local publishers and the early literacy market, with considerable aid given to non-African organizations to deliver materials on the African continent. Donor-led content creation initiatives are still a potential source of business through large, well-funded programmes.

David Waweru spoke about open licensing from the perspective of a commercial publisher. He pointed out that 'digital change has been disrupting traditional business models in the last twenty years.' He went on to assert that 'destruction and reinvention are happening at the same time' and used four media examples – YouTube, Netflix, Amazon, and the Khan Academy. About open licensing, Waweru had the following questions for his fellow publishers:

early literacy resource network

- *What opportunities lie beneath the disruption? (e.g., shift from payment for products to payment for services – software, dance artists, authors, etc.)*
- *How shall we organize? (Business model innovation.)*
- *What's our particular context / landscape? (There's no one 'right' way of dealing with disruption.)*

He ended by making the following points:

> YES, open licensing is disrupting the publishing industry, and YES, it has the potential for devastating impact on the landscape. BUT can these we (publishers) unearth related opportunities close by and rejuvenate given the reality that we cannot wish OL away?

Alternative content creation models

There are many limitations on the establishment of alternative content creation models for local content. Many models rely on donor funding, which may not remain available. Others depend on volunteers, but this model is not universally applicable and can be constrained by quality considerations. Some models rely on the use of translations, enabling faster content creation, more books, and wider distribution. But translations can be problematic because neither text nor illustrations are sufficiently compelling to a young reader in a different country.

3. Open Licensing and Quality

Questions discussed:

How is quality potentially affected (both positively and negatively) by open licensing and use of online content creation tools?

Resources can be shared more easily and widely with digital content creation tools and platforms, but the quality of these learning materials is uneven.

Figure 2   A slide from Jenny Katz's presentation shows the problem with direct translation

The problem of direct translation from English into African languages

The vast majority of early readers in the African languages are directly translated from an original English source document. This leads to the creation of complex texts that are not commensurate with the learners' level of reading.

ENGLISH	soccer		
ISIZULU	ibhola likanobhutshuzwayo		
1 word	6 letters	2 syllables
2 words	24 letters	10 syllables

Jenny Katz of the Molteno Institute of Language and Literacy (MILL) in South Africa shared with us how MILL works on its *Vula Bula* early reading materials by developing texts directly in African languages rather than translating English-language texts. In her presentation, she used the word 'soccer' as an example. Instead, MILL uses words that are easy to pronounce and make sense phonetically to a young child.

Quality assurance procedures

There are two disconnected layers of quality assurance in the open licensing and early literacy space.
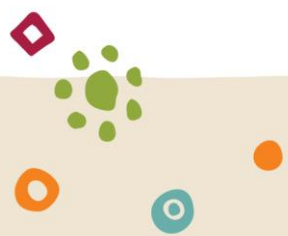
early literacy resource network

Figure 3   A slide from Ken Harley's presentation describing what communities regard as quality

- *'Our kids must have good personality, become good citizens.' A good story must 'pass on our culture'* (elder at Chefe Donsa, Ethiopia).
- There is a *'community desire for moralisation'* (Uganda PI interview)
- At the DWW CL in Uganda, the importance of recording the community's values in the stories of elders was made even more pressing by the fact that *'the elders are becoming few'* (Member of Management Board).
- What makes a good story? *'1. The mission of the story. 2. The 'handiness" of the book: level, language, culture, attractive size and fonts, illustrations'* (CE official, interview).

Communities can be very explicit about what goes into good-quality stories.

In his review of community library projects in Uganda and Ethiopia, conducted by Cornelius Gulere of Uganda Christian University and CODE Ethiopia (CE), Prof. Ken Harley reported on how the communities writing stories determined what constitutes quality.

Figure 4   A slide from Ken Harley's presentation describing different perspectives on quality

	Communities	StoryWeaver Platform
Quality criteria	Explicit	Implicit
Essence of quality	Accurate relay – in text and illustrations - of the message of the story.	Social message in stories must be suitable for all communities; and offensive to none.

He went on to describe the tension that can exist between how communities view quality assurance (QA) and how platforms, such as StoryWeaver (SW), determine what constitutes QA. StoryWeaver has a special category it calls 'Recommended by StoryWeaver;' African Storybook (ASb) has one that it calls 'African Storybook Approved.' In neither case do the platform managers explain in detail the criteria they use to determine 'recommended' and 'approved.'

Both SW and ASb allow community members to upload their own content without undergoing any quality-assurance processes. SW puts only its recommended stories on the home page, while community stories that are not recommended are not and are less easily found. ASb only publishes approved stories on its app, but has two categories on its home page – one for approved stories and one for community stories. This policy came under considerable criticism. Users of the platform can easily ask why stories that are not 'approved' are mounted at all.
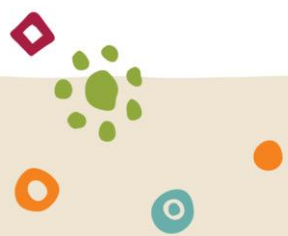
Figure 5 Tessa Welch discussed negative effects on quality.

Negative effects on quality

1. People don't understand the difference between community and ASb approved storybooks
   - Judge the library negatively as a result.
   - Translate (and thereby propagate) unapproved and perhaps less than satisfactory content.
2. Challenges with community storybooks
   - Some storybooks convey negative or stereotyped messages (see Twanza the bad girl)
   - Illustrations a big issue – use of copyrighted illustrations, or selection of illustrations that do not match the text.
   - Language issues (punctuation and special characters).

Tessa Welch of African Storybook presented on ASb policies pertaining to the two different categories ASb uses, their drawbacks, and efforts ASb is taking to mitigate the problems that these policies can present. For example, ASb has developed guides for using and translating stories and is compiling special collections of ASb stories. In addition, all stories selected for printing come from the collection of approved stories.

Participants focused on community stories *versus* approved stories and debated two points of views. Some argued that everyone should be able to share a story; others opined that not all stories matter and should be published. The intertwined issues of what constitutes quality and who determines it were clearly vexatious. There was consensus, however, that story platforms need to be transparent about how they determine quality.

4. Workshop takeaways

Publishing in Africa needs to position itself as a cultural industry, rather than just an educational supplier. The publishing community must create markets and curate activities that encourage reading. Publishing children's books in local languages using open licences could potentially be viewed as a loss leader, with a goal of getting more literate readers into the system. More readers means a more vibrant market and changes the dynamics of the publishing market from reliance on textbook publishing to one that incorporates all sectors. Partnerships between publishers, NGOs, donors, and governments could help to produce a vibrant early literacy ecosystem.

Publishers should be able to focus on creating books that children everywhere will appreciate. African children will be able to develop a love of reading if they have access to books with content that is relevant and interesting. Reading should be aspirational and seen as the ticket to a better life. A love of reading serves an important indicator of a powerful and healthy society.

The period in which the sustainability of the publishing industry is reliant on government procurement is drawing to a close, and publishers need to diversify their markets to survive. They must become activists for local content creation and local languages in the same way as other media have done. Bakare-Yusuf recommended that publishers think of government and donor procurement as 'seed money' to fund other publishing activities.

Digital content creation tools have significantly lowered the barriers to entry for content creators and producers. The international development community is interested in digital content creation because it allows access to a wider audience, but many children may need and want print books.
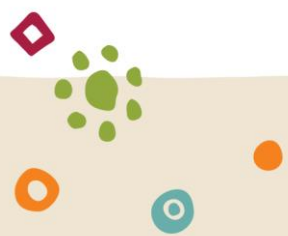
Furthermore, donors will continue to push for open licensing as one way to make books cheaper and to facilitate translation to other languages. Because of these policies, we must raise awareness among governments and donors about true costs of creating local content. Everybody in the content creation value chain should be reimbursed for their work. It is problematic if everyone in the value chain is paid except for the originator. Publishers, who frequently mentor authors and illustrators in addition to normal production responsibilities, also need fair payment for their contributions.

Strategies for teaching literacy vary, but it is in the public interest to have this intellectual property available to all. These resources can assist in creating a base of well-rounded literacy source materials, which could be accompanied by professional development of teachers. MILL is now investigating whether it is financially feasible to make *Vula Bula* free online, but to charge for value-added services, such as print and training. Another example is ASb's collaboration with Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) to produce an online open course on teaching early literacy in Africa with African Storybook.

Copyright and open licensing publishing models can coexist if publishers, governments, and donors can understand the contribution of each to the early literacy value chain. These conversations need to avoid polarizing proponents of one licensing regime over another because it forces a choice, rather than opening-up the market to blended publishing models. Publishers should harness the potential of digital disruption and open licensing to be able to explore these models.
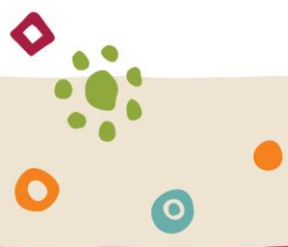
Appendix 1: List of participants for Early Literacy and Open Licensing Workshop

West Africa

1. Akoss Ofori-Mensah
Akoss is the managing director of Sub-Saharan Publishers in Accra, and involved in open licensing action research. Akoss is member of APNET.
https://www.subsaharanpublishers.com/

2. Bibi Bakare-Yusaf
Bibi is the co-founder and publishing director of Cassava Republic, with offices in Abuja and London.
https://www.cassavarepublic.biz/

East Africa

3. David Waweru
David is the founder and CEO of WordAlive Publishers based in Kenya, and former chairperson of the Kenya Publishers Association.
http://www.davidwaweru.com/ and http://wordalivepublishers.com/

4. Lily Nyariki
Lily is a librarian based at Moi University in Eldoret, Kenya, and the focal point for ADEA Working Group on Books and Learning Materials.
http://www.adeanet.org/en/working-groups/books-and-learning-materials

5. Charles Batambuze
Charles is the director of the Uganda Reproduction Rights Organisation (URRO) and executive decretary of the National Book Trust of Uganda (NABOTU).

6. Demere Kitunga
Demere is the director of Soma Book Café, Demere works with children developing local language stories.
http://www.somabookcafe.com/ and http://www.edvisionpublishing.co.tz

7. Ineke Aquarius
Ineke is the managing director of Mango Tree, responsible for creating education and communication tools for development.
http://mangotreeuganda.org/

South Africa

8. Tessa Welch
Tessa is a teacher education programme specialist, and project leader for the African Storybook Project at the South African Institute for Distance Education (Saide).
https://www.saide.org.za/ and https://www.africanstorybook.org/

9. **Jenny Katz**

Jenny is the research and materials development manager at Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy.
https://www.molteno.co.za/
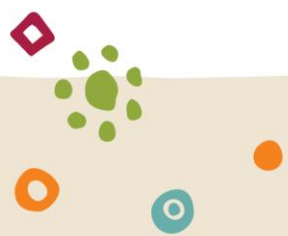
NBA Staff

10. Neil Butcher

11. Kirsty von Gogh

Consultants

12. Lisbeth Levey

13. Ken Harley

Appendix 2: Open Licensing and Early Literacy: Workshop Agenda

Workshop Details

Date: 27th – 28th August, 2018
Time: 9am to 5pm daily
Place: Wanderers Club (Strikers Boardroom), Johannesburg

Workshop Objectives

The main objective of this workshop is to create a forum for participants to explore themes of common interest in the field of early literacy, with a particular focus on emerging understandings of how open licensing is contributing (and sometimes impeding) the overarching goal of ensuring that young children in African countries have access to high quality early readers as part of their formative educational experiences. The workshop is organized around a few key questions, with participants being asked to present short introductions to the question that will lead to further plenary engagement and discussion. The size of the group has been kept deliberately small to enable deep discussion between a small network of experts in the field. Through this, it is hoped that the workshop will:

- Build a shared understanding of how open licensing affects publishing in Africa and how content creators can use it to their benefit.
- Share knowledge about and emerging best practices in the use of open licensing in African publishing.
- Discuss possible models for adopting open licensing with assistance from peers and experts.

Session	Time	Focus
		Day One
	08:30 – 09:00	*Arrival and Registration*
Day 1 Session 1	09:00 – 09:30	*Welcome and Introduction* Facilitator: Neil Butcher • Introduction to workshop • Introductions (3 mins each) • Overview of agenda Agree workshop parameters
Day 1 Session 2	09:30 – 11:00	*Setting the Scene* • NBA presentation on emerging issues and lessons around open licensing for early literacy materials Plenary Discussion
	11:00 – 11:15	Break for Refreshments
Day 1 Session 3	11:15 – 12:45	*What are the key factors inhibiting growth of sustainable markets for stories in local languages?* • Bibi Bakare-Yusaf, Cassava Republic: Are there any viable markets for these stories in local languages, in print or in digital format?

early literacy resource network

Session	Time	Focus
		• Akoss Ofori-Mensah, Sub-Saharan Publishers: How can content creators ensure that the books they publish speak to the needs and interests of the children and communities for whom they are meant? Plenary Discussion
	12:45 – 13:45	Break for Lunch
Day 1 Session 4	13:45 – 15:15	*What elements of alternative content creation models and open licensing can be adopted by publishers and NGOs to spur the production of local-language books for early literacy and promote long-term growth of a vibrant publishing industry in low-income countries?* Introductory presentation of an alternative content creation model • Ineke Aquarius, Mango Tree: What alternative content creation models can be adapted to include more diverse content creators, and ensure sustainability over the long term? • Demere Kitunga, Soma Book Café: How can community involvement be leveraged to create more local storybooks? • Jenny Katz, Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy: Are there sustainable publishing processes and solutions to assist content creators produce and share high-quality indigenous early literacy resources, using open licensing? Plenary Discussion
	15:15 – 15:30	Break for Refreshments
Day 1 Session 5	15:30 – 17:00	*How is quality potentially affected (both positively and negatively) by open licensing and use of online content creation tools?* • Tessa Welch, African Storybook: What guidelines do online platforms use to determine quality and the stories that they recommend? • Ken Harley, Consultant: Is there a tension between community determinations of what constitutes quality and those of the platforms? Plenary Discussion
	18:30	*Workshop dinner for all participants*
**Day Two**	
Day 2 Session 1	09:00 – 09:30	*Open Mike* Participants can speak their minds about topics relevant to the workshop.
Day 2 Session 2	09:30 – 11:00	*Is there a role for traditional publishers in early literacy in Africa in the context of digital disruption and open licensing drives by donors and governments?*

early literacy resource network

Session	Time	Focus
		• David Waweru, WordAlive Publishers: What do publishers need to understand about open licensing? What do local content creators want to hear from donors and governments? • Charles Batambuze, National Book Trust of Uganda (NABOTU): Can open licensing work for commercial publishers and, if so, how? • Lily Nyariki, ADEA: What do donors and governments need to hear from local content creators? Plenary Discussion
	11:00 – 11:15	Break for Refreshments
Day 2 Session 3	11:15– 12:45	*Is open licensing enabling or destroying local content creation capacity for local publishers and NGOs?* • Jenny Katz, Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy: What kinds of contracts are necessary for authors, illustrators, editors, designers, and others associated with children's book production? • Tessa Welch, African Storybook: How can early literacy initiatives compensate local content creators and provide for a vibrant cultural industry? • David Waweru, WordAlive Publishers: How do open licensing activities promote or impede the sustainability of content creators and publishers? Plenary Discussion
	12:45 – 13:45	Break for Lunch

Day 2
Session 4
	13:45 – 15:15	*Bringing it all together*
		• Summarizing points of consensus and difference
		• Core issues for discussion:
		   - Using open licences
		   - Donor and government engagement
		   - Community engagement
		   - Sustainability of publishing ecosystem
		Implications for authors, illustrators and others in the ecosystem

	15:15 – 15:30	Break for Refreshments
Day 2 Session 5	15:30 – 17:00	*Where to from here?* • Next steps • Wrap up

early literacy resource network

Early Literacy and Open Licensing Workshop Report

August 2018