

“When I express myself in the language of my heart I’m sure of what is coming out.

Their hearts – their culture - is being opened up by reading these stories so they find they are going much deeper in their learning.

This is what the African Storybook helps us do.”

# African Storybook Initiative

External ‘accountability’  
evaluation: 2013 - 2016

John Gultig

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**The cover quote**

“When I express myself in the language of my heart I’m sure of what is coming out. Their hearts – their culture - is being opened up by reading these stories so they find they are going much deeper in their learning. This is what the African Storybook helps us do”

**Hirome Gershom, Chairperson: Lunyole Language Association.**

Interviewed in October 2016

# Executive Summary

The goal of the African Storybook Initiative (ASb) is to address the shortage of African language early reading materials and provide educators and other interested parties with “contextually appropriate books for early reading in the languages of Africa”. The ultimate goal of this is “systemic change to the lives of poor and disadvantaged people.”<sup>1</sup> Unless children develop the ability to read fluently for meaning and enjoyment in a familiar language, the foundations for all future learning are shaky.

ASb want to address the shortage of books through an open publishing model: a website where anyone can access openly licensed storybooks and to which anyone can contribute storybooks. This model will, they believe, ensure that growing numbers of storybooks are available to teachers, parents and librarians as needed, without having to consider the size and buying power of the market for a particular language.

## SUMMARY OF THE SUMMARY

The African Storybook Initiative (ASb) have exceeded all the important targets they set when embarking on this project. To echo the mid-term evaluators, “On every measure there have been remarkable gains”<sup>2</sup>.

In the few instances where ASb have fallen short of their target, or where a strategy clearly is not working, they have responded quickly and effectively. In fact, aside from faithful accounting, what is most impressive in this evaluation is the initiative’s ability to reflect thoughtfully, listen to input from a variety of sources, and recalibrate as they moved forward. This kind of thoughtful flexibility is a key contributor to the ASb’s success.

Aside from this organizational flexibility – which speaks positively to the initiative’s ability to sustain their growth in the unpredictable contexts in which they work - the ASb have, in less than four years<sup>3</sup>:

- **Assured a supply of storybooks in African languages.** They have set up a website – and mobile telephone reading app - which provides literacy development organisations (LDOs) and educators working in African countries with almost 4 000 storybooks in 100 languages of Africa<sup>4</sup>.
- **Created a website through which stories can be created.** The ASb website provides an accessible space (which is increasingly well used) through which users – especially African users – can create, translate or adapt stories for use by them and by others.
- **Improved the ways in which storybooks are used.** Within their pilot sites and hubs, ASb have improved the ways in which their storybooks are being used – in print and online - for early literacy development in often trying contexts. While progress is uneven and fragile, there is some momentum which ASb should continue to encourage.
- **Established some far reaching partnerships with large educational and literacy development initiatives** to ensure that ASb stories are distributed to teachers and learners as part of their

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<sup>1</sup> 2016 Annual Report to Comic Relief, February 2017 (revised)

<sup>2</sup> Mid-term Review of the African Storybook Project, May 2015, Hilary Janks and Ken Harley

<sup>3</sup> This evaluation covers the 30-month period, from June 2014 (the website’s launch) to end-November 2016

<sup>4</sup> ASb had developed storybooks in 98 languages by the end of the evaluation period, November 2016. By time of writing - end of December - the number had risen to 100.

programmes; for example, iMlango, and the Programme for the Improvement of Learning Outcomes (PILO) in KwaZulu-Natal.

- **Elicited a surprisingly large independent take-up.** ASb's openly licensed resources – authentic mother tongue stories in Africa - are being used by organisations and individuals they have never met. The resources serve to strengthen these organisations in contexts where good reading texts are scarce. In addition, writers are uploading new stories and translations in languages from countries ASb has not visited.
- **Influenced the debate about open educational resources.** ASb's argument that OER can play an important role in supporting early literacy development and addressing Africa's publishing catch-22, has had an impact. They have signed agreements, and are working on projects with five educational authorities in two countries; they are cited in a number of important policy publications; they sit on a key working group of a highly influential book development organization; they are expanding into four new countries; and they have an uncommonly large number of publications and conference papers emerging from the project.
- **Saide has emerged from this initiative as a stronger organisation.** They have thoughtfully used project management tools to improve their functioning, but also to strengthen other Saide projects. Some of these processes, as well as the reflective Learnings Question process, have focused ASb – and Saide more broadly – on how to manage change, and especially driving change through partners. What was also evident in this evaluation is that a project as complex as this required a 'container' organization as sophisticated and strong as Saide is to succeed.

A final question is about **sustainability**. There is no doubt that ASb have considered sustainability and actively worked towards making the project less reliant on the central office over time. This is evident in the minimalist resourcing of pilot sites, and then gradually weaning sites off central office support; in the attention paid to building partnerships with organisations that can distribute storybooks widely and/or implement literacy work using their storybooks; in the building of skills of key people through their training (that was widely commented upon); in their research of alternative income revenue models and/or funding sources; and, especially, in the arduous work associated with integrating the project into existing state education systems. This work is hard because while educational authorities recognize that children need to read a lot – and for pleasure (ASb's mandate) - in order to embed new reading practices, a range of constraints push policymakers in the direction of strong preference for graded readers at the expense of storybooks.

There is little doubt that the project is sustainable. But, funding is required to move a strong project on the cusp of take-off, to a level where it can make a significant long-term impact on early mother tongue literacy development in Africa **and** firmly establish a "model" for the thoughtful use of technology to do so, in areas that would not normally be regarded as conducive to this form of delivery.

## THE LONGER SUMMARY

***Outcome 1: LDOs and educators working in African countries use the website successfully to find, create, translate or adapt stories for use in their contexts. Through the website, sufficient stories are available for regular reading practice.***

ASb have produced a supply of storybooks adequate to their task of improving mother tongue literacy in Africa, and the growth in supply continues at a healthy rate. Over half a million storybooks have been downloaded, suggesting use by a significant number of educators with even more learners. These numbers underestimate usage, which suggests beneficiaries probably number over one million (assuming a very conservative two users to one download measure).

A significant number of these users and producers are from remote communities which suggests that skepticism about using an online platform for producing and distributing resources in African contexts seems to have been proved wrong. Moreover, the rapidity of the growth of this repository is a powerful reminder of what an open educational resources model can achieve. It is highly unlikely that this kind of growth would have been possible in a conventional publishing model.

There are challenges – which are discussed in other chapters – but ASb’s concept, and the careful way in which they have managed to pre-empt challenges, demonstrates that these challenges can be overcome.

The African Storybook Initiative successfully “set up an interactive website with a critical mass of stories for early reading”<sup>5</sup>, enabling their target audiences to “access openly licensed digital reading resources of various levels and types”. This is evident in the numbers of users who accessed the website over 30 months since the launch of the website, and the number of downloads of storybooks in that period.

Furthermore, the site was used by many of the target audience to translate, adapt and create stories for use in their contexts, and in order to enrich the library on the ASb site.

More specifically:

**ASb provided a regular supply of storybooks - they met their availability targets:**

- They grew the **storybook stock** from 780 storybooks to 3764 storybooks over 30 months, almost a 500% expansion:
  - Unique stories grew by 637 titles (from 120 to 757) over 30 months, exceeding the ASb target of 600
  - Translated stories grew from 660 to 2680.
  - The ratio of unique to translated + adapted stories is 1:4, significantly ahead of ASb’s OER sustainability target of 1:3.
  - Adapted stories now number 327, up from 0 in June 2014. No target was set for this.
- The number of **languages** in which storybooks appear has now reached 100:

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<sup>5</sup> *Grant start-up Report – International special initiative: February 2013 (Revised, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013), Jennifer Glennie and Tessa Welch*

- At the end of the evaluation period – November 2016 - the ASb website had storybooks in 98 languages, up from 20 in June 2014. By end of December numbers stood at 100. Their target was 30.
- Indigenous African languages account for 68% of storybooks produced. (No numerical target was set but the aim was that it be a site that carried predominantly African language stories).
- ASb have exceeded its “ambitious” long-term target<sup>6</sup> of providing 126 storybooks for four languages – Kiswahili, Lunyole, isiZulu, and isiXhosa. There are 50 storybooks or more in all the main languages of their pilot sites, and far exceeded it in some – like Kiswahili.
- By November 2016 only 14 African countries did **not** have any of their languages represented on the ASb website whereas only 14 African countries did have storybooks in local languages on the ASb website in June 2014. No target was set here.
- **Illustrations** on the site more than tripled over 30 months: from 2608 to 8153. Most were commissioned by ASb (6404) but almost 30% - 1749 - were user-generated. No target was set but ASb aim to increase the proportion of user-generated illustrations.

**ASb were successful in ensuring that potential users could access the storybooks:**

- Monthly average website visitor numbers nearly doubled over thirty months; from 2888 in the first half year to an average of 5545 in the last.
  - **New visitors** are growing at a rate of 3.3% per month, thus increasing by an average of 55 visitors per month.
  - **Returning visitors** have grown steadily, at 2.8% per month.
  - **African visitors** make up 65% of website visitors, up from 51% in the first seven months. This is well ahead of the ASb target of 50%. The monthly growth rate of 4.7% is also significantly larger than the 3% overall visitor growth rate.
  - **Registered user numbers** have grown most rapidly - from an average of 291 in the early days to 1965 in the final 5 months, an average monthly growth rate of 18% or 53 new users per month.
  - **African registered users** now make up 85% of all users.

The ASb website is attracting visitors and users, and especially African visitors, at a steady rate that exceeds ASb’s goals. More importantly, the website analytics and interviews suggest **visitors and users are engaged by the site:**

- Google analytics provides good and remarkably consistent numbers from which an engagement measure can be extrapolated:
  - The website bounce rate has hovered around 41% which is about as good as one can expect barring a technical glitch. It is also significantly better than ASb’s target of 50%.
  - Pages per session has averaged out at about 6.2, which is well above the industry standard of 2 pages per session.

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<sup>6</sup> This ‘ambitious target’ is based on the *Global Book Fund Feasibility Study – Final Report, April 2016*. Accessed at [http://www.r4d.org/sites/resultsfordevelopment.org/files/resources/R4D-IEP\\_GBF\\_Full%20Report\\_%20web.pdf](http://www.r4d.org/sites/resultsfordevelopment.org/files/resources/R4D-IEP_GBF_Full%20Report_%20web.pdf)



- The average duration per session has ranged from about 7½ minutes to 6½ minutes, again well above the industry standard of 3 minutes.
- Moreover, the website comes up on the first page of a search using likely search terms like “African+stories”, “Africa+literacy”, etc – another indicator of good practice.
- The number of stories **downloaded** from the website globally, but especially in Africa and in languages of Africa, is increasing and exceeds ASb’s targets:
  - By the end of November 2016, 559 413 storybooks had been downloaded at an average of 18 647 per month over 30 months.
  - Some 82% of these downloaded storybooks are written in indigenous languages.
- The monthly average **download number has more than doubled**: in the first seven-month period 14 602 downloads were recorded per month while in the last five-month period there were 31 566 downloads of 2769 titles. This excludes downloads from partner sites like iMlango and WorldReader – who load stories onto their sites which are then downloaded independently of ASb - which are significant.

Taken together this suggests that viewers and users are finding the website easily, finding it easy to navigate, downloading stories they want, and are engaged by its content. In addition, ASb have evaluated and then re-designed the website to make it more responsive (for use on mobile phones) and more accessible for those who want to create, adapt or translate stories.

***Outcome 2: LDOs and educators working in African countries successfully use the stories in a variety of ways (pedagogic and technical) for early literacy in their contexts.***

ASb’s work - within pilot sites and through partners - to improve the way in which educators “**use** African storybooks for different pedagogical/early literacy purposes” is having results. While ASb have met their numerical targets, it is also clear that the quality of their impact is variable.

Clearly measures of website visits (especially returning visitors), users and downloads are important indicators of **use**; they capture the numbers of users beyond those reached in pilot sites or through partners, and they tell an impressive story. These are captured in the discussion of Outcome 1. In addition, ASb have - easily – met the beneficiary targets set for this outcome:

- By the end of 2016 they reported that 541 (257M and 284F) **known** educators (from pilot sites only) had used the ASb storybooks. In addition, however, through the work of known partners, 8734 educators (2602M and 6132 F) used ASb storybooks with children. This way exceeds the target of 580 educators, 193 men and 387 women.

**Pilot sites fostered excitement, encouraged storybook production and use, and were useful concept testing sites:**

The mid-term evaluation, and case study 2 evaluation, provides many examples of ASb’s positive impact on pedagogy at **pilot sites**. In this evaluation similar patterns were evident:

- Observation of classroom practice and interviews with teachers indicated that **access** to mother tongue storybooks, and the fact that they are **attractively illustrated**, has excited teachers.
- Many commented on the importance of **ASb training** (especially) in giving them the confidence to teach differently; it had, they said, encouraged them to experiment with more learner-centred pedagogies.

- A few also mentioned the **confidence they had developed to create and translate stories**, and attributed this to ASb training, the pilot site resources, and the feeling that they were “part of a movement”. This had engendered high levels of pride.
- The African Storybook work within pilot site schools has **created an interest by other (non-involved) teachers** and learners who see the excitement of those in classrooms where stories are projected.

In the best sites there is a sense of excitement and agency, which suggests this will continue to grow. The website – as a free repository of storybooks – is critical to underpin this continued growth, as is ongoing training support.

It is as clear in this evaluation - as it was in the mid-term evaluation - that socially cohesive pilot sites benefit from resourcing and training at a much higher multiple than do others. It was at these sites that the idea of being part of a “movement” was most often mentioned. It is also true – from the limited observation during this evaluation – that especially poorly resourced schools in areas in which deprivation was evident – are struggling to make good use of storybooks.

It seems likely that the following are necessary for take-off: social cohesion, an influential champion (sometimes an individual, sometimes officials in a school department), support and training to use technology and storybooks appropriately, and some sustained resourcing.

The work at pilot sites – accompanied by ASb’s impressive processes to reflect on practice - did achieve their primary purposes, namely:

- Raising interest in mother tongue literacy development and OER as a means through which practices could be improved
- Providing spaces where they could test out and learn about the validity of a number of dimensions of their overall concept.

**ASb were exceptionally successful in building partnerships through which storybooks were produced, distributed, and used:**

ASb have built a strong set of partnerships of individuals and organisations who both advocate (see Chapter 3) and who **use the ASb materials** in new and creative ways. The latter either work directly with teachers, or teacher educators or education departments, or ‘distribute’ ASb storybooks to a much wider audience through their websites.

In this sense, ASb are well on their way to achieving their vision of a ‘project of partners’ where the website resource and the project’s vision ‘is increasingly independent of the main project team’<sup>7</sup>. These partners provide **the promise of sustainability**, namely that mother tongue storybooks offered through an open resources model can continue to be produced and used, at minimal cost to ASb’s central office; the **richness of new ideas**, and ideas that inform and shape ASb’s approach to this endeavor; and the **means to spread new ideas** about literacy development, education generally, OER and ASb itself way beyond what is possible through ASb’s current social media efforts.

Three points are worth highlighting:

- Some of the partnerships, like iMlango, an NGO working with the Kenyan education department, **borders on being a systemic initiative** in the sense of how closely integrated it is with Kenya’s

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<sup>7</sup> *Grant start-up Report – International special initiative: February 2013 (Revised, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013), Jennifer Glennie and Tessa Welch*

national schooling system. Partnerships with ‘shadow’ systems like these are worth pursuing as they provide alternative routes into State systems.

- The online nature of ASb – a website offering OER - **sets it up for ‘viral’ distribution (and production)**. This seems to be happening at a rate underestimated by ASb with individuals and organisations finding the website, recognizing that they offer free materials, using these or developing stories for or donating stories to the website.
- Formal agreement with partners are important – both because the discussions that occur in constructing these clarify expectations and because they provide a space to advocate for ASb’s ideas – but the **relationships with enthusiastic individuals have proved vitally important** and must be nurtured.

***Outcome 3: There is growing recognition that openly licensed stories have a significant role to play in supporting early literacy development, particularly for very young African children.***

The African Storybook Initiative has had an outsized influence on the **debate about how and why open educational resources** can be used to improve early child literacy development in Africa. Its influence went well beyond simply ensuring a ‘growing *recognition*’ of OER, both in terms of numbers and in terms of the quality of that influence.

**The numbers exceed targets comfortably:**

ASb achieved 15 times its advocacy target: over 15 690 against a target of 1 000<sup>8</sup>. These numbers are both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ in the sense that some partners are actively engaged in promoting ASb and OER, while others are – at this point – simply interested in hearing more about OER and the African Storybook Initiative:

- ASb’s **network of advocacy partners** continues to grow and now stands at 55 individuals and organisations listed on their website as active partners
- Organisations or individuals listed on the partner grid with a **record of independent engagement** – not just passive ‘partners’ – stands at 98. In all the grid lists 164 individuals and partners as having some form of engagement with ASb
- Attendees at **pilot site advocacy events** number 10 212 since the project started (although these numbers were not collected in 2016 and so are, likely, an under-estimate)
- The number of people - authors, academics, and other influencers - **attending conference sessions, or story development workshops**, run by ASb reached 4030 by the end of 2016
- **Mailing list numbers** increased from 809 to 1000 during 2016. These organisations and/or individuals receive regular newsletters from ASb on its work, and on OER.

More impressive was ASb’s success in terms of **systemic implementation**. ASb’s commitment was having ‘at least one government department *explore ways* for the provision of openly licensed materials’. Their beneficiary target was “between 3 300 and 10 000 educators”.

ASb have comfortably exceeded these targets, both in quality and quantity:

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<sup>8</sup> *These numbers are drawn from the Outcome 3 data in the 2016 Annual Report to Comic Relief, February 2017 where the totals for up to the end of 2016 have been corrected to be the sum of the numbers beneath it.*

- They have signed **formal agreements and begun working** with four government departments providing Grade 1 to 3 schooling in South Africa and Kenya.
  - Two of these - the Department of Basic Education in South Africa and the Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development – have national reach.
  - The two other partnerships – with the KwaZulu-Natal Education Library, Information and Technology Service and the Reading Support Programme (both in South Africa) work in KwaZulu-Natal and North West/Limpopo provinces respectively.
- Through these agreements ASb has easily exceeded its **beneficiary targets**:
  - ASb’s annual data report form shows that **150 people will benefit directly**, and by this ASb mean those with whom they have directly engaged (often decision-makers)
  - One province’s printed teacher’s manuals alone – not counting other partnerships or electronic distribution - will be **used by 5 000 educators**. In total the numbers of educators benefitting are certain to exceed the top end of their direct beneficiary target of 10 000.

By the end of 2016, over 500 000 children are estimated to have been indirect beneficiaries<sup>9</sup>. This is more than the ASb target for indirect beneficiaries of “between 100 000 to 300 000”. The number will increase further in the period 2017 to 2020, where 600 000 children and their teachers will be exposed to African Storybooks through USAID’s Reading Support project in two South African provinces.

  - ASb’s systemic integration work within **teacher education**, regarded as vital by the mid-term evaluators because “it has a multiplier effect in terms of children reached”, has been less successful. Although a number of translations and storybooks have been created, there are no examples of student teachers using the storybooks in classrooms. ASb commissioned a case study evaluation in order to guide its future work in this regard, and has developed a strategy about how to do so in 2017.

**The quality of ASb’s influence on OER debates and practice exceeds merely “achieving greater recognition”:**

To assess whether “minds have been changed” regarding the use openly licensed resources it is important to consider the quality of the ASb’s influence. This evaluation identified a number of especially powerful examples of the quality of this influence:

- A remarkable **amount of research is being undertaken**, by the project itself, by partners, and by academics and post-graduate students interested in the field. The results are being used to inform project implementation (often through the research being done as part of ASb’s Learnings Questions), and much is being published and thus reaching a much larger audience.
- The initiative is **being noticed, published and used by global influencers**. Here are three examples:

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<sup>9</sup> See *Annual Data Form for 2016 -Part D Actual No under 18 benefiting to end 2016, submitted to Comic Relief*

- **The Global Book Fund** - in an influential review of local language supplementary readers for early reading conducted by RTI International<sup>10</sup> - both cites ASb's contribution to global thinking about book development and provision and uses their typology of early literacy reading levels.
- African Storybook have been invited onto one of the technical working groups of the Washington-based **Global Book Alliance** and is part of the discussions of how to transform book development, delivery and use in the developing world.
- ASb are discussed in two other influential publications - *Global Open Policy Report 2016* funded by the Hewlett Foundation and *Open Educational Resources: Policy, Costs and Transformation*, a UNESCO publication.
- ASb's impact on **planners and activists involved in systemic change** has also been significant. Here are a few examples:
  - The Kenyan Institute for Curriculum Development were initially reluctant to use African Storybooks. Now they are using them but more importantly perhaps, they have asked ASb to advise them about how they might use OER as a model to address reading materials provision in Kenyan schools more generally
  - The provincial implementation with KwaZulu-Natal's DoE ELITS demonstrated, vividly, how much further their grant for library provisioning would go if content they purchased was free and only the printing had to be paid for. This working example of the benefits of OER has led to further requests for materials in 2017.
  - Molteno (as we note in Chapter 2) was a reluctant ASb partner. At first they insisted on charging for their Readers. After much discussion they released many of their Readers for open licence use and "now (ASB is) working very closely with them"<sup>11</sup>.
  - Oxford Publishers have given African Storybook verbal support in their drive to popularize OER. Although this has not translated into concrete action, it is a rare move for a publisher.

### **ASb's influence is expanding beyond the three pilot countries:**

A final indication of ASb's influence is its successful **expansion** beyond the three pilot countries. This expansion is both:

- **Deliberate:** By November 2016 ASb had developed important beachheads in four new countries - Ethiopia, Ghana, Zambia and Rwanda – with Ethiopia significantly more advanced than the other three<sup>12</sup>.
- **Spontaneous:** In a country like Nigeria – to which ASb has not travelled – organisations are using the openly licensed materials widely in reading camps with some 20 000 beneficiaries (according to the user, USAID-funded TELA and the American University of Nigeria). This is one of a number of examples of this kind of independent use of ASb's openly licensed materials.

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<sup>10</sup> *Global Book Fund Feasibility Study - Final Report, April 2016*. Accessed at [http://www.r4d.org/sites/resultsfordevelopment.org/files/resources/R4D-IEP\\_GBF\\_Full%20Report\\_%20web.pdf](http://www.r4d.org/sites/resultsfordevelopment.org/files/resources/R4D-IEP_GBF_Full%20Report_%20web.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> *E-mail correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017*

<sup>12</sup> *This section is based on the three internal ASb reports on new country developments; Ethiopia, Ghana and Rwanda*

What is evident is that a great deal of talking and networking with government departments – and influencers - in earlier years was turned into concrete systemic implementation agreements in 2016. Moreover, there are indications that the momentum of these first large systems agreements has set in motion systemic take-up in other South African provinces. That is the power of having a visible model of OER.

This systemic influence is built off a passionate and engaged advocacy base, a base that publishes and disseminates ideas – often through influential think-tanks. It is likely that the low-key work being done by academics and their students will increasingly appear in publication and this, too, will continue to shape the debate.

This advocacy work has been slow and difficult, and still has important points of resistance, especially in publishing. But ASb's influence in global debates is much greater than their size, or their Global south location, might have predicted.

***Outcome 4: Saide's change and project management processes become more rigorous: it understands change better, its ability to manage collaborative relationships improves, and its project management processes become more rigorous.***

The ASb initiative has had a powerful and positive impact on Saide's organizational effectiveness, and much of the learning and systems re being effectively 'mainstreamed':

**New project management systems are working effectively and are being "mainstreamed":**

The new project management and data storage/communication technologies have enabled ASb to function more effectively, and are being 'mainstreamed' into other Saide projects. This is evident in them meeting their predicted target – 26 people in four Saide projects are 'directly benefitting' (the target was 25) through their use of all or parts of Prince2 and Sharepoint.

It is also evident - in internal discussions (recorded in minutes of meetings and learnings papers), and in interviews with staff – that Saide has thoughtfully adapted these technologies before using them in smaller projects.

In addition, although the ASb website is not a project management technology, the learning and activity focused design thinking behind its new iteration is being inserted into Saide's other distance and online education work.

**Collaborative relationships have been managed well, and ASb and Saide have learnt from the experience:**

ASb have grown its number of partnerships significantly, and they vary widely in kind – from relatively closely managed pilot sites or hubs, through formal agreements with partners (small and large, distributors and implementers) who operate with little ASb input through to government systems (provincial and national).

Managing this rapidly growing array of collaborations has been tough but, with a few weaknesses (which ASb acknowledge and are addressing), they have been remarkably successful.

Their learning here has been diffused through Saide, both deliberately in new projects (and in this sense they have met their target of 25 beneficiaries), and through the fact that Saide expertise moves in and out of ASb work and discussions as needed (thus influencing other projects).

In addition, Saide and ASb's commitment to ongoing research and learning is creating a library of important new insights about collaboration and collective impact which is benefiting other Saide projects. In fact, in

order to gather a deeper insight into collective impact a Saide staffer was assigned to develop a briefing paper to ignite more discussion about this issue, using one of its partner organisations as a case study.

### **Change management learning: Saide has benefitted, and Saide has contributed**

Finally, ‘change management learning’ has been applied to at least three new and existing Saide projects and, again, the target of 19 beneficiaries has been met. In reality, this thinking has spread more widely. In interviews with some pilot site co-ordinators – who are not counted above - reference was made to the way in which they were impressed by the way in which ASb central office had managed the project, and how they had learnt from this and applied it in their own local management practices.

It is also important to note that thinking about how to manage within fluid and changing contexts has always been part of Saide’s management strategy. What ASb did, as a “large and complex – continent-wide” initiative was to “make these change discussions more explicit”<sup>13</sup>.

What became evident to this evaluator was that Saide’s existing strengths – its experience managing large projects allied with a thoughtful but methodical approach to managing people - enabled it to manage many of the complexities of this project. In this sense Saide, likely, contributed as much to ASb as the ASb initiative contributed to Saide.

### ***Is the ASb initiative relevant, efficient and effective and sustainable? Is its design relevant and appropriate?*<sup>14</sup>**

The final chapter synthesizes the findings in the rest of this evaluation to answer four over-arching questions:

- Is the initiative **relevant**?
- Is the **design** of the initiative sound, appropriate, and adapted when necessary?
- Is the initiative run **efficiently and effectively**, and is it adaptable?
- Is the initiative paying sufficient attention to **sustainability**?

#### **Is the initiative relevant?**

ASb conceive of relevance as **meeting needs**: providing **affordable access to culturally appropriate texts**, and providing the **means for local creation of texts**. In addition, they define it as having to do with **being recognized**, locally and internationally.

ASb have clearly begun addressing the “need for **affordable access** ... to enjoyable storybooks in the languages of Africa” among educators and librarians working in early literacy development. (See outcome 1). This is evident in the number of storybooks made available on their website in the 30 month of this evaluation, the increasing numbers of African visitors to, and users of, the site.

It is also evident in ASb’s success in making storybooks accessible in contexts where electricity and internet connectivity are non-existent or fragile. This speaks to ASb’s **design appropriacy** strengths: they evaluated how users found their website, and responded through a thoughtful re-design. In addition, they noted trends within Africa and developed a mobile phone reading app which this evaluation suggests will be an increasingly important means of accessing storybooks in Africa. ASb also follow a rigorous website testing

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<sup>13</sup> Interview, Jenny Glennie and Tessa Welch, September 2016

<sup>14</sup> Reference is made to many issues tackled in depth in other chapters. This chapter focuses on how they speak to longer-term sustainability

protocol, another dimension of their work that speaks to their sensitivity to making the initiative relevant to their target audience.

In addition, while using online technology in contexts that ASb knew lacked such access, they also worked hard to find out what worked, or what combination of resourcing was necessary to move the project to ‘take-off’. There were problems with the use of solar to provide power, and with the lack of any technological literacy, and with internet connectivity. But the relevance – and resilience – of this initiative was evident in how pro-actively ASb responded to these challenges, and how creatively many in pilot sites responded.

Relevance is also indicated by the degree to which a project is generative, rather than simply being “consumed”. The ASb’s work in pilot sites, through partners, and through spontaneous take-up suggest that the idea of “**creating early reading materials that are culturally and linguistically appropriate**” has struck a chord in many parts of Africa. Again, this is evident in the remarkable number of stories created, adapted and translated in a short period of time. It is also clear in the passion of people who have found the site through online dabbling, and then approached ASb with offers to expand the project in their jurisdictions, or suggested ways in which storybooks could be printed or used, often in situations where “access to technology and education ... is severely limited”.

Finally, the initiative – and its core idea, using open educational resources to address early literacy development, is being “**recognised and taken up**” **locally and internationally**. This take-up has been through systemic integration in pilot countries, invitations to sit on globally influential think tanks (this organization also cited and made use of ASb’s literacy standards), and contracts to advise governments in the use of OER more broadly than simply in early literacy development.

All of these speak to a central question in relevance and sustainability, namely “is there **consistency between the project’s objectives and that of public systems**, nationally, sectorally, provincially or at a district level? In other words, if the project can attract support from these parties its ability to sustain itself, and go to scale is increased.

It is clear that the foundations are in place: they are addressing an expressed need, they are working with systems (government and the large shadow NGO systems), and they are developing into a size that makes people take notice. A remaining relevancy challenge is reading for *pleasure*. No-one denies that this is important but, as ASb is finding, cash and time-strapped institutions in Africa argue that while the basics (i.e. basic graded readers that teachers can use to develop literacy, and a simple literacy development process) are not in place, “reading for pleasure” and “trans-languaging” literacy approaches remain a “luxury”.

#### **Is the initiative run efficiently and effectively, and is it adaptable?**

ASb have worked effectively and demonstrated real adaptability. Typically, efficiency and effectiveness of assessment by examining an organisation’s **implementation and monitoring strategy**:

- Is the implementation period realistic?
- Is there an implementation plan with clearly defined responsibilities?
- And a monitoring and evaluation plan?
- Has the project developed success indicators (financial, physical and impact)?

Implementation and M&E plans were put in place, proved to be realistic and where they may not have been, were adapted in what was a very thoughtful implementation. Indicators were developed at the start of the project, and regularly monitored. In addition, ASb developed further indicators – or learnings questions – to guide their thinking and execution as the project proceeded. Financial and management indicators were



drawn from Saide's rigorous budget and personnel management processes, and strengthened through the use and integration of the Prince2 project management tool.

More impressively, these processes were not implemented rigidly. Instead, ASb permitted staff the freedom to explore, and through their reflection processes, to problem-solve and adapt to the changing contexts in which they worked. (See outcome 4)

One concern did emerge. Although ASb have a strong team they do seem overly dependent – managerially – on its project leader. ASb have struggled to attract people with the mix of skills and knowledge necessary to co-ordinate different parts of the project. Attempts to find a partner development coordinator were “thwarted by South Africa's then chaotic work permit requirements”<sup>15</sup>. ASb did recruit two excellent in-country coordinators but, towards the end of 2016, the Ugandan co-ordinator died. They also have excellent staff co-ordinating story development and publishing. So the problem is not “bench strength” – the team's capabilities are exceptional. It is about who makes the leadership decisions; about who provides strategic direction.

In order to grow this project, it would seem this is a nut that needs to be cracked.

An effective organization also has a post-implementation “maintenance” (or sustainability) strategy. This has, as we explain below, been central to ASb's thinking throughout the project but especially in 2016.

### **Sustainability:**

ASb asked that sustainability be assessed not in terms of whether they have, or even are likely to, achieve sustainability but whether they were “**paying sufficient attention** to the sustainability of its results”. The short answer to this is a categorical, “Yes”: ASb documentation is laced with questions about how they can ensure that the initiative continues after central ASb support is removed.

ASb has, since its inception but especially in its plan for 2016/2017, highlighted the importance of systemic implementation; of having the ASb integrated into public systems, including schooling, teacher education and libraries ‘in a manner that enables scale.’

Their ‘Learnings Question 5’ addresses this issue in more detail, as does their collective impact research, and ASb have in the last year made significant efforts to find funding – both through grants, partners and fees – to grow the project. All of these point to a serious focus on maintaining – and growing - the project.

This evaluation is a little more ambitious and does, tentatively, explore **whether ASb are – at this stage – likely to be sustainable in the longer-term**. Making judgments about sustainability generally requires examining a project in one or more of its dimensions<sup>16</sup>:

- **Has ASb secured continued funding?**
  - Predictable continued funding is critical. The initiative is succeeding, but needs consolidation. It is necessary to fund at least the maintenance and improvement of the technology and the

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<sup>15</sup> Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, February 2017

<sup>16</sup> This section is based on two articles - *Evaluation's Role in Supporting Initiative Sustainability* by Heather Weiss, Julia Coffman, and Marielle Bohan-Baker (of the Harvard Family Research Project, 2002) and *Planning for and monitoring of project sustainability: a guideline on concepts, issues and tools* by M. Adil Khan, (a UNDP evaluation advisor, 2000) <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/khan.htm>

<sup>17</sup> Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, February 2017

steady supply of published stories across Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa in order to root down firmly.

- ASb say their funding strategy is “to ensure that various of our services are **paid** for, so we have ensured that any major requests for printing of the storybooks have not been paid for from Comic Relief funds, but paid for, for example, by the three provinces in South Africa”<sup>17</sup>. They have also partnered with organizations like iMlango and World Reader for them to distribute the stories to and be used by large number of children and are, increasingly getting partners to pay for or contribute to the costs of translating of the stories into local languages.
- ASb are working hard on securing new funding and have already had some success. They are pitching for new discrete funding, exploring joint-funding with partners (an area where they have already been successful), researching and implementing new income streams (in addition to the examples above through printing, publishing advice, etc); and by leveraging Saide’s fund-raising expertise and their networks.
- **Has it been able to “operationalize” its ideas?** At an obvious level – the website – the idea of OER is already ‘operationalized’. In 2016 they began showing signs that public systems and partners were beginning to ‘buy’ into the idea of OER, and integrating the idea into their systems. They have also researched what levels of support are optimal for ‘take-off’, moved towards larger and more strategically located implementation hubs. Finally, their ideas are being taken up by influential global policy groups, like the Global Book Alliance, which make it more likely that their ideas will take on a concrete form.

Operationalization is, however, nascent and fragile. While governments are unlikely to ever fund ASb’s core costs, a long-term sustainable project requires persuading governments to increasingly recognize – in policy – the power of ASb’s open publishing model, and pay market price for the services ASb provide.

- **Has it built “deep” relationships with implementing organisations?** Sustainability is more likely when collaborations are of a “higher-order” (such as jointly conceived and funded projects), long-term (rather than once-off), and not only “initiative-driven” (in other words, they are deeper than the ASb and speak to a meeting of minds). ASb have committed to jointly conceived and funded projects in their new strategy, and are already doing so. Moreover, most - especially systemic partnerships but also with quasi-systemic partners like iMlango - are conceived of as long-term relationships. ASb have also skillfully exploited Saide’s networks, and the networks of ‘friends’, to build relationships that go deeper than simply executing this initiative. In other instances, it is shared commitment to an ideal, like OER, that enables ASb to partner with organisations like the Commonwealth of Learning, or OLE Ghana.

An issue to explore is why promotional activity, even in partnerships that are strong, seems to be uni-directional and generally benefitting ASb’s partners more than it benefits them. For example, iMlango who in interviews spoke highly of their partnership, do not formally recognize ASb as a partner on their website or, more importantly, provide a link from their site to ASb’s website. This kind of publicity, and especially linking, is important.

- **Has it “codified” its initiative in policy or practice?** There is certainly increasing support for ASb’s ideas from a growing bod of people; those with formal authority, those who have influence and are

passionate; local people with local credibility; and significant growth in the spontaneous use of ASb by people of all kinds. In terms of concretely etching ASb ideas into their policy, procedures, and legislation, ASb have a way to go. But there is movement: Global think tanks are drawing on and giving credit to ASb's ideas, and state actors are increasingly calling ASb in to advise them on the use of OER within their education systems more broadly.

ASb's **post-pilot operation and maintenance strategy** is in place. They are making good progress on setting in place some of the critical 'sustainability' dimensions which was also key in project discussions. Last year they synthesized their four years of work into **expansion strategy** that works and which they will follow as they expand:

- Design an intervention in which people who form your target audience are prepared to 'invest';
- Test it in a representative set of sites;
- Learn from experience which are the best sites and what represents good practice;
- Based on what they do well, encourage the best site/s to become a 'hub' for the district/country;
- Support them through simultaneous engagement at county level and advocacy at national level.

They sum this up as "let the local lead."<sup>18</sup>

In addition to expansion they need to focus on **consolidation**. Projects often fail at this level – financial support is withdrawn prematurely and the idea dies. Or projects spread themselves too thin, and the idea dies.

It is clear that ASb have demonstrated a proof of concept. Continued demonstration of concept, and advocacy – with governments at local and national levels - requires funding for the central component of the ASb for some years to come. In the next phase, though, the focus should be on this kind of long-term sustainability. It will not be easy, and ASb know this: moving governments from an entrenched process of procuring from publishers to one where OER printed books are included on their lists will be tough and will take years of advocacy, at local levels and higher levels.

Printing will always be a major cost, even when "we manage to print at 1/7 of the cost". "... getting books onto tablets is a real possibility but requires huge government intervention"<sup>19</sup>. This is an important part of ASb's consolidation work moving forward.

The signs are good, but as ASb has found in getting to sign the MoUs, there is a large gap – in time and motivation - between conversations and signing of an agreement.

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<sup>18</sup> *Presentation to E-Learning Africa, Digital storytelling for early readings in marginalised African communities - The African Storybook experience in Kenya, Tessa Welch, May 2016*

<sup>19</sup> *Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, February 2017*

# Overview

## THE PROJECT

The goal of the African Storybook Initiative (ASb) is to address the shortage of African language early reading materials and provide educators and other interested parties with “contextually appropriate books for early reading in the languages of Africa”. The ultimate goal of this is “systemic change to the lives of poor and disadvantaged people.”<sup>20</sup> Unless children develop the ability to read fluently for meaning and enjoyment in a familiar language, the foundations for all future learning are shaky.

ASb want to address the shortage of books through an open publishing model: a website where anyone can access openly licensed storybooks and to which anyone can contribute storybooks. This model will, they believe, ensure that growing numbers of storybooks are available to teachers, parents and librarians as needed, without having to consider the size and buying power of the market for a particular language.

This is necessary, they believe, because of a publishing catch-22 in Africa: they aim to address through their use of open educational resources (OER):

*“Because there is very little reading material, children do not learn to read well or enjoy reading. There is therefore no demand for books. If there is no demand, publishers will not invest in producing books (particularly African language books) to support children learning to read. This vicious cycle results in a continuing dearth of sufficient reading material for young African children to embed reading practices.*

*The African Storybook initiative (ASb) aims to contribute to the improvement of literacy among African children in Sub-Saharan Africa by intervening positively in this vicious cycle.”*

ASb work towards this by:

- Building a website that **provides** attractively illustrated levelled storybooks – without a cost - to encourage *reading for pleasure* and practice, rather than sets of graded readers
- Using the website to **facilitate the development**, adaptation, or translation of storybooks into many languages of Africa
- Work with partners in pilot countries and elsewhere to promote the **pedagogically sound use** of these storybooks in schools, libraries and other sites in Africa, and to encourage people to use the website to create, translate, adapt and comment on stories
- Work with education systems to encourage them to use African storybooks, and to begin implementing an open publishing approach to textbook provisioning.

The project started in 2013, with the website launched in June 2014. It operates in four countries – South Africa, Lesotho, Kenya and Uganda – and is managed by two site co-ordinators in Southern Africa and two country co-ordinators in East Africa.

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<sup>20</sup> 2016 Annual Report to Comic Relief, February 2017 (revised)

# THE EVALUATION

## 2. Purpose

This “accountability” evaluation was conducted towards the end of the first four years of the African Storybook Project (ASb) of the first 30-months from the launch of the website, from June 2014 to November 2016.

Its focus is to provide an external review of what ASb has achieved against the outcomes and indicators agreed with Comic Relief on inception (and spelled out in its Learnings plan May 2013), as well as a review of the validity of its “Theory of Change”.

The evaluation is one of a number conducted by and on the ASb. This evaluation draws on these evaluations – most particularly the case studies and mid-term review – and should be read in association with these. While this evaluation does come to findings on the ASb’s four outcomes, and four over-arching questions, the findings are whether ASb has “accounted”. It does not come to independent judgments about the quality of the gains made in literacy or language acquisition, or changes in pedagogical practices. It addresses, simply, the question, “Did ASb achieve what it said it would achieve in terms of the **outcomes** it set itself?”

The key limitation of this evaluation is that fieldwork – interviews and observations – were limited, and so the evaluator draws significantly on the impressive evaluative work the ASb is doing, on self-evaluations by key ASb staff members, and the research done by the case study evaluators.

## 3. The evaluation questions

Simply ticking off indicators associated with outcomes does not necessarily answer bigger questions related to impact, relevance and sustainability (questions highlighted in the DAC Principles for the Evaluation of Development Assistance<sup>21</sup>). ASb have adapted these as follows:

- **Relevance:** Is the initiative meeting a need for affordable access for educators and the children in their care to enjoyable storybooks in the languages of Africa for early reading? Is it meeting a need for the support and development of local initiatives in the creation of early reading materials that are culturally and linguistically appropriate, and in contexts in which access to technology and education have been severely limited in the past? To what extent is the initiative being recognised and taken up internationally as well as in the pilot countries?
- **Efficiency and effectiveness:** In ASb’s case they address this through two sub-questions - How well is it being run? Is it able to adapt to the evolving needs and conditions, both local and global?
- **Sustainability:** Is the initiative paying sufficient attention to the sustainability of its results?

One over-arching question relates, legitimately, to **the design of the initiative**. Are the activities designed to meet these needs in technologically and pedagogically innovative and theoretically sound ways? Are the changes that have been made/are being made to the project design appropriate? What improvements could be made?

These lines of inquiry are dealt with in the final chapter.

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<sup>21</sup> *The DAC Principles for the Evaluation of Development Assistance, OECD, 1991*

## 4. Desired Outcomes and indicators

The four areas in which the ASb sought to make an **impact** were outlined in their outcomes<sup>22</sup>:

- **Outcome 1:** Literacy development organisations (LDOs) and educators working in African countries use the website successfully to find, create, interact with and translate /adapt stories for use in their contexts. Through the website, sufficient stories are available for regular reading practice.
- **Outcome 2:** Literacy development organisations and educators working in African countries use the stories in a variety of ways (pedagogic and technical) for early literacy in their contexts.
- **Outcome 3:** Growing recognition that openly licensed stories available for versioning for particular contexts and languages have a significant role to play in supporting early literacy development, particularly for very young African children.
- **Outcome 4:** Saide's change management and project management processes become more rigorous. Three sub-outcomes are listed:
  - Saide has a better understanding of changes required by engagement with this project.
  - Saide's ability to manage a growing number of collaborative relationships improves.
  - Saide's project management processes become more rigorous.

These are elaborated through associated indicators. These can be found at the start of each Outcomes chapter.

## 5. A future-focused lens

ASb argue that they “were able to demonstrate that (the ASb) concept was viable - because of success in the pilot sites as well as the interest being shown by larger initiatives – and so (they) were in a position to move towards thinking how the initiative could grow and be sustained.”<sup>23</sup>

Given this ambition this evaluation is written with an eye on ASb's 2016/2017 strategy which they describe as follows:

*“The approach is broadly that maintenance is the first goal: we need to **maintain our website** and a steady stream of stories. In response to the external technical evaluation at the end of 2014, we are re-developing our site to be mobile friendly and responsive in low bandwidth situations for users with a variety of devices. Even though this involves re-development, we regard it as essential maintenance work to adjust to the evolving needs of users.*

*Secondly, we need to consolidate and extend the work in our **pilot sites**. In particular, this entails turning these supported sites into larger ‘hubs’ with less intensive support from ASb.*

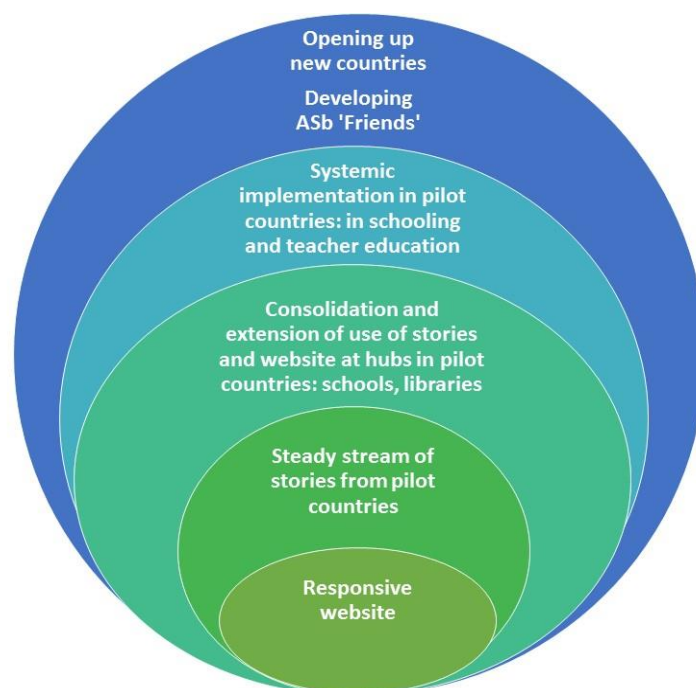
*Thirdly, systemic implementation is key in order to have the impact that is necessary. But expansion is also necessary to become a truly Sub-Saharan African initiative. Together with opening up new countries comes the need to develop and nurture ‘Friends of the ASb’ – a widening circle of people prepared to contribute.”<sup>24</sup>*

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<sup>22</sup> Saide/African Storybook: Terms of Reference - External evaluation of the first four years of the implementation of Saide's African Storybook initiative (undated)

<sup>23</sup> E-mail correspondence, Tessa Welch, December 2016

This changing focus is represented diagrammatically:



## 6. Audience & scope

This external evaluation is being conducted for Comic Relief (the current funder of ASb), other potential funders, the Saide Board of Trustees and management, as well as the African Storybook team. The **scope** of the evaluation, as requested by the ASb in the ToR for this evaluation, includes:

- A review of key ASb documents.
- Engagement with external mid-term formative evaluation.
- Engagement with a hub site in each of East Africa and South Africa/Lesotho.
- Engagement with a government agency working with ASb stories and website in East and South Africa.
- Engagement with one teacher college/faculty working with African Storybook.
- Interviews with Saide international advisors.
- Interviews with members of the Saide/ASb team.

The evaluation **timeline** is June 2014 to November 2016, a period of 30 months.

## 7. Methodology

This evaluation - following the Terms of Reference - is based primarily on **ASb documentation**:

- The website analytics provided by Neil Butcher and Associates is the basis of Outcome 1's discussion
- The ASb "learning questions", pilot site reports and reflections, articles written for conference presentations, the mid-term evaluation and, especially, the five case studies completed as part of this final evaluation, were critical for coming to a judgment about Outcomes 2, 3 and 4.

In addition, the evaluator **visited a few pilot sites** in South Africa, Kenya and Uganda where he:

- **Interviewed** the country or site co-ordinators, and a selection of pilot site staff, teachers and librarians and partners
- **Observed** teachers and librarians (at pilot site schools and libraries), and teachers (working through partners) using African Storybooks in their teaching.

Finally, formal **interviews** (and corridor discussions) with ASb's central office staff, the mid-term evaluators, and some of ASb's international advisors proved invaluable in understanding the project and considering whether it had met its mandate. Ongoing email and Skype discussions with Tessa Welch and Jennifer Glennie – often in response to drafts of this report – served to clarify the initiative's strengths and challenges.

(See appendix 1 for a detailed breakdown of documentation consulted, interviews conducted, and observations undertaken.)



# Outcome 1: Users find, create, use, translate or adapt African storybooks

## EVALUATION FOCUS

The African Storybook initiative's (ASb) first commitment – “Literacy development organisations and educators working in African countries use the website successfully to find, create, interact with and translate or adapt stories for use in their contexts. Through the website, sufficient stories are available for regular reading practice” - making storybooks **available** and **enabling access** to these storybooks. It is about storybook **supply**, and about whether users can **find and use** the storybooks.

A deeper access question is whether the website and initiative is generative: does it help users **create, translate or adapt** storybooks? ASb explain their understanding of availability and access as follows:

*“ASb aims to increase access dramatically to African stories for early reading through a variety of technologically enabled mechanisms.*

*But the project is not only about creating a digital library which is easily searchable. It is about providing tools on the website for people to create, translate and version the stories for their own language contexts.*

*(It) is (also) about methods and formats of delivery of the stories; for example, by projection on classroom wall from a notebook or tablet or mobile phone, or downloading and low cost printing of booklets for children to take home.*

*The theme of access therefore relates to the website: access to stories on the website, the means to create and version stories through the website, and the means to access them from the website.”<sup>25</sup>*

The indicators against which this outcome is to be evaluated are (rephrased as evaluation questions):

### Availability

- How many openly licensed unique **stories** and **illustrations** have been uploaded to the website?
- How many stories have been translated into **African languages**, or unique stories created, or stories adapted (versioned) using the ASb website?

### Access

- How many people have **visited** the website, or become members?
- How many storybooks have been **downloaded** from the website?

The other indicators associated with this outcome overlap with Outcome 2 questions of **use and of agency** and are discussed in the next chapter:

- How many educators use the website successfully to create, translate and adapt stories for early literacy?
- How many partners (in schools, education colleges and NGOs) use the website to find, create, interact with and translate/adapt stories independently for use in their own contexts?

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<sup>25</sup> This appears in an internal ASb document, *Reflection on their 2013 Learnings Framework, 2016*

## FINDINGS SNAPSHOT

ASb have comfortably exceeded the few targets they set relating to the project website. They have also achieved a phenomenal growth in the **supply** of African Storybooks in the 30 months evaluated, and successfully opened **access** to these stories:

- **An interactive website has been set up, and re-designed.** The re-design was to make it more responsive for those reading on mobile phones, and to improve the experience of potential writers creating storybooks.
- **They grew the storybook stock** from 780 storybooks to 3764 storybooks in 98 languages over 30 months, an almost a 500% expansion. Their target was 30 languages.
  - Indigenous African languages account for 68% of storybooks produced.
  - They have 50 storybooks or more in all the main languages of their pilot sites. ASb have exceeded their “ambitious” long-term target<sup>26</sup> of providing 42 storybooks per grade per year in four of the languages of the pilot countries: Kiswahili, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Lunyole.
  - **Illustrations** on the site more than tripled over 30 months: from 2 608 to 8 153. Most were commissioned by ASb (6 404) but almost 30% - 1749 - were user-generated.
- **Access to the website and storybooks increased impressively.**
  - Website visitor numbers nearly doubled over thirty months; from a 2 888 per month average in the first half-year to an average of 5 545 in the last half-year. **African visitors now** make up 65% of website visitors, up from 51% in the first seven months. This is well ahead of the ASb target of 50%.
  - **Registered users** – people who have an interest in creating storybooks - have grown most rapidly - from an average of 291 in the early days to 1965 in the final 5 months (thus adding an average of 53 new users per month). **African registered users** make up 85% of all users and their proportion is growing.
- **Visitors and users are engaged by the site;** once they enter they are far less likely to leave early than the industry averages suggest:
  - Website **bounce** rate has hovered around 41% which is significantly better than the industry standard, and ASb’s target, of 50%.
  - **Pages per session** has averaged out at about 6.2, which is also well above the industry standard of 2 pages per session.
  - The **average duration per session** has ranged from about 6½ to 7½ minutes, again well above the industry standard of 3 minutes.
- **The number of stories downloaded from the website globally, but especially in Africa and in languages of Africa, is increasing and exceeds ASb’s targets:**

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<sup>26</sup> This ‘ambitious target’ is based on a Global Book Alliance study - *Feasibility Study for a Global Book Fund, Results for Development, 2016*

- 559 413 storybooks have been downloaded at an average of 18 647 per month. The number downloaded per month has more than doubled: from 14 602 downloads to 31 566 downloads (of 2769 titles) in November 2016.
- Some 82% of these downloaded storybooks are written in indigenous African languages.

The project also set out to ‘prove’ a concept, namely that openly licensed storybooks provided through a thoughtful mix of online and other technologies could begin addressing the critical shortage of books in Africa, and a shortage of incentive to develop mother tongue literature. This data would suggest that this has been achieved.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. ASb storybooks have been made *available*

A basic measure of meeting the “need for affordable access to enjoyable storybooks” is a count of stories and illustrations available to users on the ASb website. No targets were set.

#### HOW MANY STORIES AND ILLUSTRATIONS HAVE BEEN UPLOADED?

##### *The big picture*

Over 30 months ASb grew their **stock of storybooks** by 2984 titles, a 383% expansion from the 780 storybooks in June 2014 to 3764 at the end of November 2016<sup>27</sup>:

- Unique stories – those newly created by writers – grew by 637 titles (from 120 to 757), exceeding an unofficial and “wildly over-ambitious”<sup>28</sup> target of 600
- Translated stories – the kinds of stories most valuable in an open publishing environment - grew by 2020 storybooks, from 660 to 2680
- Adapted stories now number 327, up from 0 in June 2014.

ASb’s storybook stock is, thus, growing at an annualized rate of 153%, or 12.8% per month. Concretely, this translates into ASb contributors uploading an average of 99 storybooks a month, with the great majority of these being translations of existing titles into new languages.

Number of stories	At launch 3 June 2014	End of evaluation 30 Nov 2016	Growth		Growth %	
			30 months	Per month	Overall	Per month
<b>Totals</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>3764</b>	<b>+ 2984</b>	<b>+ 99</b>	<b>382.6%</b>	<b>12.8%</b>
Unique	120	757	+ 637	+ 21	530.8%	10.2%
Translated	660	2680	+ 2020	+ 67	306.1%	10.9%
Adapted	0	327	+ 327	+ 11	n/a	n/a

<sup>27</sup> ASb collected and translated stories before this in order to create a base stock of storybooks for the website’s launch in June 2014, so the growth is even more impressive if measured from project inception rather than website launch

<sup>28</sup> E-mail correspondence: Tessa Welch, February 2017

**Table 1: Growth in story production over 30 months**

To explore the rate of production of the three kinds of storybooks the 30 months has been broken down into five half-year periods<sup>29</sup>, and a monthly average calculated for each period. A couple of points stand out:

- The average **monthly production numbers for all storybooks** has risen steadily over the five half years, from 66 to 144 per month
- **Translated storybook uploads**, likewise, grew steadily and consistently over the first four half years, ranging from 44 to 77 per month, but then bumped up significantly in the last half year (to 112 per month)
- **Adapted storybook production** is low and very variable.

	Launch	Jun - Dec/14	Jan - Jun/15	Jul - Dec/15	Jan - Jun/16	Jul - Nov/16
<b>Unique</b>	120	151 22 p/m	133 22 p/m	155 26 p/m	98 17 p/m	100 20 p/m
<b>Translated</b>	660	309 44 p/m	310 52 p/m	378 63 p/m	463 77 p/m	560 112 p/m
<b>Adapted</b>	0	0 0 p/m	147 25 p/m	80 13 p/m	38 6 p/m	62 12 p/m
<b>Total</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>+ 460</b> <b>66 p/m</b>	<b>+ 590</b> <b>99 p/m</b>	<b>+ 613</b> <b>102 p/m</b>	<b>+ 599</b> <b>100 p/m</b>	<b>+ 722</b> <b>144 p/m</b>

**Table 2: Rates of story production over 30 months**

Storybook production is healthy, with over 100 books being added monthly. This level of production will adequately meet the needs of institutions wanting to use the books. Production is likely to increase as ASb expand to new countries like Ghana and Ethiopia.

### *Production ratios: Translated + adapted to unique*

The ratio of unique to translated + adapted stories was 1:4 (757 stories: 3007 stories) when this evaluation was conducted, significantly better than the ASb’s target of one unique story to every three translate stories. ASb say this is necessary in order for the “multiplier effect” of OER to work.<sup>30</sup>

By the end of November 2016:

- New book production constituted about 20% of the total number of books produced
- Translations made up 71% of storybooks uploaded
- Adapted books made up the final 9% of books created (and this has remained pretty steady since the first adapted books appeared in the first half of 2015).

<sup>29</sup> *The first half year is seven months long and the final half year is five months long. To factor out these differences we work with monthly averages within each of these five periods.*

<sup>30</sup> *Unpublished ASb document, Funder feedback – Web analytics. The document is undated but seems like a reflection on Comic Relief feedback to an annual data report. It says it contains the “minimum data that needs to be collected and tracked for funder accountability purposes.”*

	Pre-launch	Jun - Dec/14	Jan - Jun/15	Jul - Dec/15	Jan - Jun/16	Jul - Nov/16
Unique	15.4%	21.9%	22.1%	22.9%	21.6%	20.1%
Translated	84.6%	78.1%	69.9%	67.8%	69.7%	71.2%
Adapted	0	0%	8%	9.3%	8.7%	8.7%

**Table 3: Storybook production by proportion of the total over 30 months**

Translated and adapted books as a proportion of the total – 85% at launch and 80% at the end of November 2016 - augurs well for the sustainability of an open licence publishing model. More encouraging is that the growth of both these categories in 2016:

- Translations grew by 66% or 5.6% per month<sup>31</sup> (from 1657 to 2680 storybooks) while all books grew by 54% (or 5% per month).
- Adapted books grew by 44% or 4% per month (227 to 327 storybooks) while unique (newly written) books grew more slowly, at 35% (3.2% per month).

### HOW AFRICAN IS THE ASB WEBSITE?

ASb storybooks are now available in over 100 **languages**. At the end of the evaluation period – November 2016 – the number stood at 98 languages, up from 20 in June 2014. The ASb target was 30.

This five-fold increase – which means that ASb has **added almost three new languages (2.6 to be precise) each month for 30 months** – is remarkable.

Indigenous African languages (as opposed to colonial languages like English, French, or Portuguese) now account for 68% of storybooks produced.

ASb have met their initial target of having 50 storybooks in all the main languages of its pilot sites. They have exceeded their more “ambitious” long-term target<sup>32</sup> of providing 42 storybooks *per grade per year* in four of the languages of the pilots sites: Kiswahili, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Lunyole.

The 22 languages that have met this 42 storybook target – albeit in total rather than per grade or level – totaled 2879 storybooks at the end of November 2016. A few interesting trends are evident.

<sup>31</sup> Calculated over 11 months , from January to November 2016

<sup>32</sup> This ‘target’ is based on a Global Book Alliance study - *Feasibility Study for a Global Book Fund, Results for Development, 2016*. It is regarded by ASb as ‘ambitious’ in that these targets have not been achieved by anyone, even in official provision of readers in relatively wealthy countries like South Africa

Language	Number of stories	
	November 2015	November 2016
1. English	507	704
2. Afrikaans	103	221
3. Kiswahili	136	193
4. isiZulu	133	177
5. Lunyole	126	152
6.		
7. Portuguese	23	138
8. French	121	130
9. isiXhosa	82	126
10. Ng'aturkana	100	119
11. Luganda	111	116
12. Setswana	56	104
13. Sepedi	56	90
14. Lugbarati	84	90
15. Oluwanga	76	76
16. Lumasaaba	68	69
17. Maa	57	62
18. Sesotho (Lesotho)	38	62
19. isiSwati	26	57
20. Kikamba	50	52
21. Lugbarati (Official)	50	50
22. isiNdebele	30	49
23. Tshivenda	7	43

**Table 4: Storybook languages**

Some 59% (1686) of these stories are in indigenous African languages.<sup>33</sup> All ASb approved stories must have an English version - so this reduces the proportion of African to 'colonial' languages.

Predictably, Kiswahili (193), isiZulu (177 stories) and isiXhosa (126) are, with English (704), Afrikaans (221), Portuguese (138) and French (130), the most common languages in which stories are written. Kiswahili and isiZulu are also in regions where ASb has pilot sites.

More interestingly, some small languages – like Lunyole, from a pilot site in Uganda (152), Ng'aturkana, from a remote Kenyan pilot site (119) and Luganda (116) – are consistently producing stories in large numbers, and over a long period of time.

<sup>33</sup> If Afrikaans is counted as an indigenous African language then the percentage rises to 66%.

The translations into French and Portuguese are important to ASb in order to increase their penetration into Francophone and Lusophone Africa. Much of this translation has been managed by ASb's partners (see Chapter 2).

One of ASb's aims is to increase the number of stories *originally* created in an African language.

Their launch website had storybooks in 20 languages but of the 120 unique storybooks 73 (61%) were written in English originally.

Twenty-two were written in isiZulu and 25 in languages of pilot countries. Of the 660 translations, 649 were translated into 20 pilot country languages<sup>34</sup>.

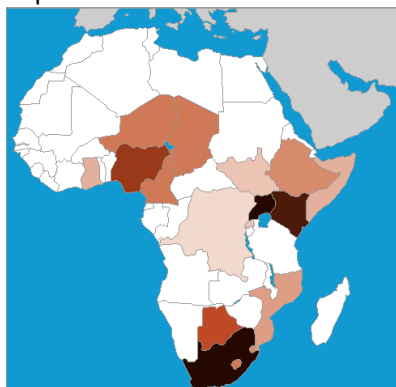
African language production spiked late in 2016, an indication of the momentum the ASb has achieved in 2016. While pilot sites and commissions continued to expand the library of storybooks, ASb's expansion into<sup>35</sup> places like Ghana, Zambia and Ethiopia contributed significantly:

- From Zambia, 30 titles in four African languages were uploaded
- From Ghana, 10 titles in 11 languages were contributed
- From Ethiopia, another 19 storybooks in Amharic and 10 in Afaan Oromo (bringing the total number of Ethiopian language titles to 59).

The "exciting part" of this is that there are "also people wanting to experiment with other languages, like Arabic or Lamnso (in Cameroon) ... in countries we have never visited!" said Welch.<sup>36</sup>

ASb set out to be a website for **Anglophone** sub-Saharan Africa and so focused on languages that enabled their storybooks to reach these countries. What has happened is that ASb is now expanding well beyond this.

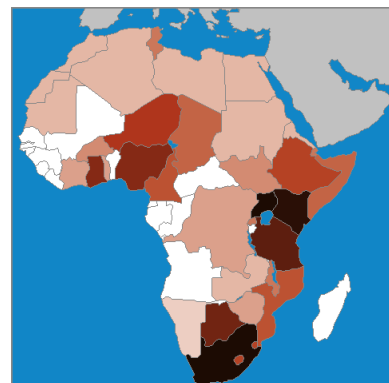
September 2015



*The darker the shade of brown the larger the number of stories in languages from that country.*

*White areas indicate that no stories in local languages are available there.*

October 2016



When the project began only 14 African countries had storybooks in local languages on the ASb website. By November 2016 only 14 African countries did **not** have any of their languages represented. These two maps illustrate how ASb's presence has grown over just a year, from September 2015 to October 2016<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> 2014 Annual report to Comic Relief, February 2015

<sup>35</sup> In most cases it is not ASb's expansion that drives story production. Instead, it is independent story production that leads ASb to expand its systemic work to these countries.

<sup>36</sup> E-mail correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017

<sup>37</sup> Pan Commonwealth Forum presentation, Jenny Glennie and Tessa Welch, October 2016

## HOW MANY OPENLY LICENSED ILLUSTRATIONS HAVE BEEN UPLOADED?

**Illustrations** on the site tripled over 30 months: from 2608 at launch to 8153<sup>38</sup> in November 2016. This is a growth of 213% over 28 months, or an average monthly growth rate of 7.6%.

These illustrations are of two kinds: 5092 are composite illustrations and 3061 “elements” (bits of commissioned artist illustrations) that writers can use to adapt or create their artwork.

Most were commissioned by ASb and 22% - 1749 - were user-generated (illustrations uploaded by users rather than the central ASb publishing office). In 2015’s annual report ASb noted that it was “important to invest in continued expansion of the image bank through commissioned high quality illustrations, but (to shift) from commissioning mainly South African illustrators, to illustrators in other African countries. Although most commissioned art is still developed by artists in South Africa, the ASb is increasingly using artists elsewhere in Africa. By the end of November, they were using two artists in Kenya, eight in Uganda, and one each in Lesotho and Ethiopia.

ASb are also committed to decreasing the number of illustrations commissioned by the central office. Of the 120 unique storybooks on the site when ASb launched, 61 came with illustrations while 59 were commissioned by ASb; a 50:50 split. ASb are now illustrating fewer than 50% of new storybooks. As an example of the pattern at African Storybook Welch provides this anecdote:

*“Around October last year 246 (38%) of 639 of new English stories were illustrated by ASb illustrators, 163 (26%) were donated, and the rest (36%) were independently created storybooks using images from a range of sources (including our image database), donated storybooks, or user images. This is quite significant. If we had stuck merely with commissioned illustrators, we would have had far fewer stories and artwork. And then if you understand that the English stories are translated into many different languages, the savings from openly licensed storybooks is significant”<sup>39</sup>.*

ASb commission “high quality digital illustrations” at an “average cost of US\$ 100 for a 12 page book”. Because each translation and adaptation makes use of the same illustrations, “the initial investment is spread across the 20 or more versions of the book. In addition, the illustrations are stored in the African Storybook image bank and can be used not only for translations and adaptations of a storybook, but combined to create new storybooks.<sup>40</sup>”

## PROVING THE CONCEPT?

This growth rate – both the number of stories and range of languages is also a powerful testament to the open publishing model which enables one story to be adapted into a number of slightly different stories, or translated into many languages, quickly and easily and cost-effectively.

As Welch says:

*“Our publishing model facilitates the rapid growth in numbers of storybooks – particularly from translations. We also get maximum value from commissioned illustrations because of the reusability*

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<sup>38</sup> Neil Butcher and Associates, Excel sheet called ‘data for Lisa’, November 2016

<sup>39</sup> E-mail correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017

<sup>40</sup> Pan Commonwealth Forum presentation, Jenny Glennie and Tessa Welch, October 2016



*of openly licensed illustrations. In addition, the digital nature of this project and the fact that it is open licence facilitates donations, which is also important.”*

The website facilitates growth because stories can be created, independently, and in a number of different ways:

- As an indigenous African language first and then translated into English (or some other ‘common’ language, like French or Kiswahili) before being translated into smaller regional languages
- Through translation from English versions of ASb approved storybooks
- Written simultaneously in an indigenous language and English, which is what happens quite often at pilot sites.

As Glennie and Welch<sup>41</sup> suggest, “the initiative (demonstrates) that it is possible to produce a surprisingly large number of storybooks and translations of storybooks in a relatively short period of time”. ASb have demonstrated that this is possible in the first 30 months of this initiative.

The Global Alliance seem to agree. Their survey of early reading books in African languages in 11 African countries showed that “countries with the largest numbers of available soft copies were Kenya (520), Uganda (261), and Ethiopia (207) (and) ... a significant number of the titles in Kenya and Uganda were from Saide’s African Storybook Project ... Saide’s African Storybook Project stands out as a major innovator in supplying high-quality materials that can be easily adapted and shared through the use of Creative Commons.”<sup>42</sup>

## 8. The ASb website is *accessible and engaging*

A library of storybooks is only valuable if people are using it. The number of visitors, and the degree to which they engage with the website, are important first measures of **access** (as opposed to availability).

### HOW MANY PEOPLE VISIT THE ASB WEBSITE?

In total, 139 219 people – 4640 on average per month - had visited the ASb site by the end of November 2016. Another 1965 had registered as users.

The average monthly number of visitors to the ASb website has almost doubled over 30 months - from 2888 per month (June and December 2014) to 5545 (July and November 2016):

- All categories grew by about 3% per month, an average increase of almost 90 visitors per month
- Returning visitors grew more slowly than new visitors
- Registered users (people who use the site to create storybooks) was the most rapidly growing category.

No targets were set for the growth in visitors but, by any measure, this is an impressive growth rate.

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<sup>41</sup> Pan Commonwealth Forum presentation, Jenny Glennie and Tessa Welch, October 2016

<sup>42</sup> From Saide’s ‘Submission for State of the Commons report’, October 2016

	June to December 2014	July to November 2016	Growth rate
<b>Total visitors</b>	<b>2888 per month</b> <b>20 218 in 7 months</b>	<b>5545 per month</b> <b>27 724 in 5 months</b>	92% increase in average monthly visitors
<b>New visitors</b>	<b>1685 per month</b> <b>11 797 in 7 months</b>	<b>3335 per month</b> <b>16 675 in 5 months</b>	97.9% increase in average monthly new visitors
<b>Returning visitors</b>	<b>1203 per month</b> <b>8421 in 7 months</b>	<b>2210 per month</b> <b>11 050 in 5 months</b>	83.7% increase in monthly returning visitors

Table 5: Growth in monthly averages of visitors between the first half year and last half year

In principle, websites should aim at a similar number of new and returning visitors. This indicates that they are both successful at recruitment (their publicity is working) and at engagement (persuading visitors that the site is worth a return visit). There are two ways of exploring this:

- **Comparing each as a proportion of the total number of visitors:**

- New visitors constituted 58.3% of visitors in the first half year, and this increased to 60.1% by November 2016
- Returning visitors declined from 41.7% in the first half year to 39.9% by November 2016.

These changes – in beginning and end monthly averages - are so small that they are, essentially, meaningless.

- **The relative rates of growth of new vs returning visitors.** Over time they should converge: At the beginning of a project returning visitors will, logically, be small – one looks before returning - while new visitors will remain steady (or grow slightly then tail off).

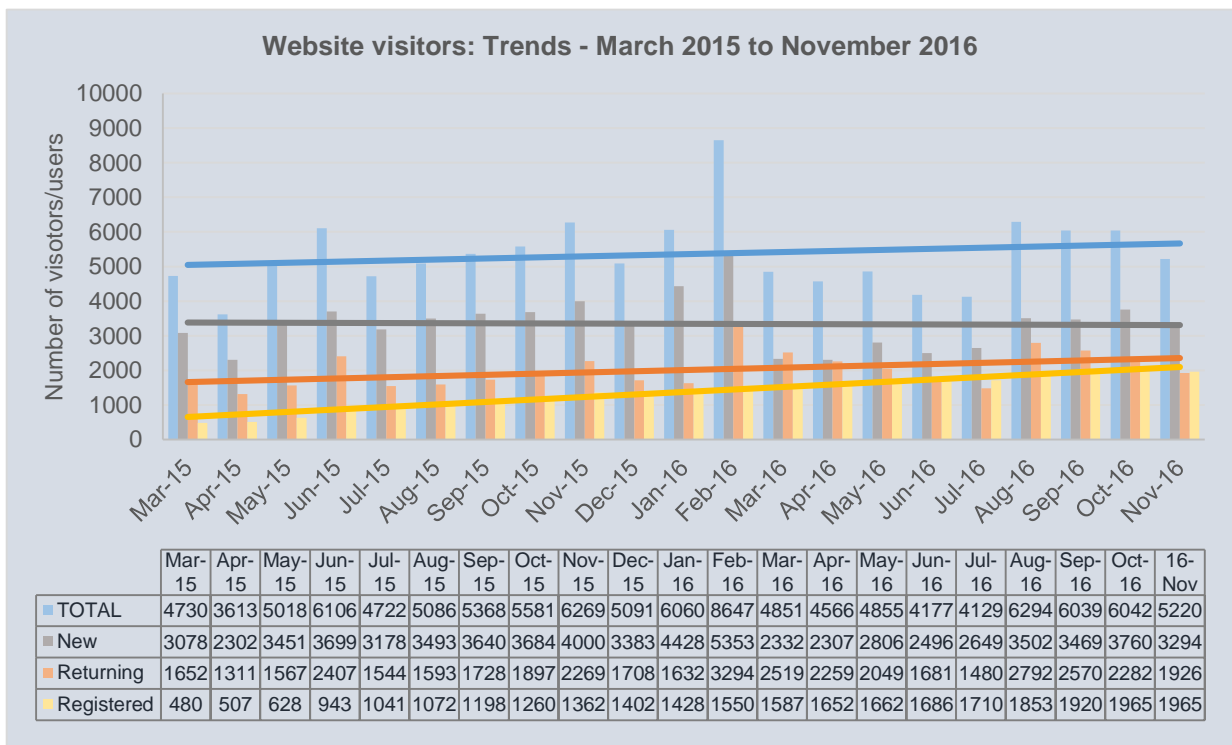


Figure 1: Growth trends for new and returning visitors, and registered users over 30 months

Figure 1<sup>43</sup> reflects this. The new visitor line is almost completely flat (declining ever so slightly over time), while returning visitors show a healthy growth (off a low base but with no sign, yet, of peaking).

## ARE REGISTERED USERS INCREASING?

Figure 1 also demonstrates that ASb’s registered users are the fastest growing of the three user/visitor categories. If March 2015<sup>44</sup> is regarded as the first accurate accounting – because ASb scrubbed some 1000 user names from their database in February 2015 - then growth looks as follows:

	March 2015	November 2016	Growth rate
<b>Registered users</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>1 965</b>	309.4% expansion (15.5% per month) 74 more storybook producers per month <sup>45</sup>

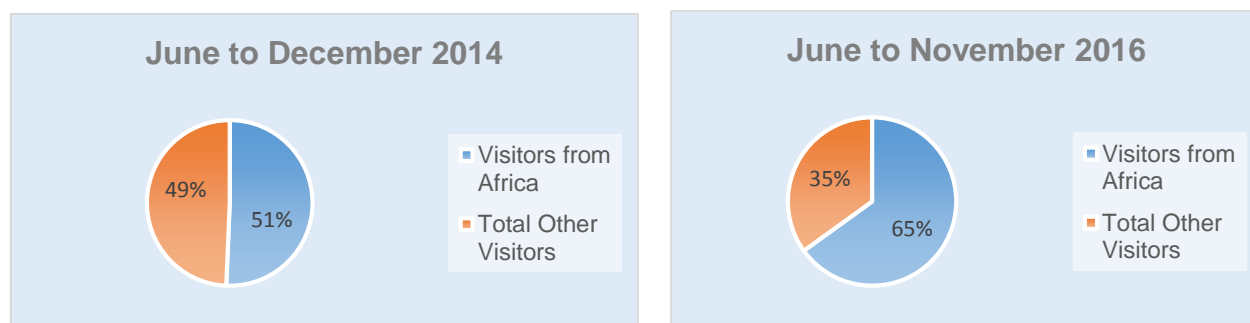
**Table 6: Growth in registered users**

As noted earlier, registered users are the fastest growing category of “visitors” to the website which is important because they are, likely, storybook producers.

## HOW MANY OF THESE VISITORS AND USERS ARE FROM AFRICA?

One of ASb’s goals was to make this an African site. Part of this was the development of storybooks in the languages of Africa and, in particular, indigenous language. They’ve achieved that.

They have also consistently increased the number of African visitors to the website: **65% of visitors** in the July to November 2016 period were African, up from 51% in the first seven months. This is well ahead of the ASb target of 50%.



**Figure 2: Changing proportion of African visitors – Start vs end of 30 months**

<sup>43</sup> Calculations that include registered users are calculated from March 2015 because at this point “unverified accounts” were removed from the data sets, and registered user numbers dropped from 1328 (in February 2015) to 480 (in March 2015).

<sup>44</sup> ASb did a ‘clean out’ of unverified accounts in February 2015. Almost 1000 user names were removed at this point. This suggests that March 2015 would be a more appropriate starting point for estimations of growth.

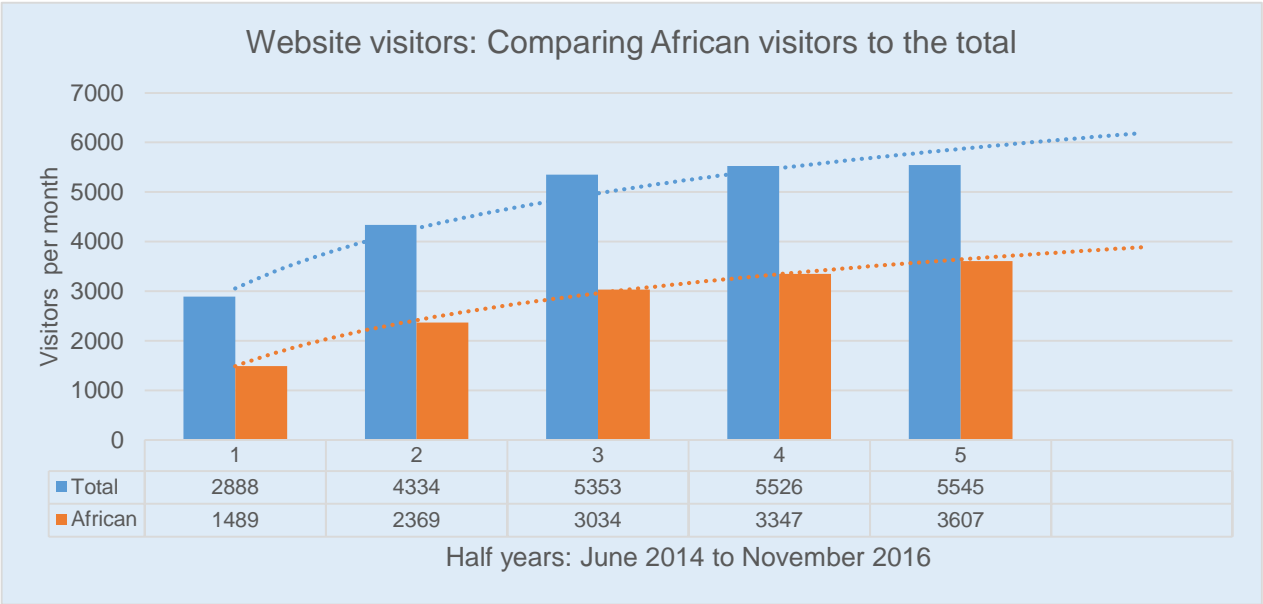
<sup>45</sup> This includes a database clean of addresses that were not valid, which reduced numbers somewhat.

Over the thirty-month period evaluated **58% of visitors were African - 80 778 people - at an average of 2693 visitors per month**. ASb assume – legitimately – that “conservatively ... half of these are educators wanting to use storybooks with children.”<sup>46</sup> If this is so then over 40 000 African educators have visited the site, **well in excess of their target.**<sup>47</sup>

VISITORS	Jun – Dec 2014 7 months	Jan – Jun 2015 6 months	Jul – Dec 2015 6 months	Jan – Jun 2016 6 months	Jul–Nov 2016 5 months	TOTAL 30 months
<b>Total</b>	20 218 2888 per month	26 004 4334 per month	32 117 5353 per month	33 156 5526 per month	27 724 5545 per month	<b>139219</b> <b>4641 per month</b>
<b>African</b>	10 243 1463 per month	14 214 2369 per month	18 205 3034 per month	20,081 3347 per month	18 035 3607 per month	<b>80 778</b> <b>2693 per month</b>
<b>African proportion of total</b>	50.7% of total	54.7% of total	56.7% of total	60.6% of total	65.1% of total	<b>58% of total</b>

**Table 7: Changing proportion of African visitors over 30 months**

The average monthly African visitor growth rate is 23% while overall visitor growth rate averages out at 19.6%. This suggests that African visitors will grow slightly over time as a proportion of ASb’s visitors.



**Figure 3: Ratios of different kinds of users in four time periods (calculated as monthly averages)**

However, the rate of growth is slowing (see Table 8 below); African visitor growth less so than the rather steep decline in overall visitor numbers.

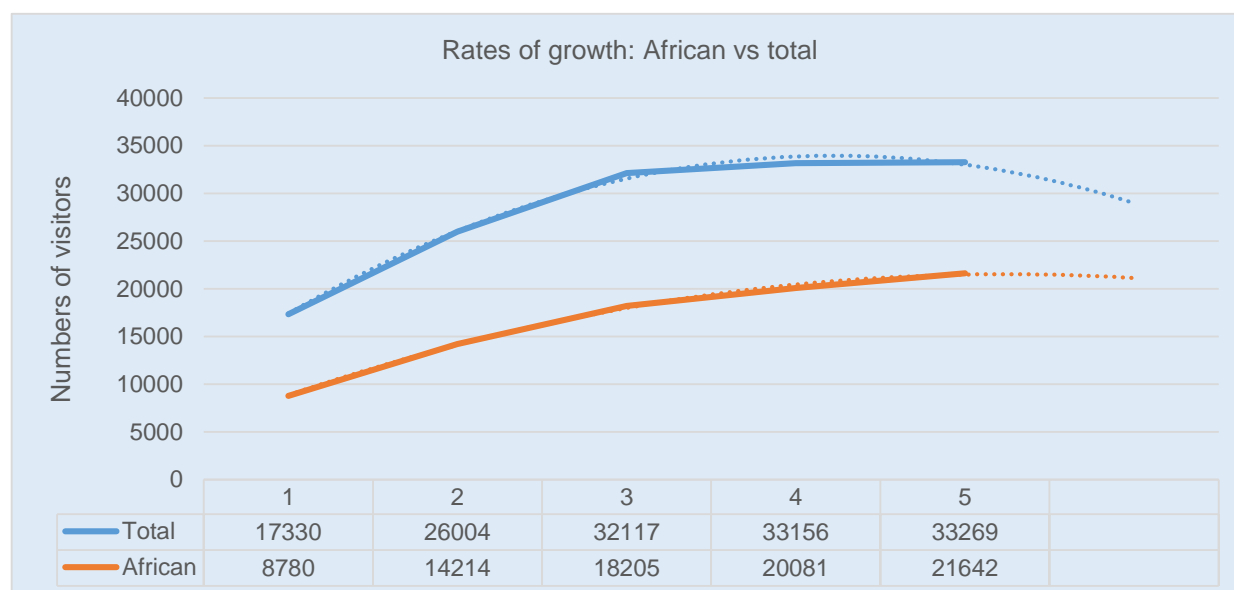
<sup>46</sup> 2016 Annual report to Comic Relief, February 2017

<sup>47</sup> In their data form, ASb only counted new African visitors in order to get a cumulative total. Their total in Part D is conservative and therefore lower.

	Jun–Dec 2014 6 months <sup>48</sup>	Jan–Jun 2015 6 months	Jul–Dec 2015 6 months	Jan–Jun 2016 6 months	Jul–Nov 2016 6 months <sup>49</sup>	TOTAL 30 months <sup>50</sup>
<b>Total Visitors</b>	17 330	26 004 +8674 +50.1%	32 117 +6113 +23.5%	33 156 +1039 +3.2%	33 269 +113 +0.3%	139219
<b>African visitors</b>	8 780	14 214 +5434 +61.9%	18 205 +3991 +28.1%	20 081 +1876 +10.3%	21 642 +1561 +7.8%	80 778

**Table 8: Growth rates - Total and monthly visitors**

Figure 4 below suggests what growth will be like if the current pattern continues.



**Figure 4: Comparative rates of growth over 30 months**

However, it is unlikely that this pattern – African growth flattening out – will materialize, given the number of new countries to which ASb is expanding. Already Ghana, Tanzania and Nigeria outnumber the pilot country, Uganda, in numbers of visitors. November 2016 data suggests that while South Africa (63% of African visitors) and Kenya (12%) still dominate, the three countries mentioned now provide 9% of the visitors from Africa, and are growing rapidly.

By December 2016 **African registered users** numbered 1704 of 2000, 85.2% of all registered users. ASb estimate that about 599 (168M and 431F) are educators “with whom we have worked to date” which means that the other 1105 (304M and 801F) are users “working independently”<sup>51</sup>. These numbers easily meet the

<sup>48</sup> First half year numbers have been manipulated to reflect a 6 month rather than 7 month period, for comparative purposes.

<sup>49</sup> Last half year numbers have been manipulated to reflect a 6 month rather than 5 month period, for comparative purposes.

<sup>50</sup> The numbers in this column reflect true June 2014 to November 2016 numbers. Consequently they do not reflect the totals of the manipulated numbers in the first and last half years.

<sup>51</sup> 2016 Annual data report to Comic Relief, February 2017

targets set for **all** users, namely that 300 users at pilot sites and with partners, and another 80 independents will “create, translate or adapt stories” using the ASb website.

ASb committed to ensuring, as part of outcome 1, that 440 educators at pilot sites and with partner organisations, and 200 “other educators/users derived from website users” use the site to “find stories to use in their contexts.”

- They have met the first easily, suggesting (legitimately, given the research done for this evaluation) that about 1 287 “known” educators (390M and 890F) have used the site. (In interviews for this research with iMlango, the Kenyan Institute for Curriculum Development, and the Family Literacy Project alone it seemed likely that many more than 440 educators are using ASb materials – See Chapter 2).
- In the same 2016 report to Comic Relief ASb argue that they covered their “independent use” target by estimating that “50% of new African visitors/users are educators”. It is highly likely that 50% (or more) of registered African users are educators and this numbers 852 (see below). It is also likely that 50% of visitors from Africa – new or returning - are educators. In both cases ASb meets its target.

ASb have achieved their goal of being a website for Africa. Clearly ASb have made the storybooks **accessible**. The ASb website is attracting visitors and users, and especially African visitors, at a steady rate that exceeds ASb’s goals.

## WHAT DOES THE WEBSITE DATA TELL US ABOUT VISITOR ENGAGEMENT?

Website ‘stickiness’ can be captured in many ways: by counting registered users and return visitors (because they are more active and/or loyal, and will likely continue to use the site) and numbers of storybooks downloaded.

Some website calculations, like bounce rate, also measure visitor interest and engagement in a website.

But, one metric in isolation tells one very little; what’s important are trends across a number of metrics, like bounce, number of page views per visit, length of visit, average duration. From this mix of indicators it seems **visitors and users are engaged by the ASb site**. Google analytics numbers on the ASb website are good and remarkably consistent:

- **Pages per session** – regarded by many website designers as the premier ‘engagement’ metric - average about 6.2, which is well above the ‘industry standard’ of 2 pages per session. Designers suggest setting a goal of 2 to 3 pages. Pages-per-session is a measure of how many pages a visitor loads within one visit and “is probably the most important metric for content sites”<sup>52</sup>.
- The ASb website’s **bounce rate** has hovered around 41% which is very good. It is also significantly better than ASb’s target of 50%, a number regarded as an industry benchmark. Some designers suggest shooting for a 30% rate.
- **Average session duration**, which has averaged between 5½ minutes and 7 minutes, is also well above the industry standard of 3 minutes. Alongside bounce rate and pages per session, average session duration contributes to understanding user engagement story by showing how long users stay on the ASb website. However, because this number is an average, designers suggest using it

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<sup>52</sup> From <http://pnmq.com/read-google-analytics/> accessed on February 7, 2017. But same sentiment can be found on other website design consultancy sites.

with caution: use it for segmented views (who is leaving quickly and who is staying?) and in conjunction with other engagement metrics<sup>53</sup>.

This is the website’s analytics history:

Monthly averages	Page Views	Bounce Rate	Pages Per Session	Average Duration
June- Dec 2014	19 226	42%	6.46	7 min, 37 sec
Jan - June 2015	26 214	43%	6.16	6 min, 4 sec
Jul - Dec 2015	28 748	44%	5.38	6 min, 8 sec
Jan - Jun 2016	34 749	41%	6.06	6 min, 21 sec
Jul - Nov 2016	34 703	42%	6.31	6 min, 1 sec

**Table 9: Website ‘engagement’ metrics**

Regardless of these metrics, the most highly valued and most predictive of success is called the “conversion rate”. Conversions are the outcomes ASb have indicated as being the reason for the site’s existence. It is more than people visiting the site and, perhaps, even downloading storybooks.

It is linked directly to fulfilling ASb’s “business” goals, like:

- Increasing the availability of stories in mother tongue. So, converting people from return visitors to registered users/producers, and/or the number of uploads of stories produced independently, could be counted as “conversions”.
- Encouraging education systems to buy into and use the open publishing model. So, the number of books used, children taught, money saved (etc) through systemic initiatives that arise from an initial engagement with the website could be conversion metrics.

A common conversion benchmark is 2% - 2% of unique visitors are persuaded to take further action and that action furthers the organisation’s core goals. But, this benchmark does “vary by industry and will completely depend on your business goals and the intention of your site”. A lower than average conversion rate – or declining conversion rate - may indicate issues with accessibility, the website’s calls to actions, low quality content, or general disinterest.

If we use turning new visitors into registered users as the conversion criterion then:

- Over the 20-months from March 2015 to November 2016 the conversion score is 2.3 (63 932 new visitors, with 1 485 becoming registered users. This sneaks over the benchmark.
- But, in 2016 the score runs at only 1.7 (33 102 new visitors and 563 new registered users), a significant drop from
- For 2015 (March onwards) when the conversion score was 3 (922 new registered users out of 30 830 new visitors).

If the new visitor numbers were experiencing a spike in 2016 because of, say, a successful social media drive a *temporary* reduction in the conversion number is likely. But in ASb’s case the new visitor and registered users numbers dipped in 2016. And, of course, this is a rough estimate, and an estimate only of one type of ‘conversion’ – from reader to writer. Many websites claim registration – which is encouraged even if the

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<sup>53</sup> From <https://www.spinutech.com/blog/digital-marketing/7-website-analytics-that-matter-most/>, accessed on February 12, 2017.

visitor only intends to visit – as a ‘conversion’ because it permits them to do targeted marketing to them through social media.

### HOW MANY STORYBOOKS HAVE BEEN DOWNLOADED FROM THE WEBSITE?

Return visitors + registered users are indications of visitor engagement with a website, and of its accessibility. The number of storybooks downloaded, and the number of users downloading storybooks, is a stronger measure of user access and engagement.

ASb have succeeded in this respect with monthly download averages more than doubling over 30 months. Downloads increased from 102 213 storybooks in the first half year (June to December 2014) – a monthly average of 14 602 – to 156 367 in the last five months (July to November 2016) – a monthly average of 31 273.

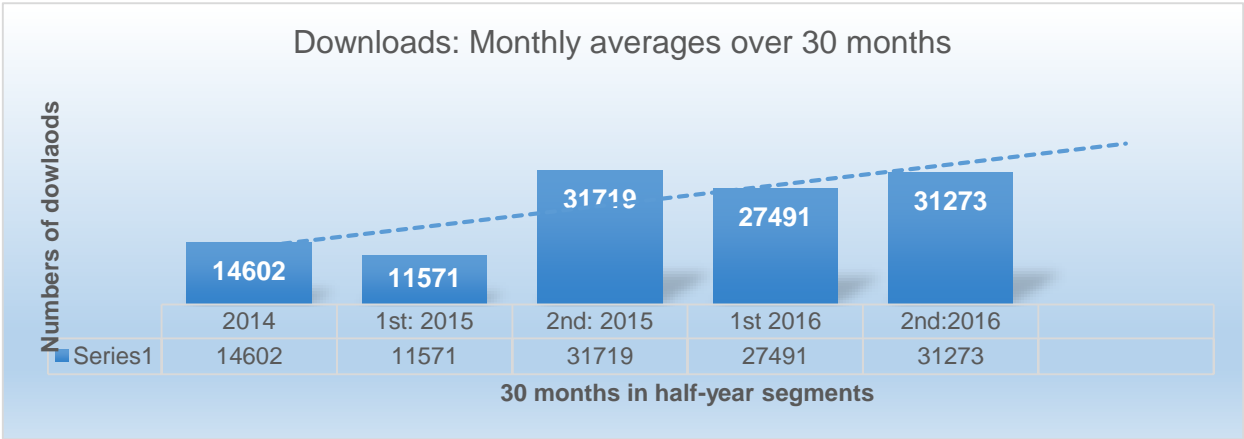
In total 683 265 storybooks have been downloaded over thirty months at an average of 22 776 per month:

	Jun-Dec 2014	Jan-Jun 2015	Jul-Dec 2015	Jan-Jun 2016	Jul-Nov 2016	TOTAL
	7 months	6 months	6 months	6 months	5 months	30 months
Total	102 213	69 426	190 315	164 944	156 367	683 265
Per month	14 602	11 571	31 719	27 491	31 273	22 776

**Table 10: Download history - Total and monthly averages**

This download story – and downloads are useful proxy measures for reading or using books from the ASb website – is even better than these numbers suggest:

- First, after a slow first two half-years downloads seemed to have settled into an average of around 30 000, well above the current average of about 23 000. The linear projection – see figure 5– suggests download numbers are likely to increase.
- Second, as ASb’s systemic initiatives kick into gear – as they are currently (see Chapter 3) – the numbers of downloads are likely to increase. Also, the website metrics will under-count this use as much of it will be in the form of a title transferred onto a Cloud, or tablet, or USB stick, or printed to be used by many.
- Third, in the same vein, reading of storybooks on partner sites is under-counted. A partner like iMlango distributes many titles to thousands of readers on their tablets in Kenya, while World Reader does the same through their global website.



**Figure 5: Downloads over 30 months**



In keeping with ASb's desire to have a major impact in Africa, it is important that African downloads – especially in mother tongue languages - are significant and increasing. Their annual report to Comic Relief notes that “In November 2016 only 18% of the downloaded titles were in English.”<sup>54</sup> In fact, only three English and four Afrikaans stories – with, respectively, 201 downloads of three titles and 256 downloads of 4 titles - appear in the 20 most popular stories. Indigenous African language stories from pilot site countries dominate:

- Kiswahili (Kenya): 199 downloads of two titles
- Sesotho (Lesotho): 185 downloads of two titles
- Setswana (South Africa): 151 downloads of two titles
- Lunyole (Uganda): 123 downloads of one title
- Sesotho (South Africa): 111 downloads of one title.

The number of stories **downloaded** from the website globally, but especially in Africa and in languages of Africa, is increasing and exceeds ASb's targets. It is a strong indicator of use and of user engagement, and augurs well for the sustained development of the ASb initiative.

Taken together this suggests that viewers are finding the website easily, finding it easy to navigate, downloading stories they want, and are engaged by its content.

### A MORE RESPONSIVE WEBSITE?

An impressive feature of African Storybook has been their responsiveness to contextual issues which impede their progress. The website is a case in point.

ASb's more responsive website – a major project in late 2015 and early 2016 – was aimed at catering for African users who were more able to access the site via mobile phones than laptops or desktop computers.

This has been timely, and has witnessed an increase in the number of people accessing the website through mobile devices:

- In November 2016 more African visitors used mobile phones (49%) to access the website than a computer (46%). About 5% used tablets.
- As a comparison, 45% African visitors accessed the website via mobile phones in December 2015 (and only 20% at the launch).

ASb's Reading App for mobile phones was launched in January 2016 and had been installed on almost 1700 phones by November 2016.

## 3. ASb users are productive: they create, translate, or adapt

Stories are being produced primarily in countries with pilot sites; 2893 of 3640 stories – or 80% - have been developed in Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa/Lesotho:

- South Africa (1274 stories; 35%),
- Kenya (836 stories; 23%),
- Uganda (676 stories; 19%)
- Lesotho (107 stories; 3%).

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<sup>54</sup> Narrative report to Comic Relief, December 2016

Other significant producers are:

- Mozambique (235 stories). ASb partners Little Zebra and Ingrid Schechter have been pro-active in translating into Portuguese and donating Portuguese stories. This will be helpful as ASb begins moving into Lusophone Africa in the future.
- Ghana (78 stories) and Ethiopia (41 stories). Both of these are countries into which ASb is expanding, and so actively commissioning translations. But, also, the reason for moving into these countries was because of signs of significant independent story creation.

ASb tried to push online creation in 2015, but they were only moderately successful – 44% of created storybooks in Kenya were created online (i.e. uploaded by the pilot site people themselves), and 29% of stories in South Africa/Lesotho.<sup>55</sup>

Data from South Africa and Kenya<sup>56</sup> show that ASb’s attempt to push the idea of adapting or translating a storybook in order to use it more effectively wasn’t very successful either:

“We can draw the conclusion that teachers didn’t generally do what we hoped: i.e. see a story that was a good one, but not quite right for their learners so adapt or translate to make it appropriate.”<sup>57</sup>

This reflects the opinions expressed in the qualitative data extracted from interviews where teachers in Uganda (primarily) and Kenya said they largely used the story as they found them, and when they did change them it was mainly to make them more culturally or contextually ‘relevant’.

Data also suggests that when teachers adapt, they do so to change either context or language or level. In Kenya, level is key, and in South Africa, it appears that users were most interested in contextualising.

Data suggests that having a champion and/or having support increases the rate at which local users produce stories. ASb have laid good foundations for the project’s sustainability. Providing the resources to support a champion in their targeted areas is advised to move the initiative from tentative take-off to steady and self-sustained growth.

Growth in story production **outside** the pilot site countries is growing more rapidly than expected: 36 of 100 languages in which ASb now has stories in languages with which ASb had nothing to do. And the number of stories in these languages adds up to 310. There are a further 15 languages users have requested to be added, but they hadn’t published stories in them by November 2016.

## IS INDEPENDENT STORYBOOK PRODUCTION INCREASING?

In order to make the initiative sustainable ASb have worked to grow story production that does not require their assistance. ASb have four categories of stories for each of unique, adapted and translated stories:

- ASb-approved: Published by ASb/Saide + some community stories approved after publication
- Saide-approved: Unique stories, adaptations or translations commissioned, produced in-house, or donated

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<sup>55</sup> Tessa Welch, email correspondence, January 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Uganda didn’t provide ASb with the data they wanted.

<sup>57</sup> Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017.

- Community-approved: Stories written, adapted or translated by users and edited and approved by the ASb publisher. ASb central office sometimes edits these in order that they become “ASb-approved”
- Other ‘non-approved’ stories: Stories written, adapted or translated by users, lodged on the site, but not edited or approved by ASb.

The website permits searches for “ASb approved” stories in order to ensure that uneven quality does not dissuade visitors from using ASb storybooks.

In 2015 ASb began drawing a distinction between stories that had passed their ‘quality check’ – which they labelled “ASb-approved’ – and community-generated stories (or adaptations or translations) which had not been approved. In order to reduce the burden on the central office they aimed to grow independently produced stories to at least 50% of the total.

- By the end of November 2016 the ASb website had “ASb-approved” 2299 of 3764 stories (61%) on the website. This compares with 894 of the 2380 stories (39%) at the end of November 2015.
- By November 2016 ASb had 1977 Saide- approved storybooks – books dependent on central office work – out of a total of 3764 storybooks overall. This means that 53% are produced by ASb, slightly above their target of 50%.

In 2016 – the year in which ASb were focusing very deliberately on sustainability – the ratios of these different publishing categories changed as follows:

	Story # and proportion		Growth
	Nov 2015	Nov 2016	
<b>ASb-approved (Saide+user-approved categories)</b>	<b>894 (39%)</b>	<b>2299 (61%)</b>	<b>157%</b>
Saide-approved (produced or commissioned by ASb)	697 (78%)	1977 (53%)	184%
User-approved (produced independently and quality-assured by ASb)	197 (22%)	322 (8%)	63%
User ‘non-approved’ (produced independently, not approved as yet)	1486 (61%)	1465 (39%)	-1.4%
<b>Total number of stories produced</b>	<b>2380</b>	<b>3764</b>	

**Table 11: Story production in 2016**

This is comfortably ahead of their goal (set in 2015), which was to have at least 50% of the stories on the website without any significant work by the ASb central office.

In 2014 most production activity was carried out by ASb staff, even though the pilot sites were active from March 2014. Independent activity started in earnest in 2015, and since then (in 2015 and 2016) independent production averages about 38% of all production in those years (843 storybooks out of 2244). In total, it constitutes 24% of all storybook production since the initiative began.

	December 2014 (from beginning June)	2015 & 2016 (to end-September)
<b>ASb-produced</b>	Unique: 271 Adapted: 0 Translated: 969 <b>1240 – 100%</b>	Unique: 231 (502) Adapted: 88 (88) Translated: 1082 (2015) <b>1401 – 62% in this period</b> <b>2605 – 75% over time</b>
<b>Independently produced</b>	Unique: 0 Adapted: 0 Translated: 0 <b>0</b>	Unique: 228 (228) Adapted: 239 (239) Translated: 376 (376) <b>843 – 38% in this period</b> <b>843 – 25% over time</b>
<b>Totals</b>	Unique: 271 Adapted: 0 Translated: 969 <b>Overall: 1240</b>	Unique: 459 (730) Adapted: 327 (327) Translated: 1458 (2427) <b>Overall: 2244<sup>58</sup> (3484)</b>

**Table 12: Story production from inception**

In the 2015 annual report ASb make the point that “to keep interest high in the African Storybook initiative and maintain our reputation for contextually appropriate attractively illustrated stories, we need a steady stream of ASb approved stories”. They say they can achieve this in three ways:

- through editing and illustrating stories from pilot countries and elsewhere
- through eliciting donations of illustrated stories and preparing them for publishing on our website
- through reviewing user created stories and making them “ASb-approved” where merited.

They note that the “second and third strategies are more cost effective, but less predictable” and so say they will “aim to keep the balance between these three strategies in a given year”.

In 2015 ASb found that ‘there were equivalent numbers of illustrated stories donated...(69) and stories for which we commissioned illustrations (69); but there were fewer translations commissioned (302) than contributed (370)’. They were happy with this ratio.

## **ARE STORYBOOK PRODUCERS USING ASB TEMPLATES AND THE WEBSITE?**

Pilot site writers found online story production challenging. This was due, partly, to the technological skills of people at pilot sites which ASb describe as “...low, even lower than we predicted”<sup>59</sup>.

The lack of skill and confidence was evident, also, during this evaluator’s interviews and observations. At a highly functional pilot site the co-ordinator could not download PDF versions of the storybooks. One

<sup>58</sup> There are small differences in metrics provided by the website and ASb records. There are probably two reasons for these: stories automatically duplicated on the website and then removed, and an editing error by students working on the site who uploaded multiple versions of the same story. The latter error is being ‘gradually corrected’ (Tessa Welch – email correspondence 28 November 2016).

<sup>59</sup> Open educational resources for early literacy in Africa: The role of the African Storybook initiative, Tessa Welch and Jennifer Glennie, 2016

interviewee spoke of the difficulty in getting support for “matters that seem quite simple to many but not to us.”<sup>60</sup> All interviewees spoke glowingly of ASb’s technical training with the only criticism being “we need more.”

Some of the difficulties lay in the ASb website’s design: challenges with the registration process that’s necessary to create or translate stories, and with the templates themselves. The website complications have now been addressed and the new site is currently being tested.

The ASb publisher makes the point that it is important for ASb’s sustainability that “more storybooks are produced online, and produced to a standard”<sup>61</sup> (technically and in terms writing quality) that reduces her role to one of “minimal oversight”.

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<sup>60</sup> Interview, Lunyole Language Association, October 2016

<sup>61</sup> Interview, Lisa Treffry-Goatley, October 2016

# Outcome 2: Stories are used in a variety of ways for early literacy development

## EVALUATION FOCUS

An evaluation of Outcome 2 – “Literacy development organisations and educators working in African countries use the stories in a variety of ways (pedagogic and technical) for early literacy in their contexts” – is about assessing whether African Storybook stories have been **used to improve** literacy teaching. The ASb Learning Framework 2016 reflection explains this:

*“...the use of stories goes beyond access and availability – it concerns **what people do with the stories** once they have them, **how they use them to promote literacy**. ... There are at least three factors likely to affect use: language (availability of sufficient stories in the children’s own language to allow them to learn to read in their own language); type of story (the picture storybook form, which is largely unknown in African languages); and technological form, which is likely to create a different imagination for how stories can be used”<sup>62</sup>.*

ASb have listed the following **indicators of success**, phrased here as evaluation questions:

- What is the extent of stories generated being used in pilot sites and partner literacy development organisations? And are they used in diverse pedagogical and technical ways?
- Are pilot sites and partner literacy development organisations initiating new reading activities and opportunities using stories generated through ASb in a variety of African contexts?
- What is the level of independent (spontaneous)<sup>63</sup> use, and how are the storybooks and the website being used?
- How many story development workshops were held and what has been their impact? (This has been explored more broadly as the support ASb has provided.)

Given that the storybooks and website are used in three distinct arenas – **pilot sites** (including the new ‘hubs’) with direct ASb support; by **partners** (in a structured relationship with ASb), and by **independent ‘partners’** (individuals and organisations who engage with ASb with no agreement) – these questions are considered under these three headings.

There is overlap between this chapter and the next in that both explore the role of partners in ASb’s implementation. The focus here, though, is on **pedagogic use** while in the next the focus is ASb’s success in **advocating for an open educational resources model** through partners and with government systems.

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<sup>62</sup> Unpublished internal ASb document, M&E and learnings plan SP05, 2017

<sup>63</sup> ASb have the following to say about the descriptor: “The phrasing in the 2015 annual report was ‘spontaneous uptake’. However, we would like to modify this to independent uptake. Most people who use our website do so as a result of the web of relationships that we have built up. So ‘spontaneous’ does not capture this correctly.”

## FINDINGS SNAPSHOT

ASb have had success in persuading teachers within their pilot sites to **use** African storybooks in more 'diverse pedagogical and technical ways', but the quality of their impact has been uneven. What is clear is that the ASb's presence – and their training and support - has created a good deal of discussion about books, reading and literacy among teachers and librarians.

They have also been very successful in forging productive partnerships with organisations involved in pedagogic work and with those who distribute storybooks to a wider audience. An important result of this – the availability, through open licence, of attractively designed and context-authentic early reading materials - has been bolstering the educative work of these organisations.

**In terms of numbers** ASb have easily met their beneficiary targets: 9 275 educators at pilot sites and through partners are using African storybooks against a target of 580, with 69% of those reached being women. In addition, the spontaneous use of the storybooks and the website - discovered through website analytics and unsolicited emails - is much more significant than originally believed.

**Qualitatively**, the mid-term evaluation<sup>64</sup>, the pilot site case study<sup>65</sup> (that forms part of this evaluation) and a number of other informal papers (learning questions papers, site reports, and a summary of country co-ordinators' reflections in December 2016) provide many examples of ASb's **positive impact on pedagogy at pilot sites**. During the observations of classroom practice and interviews with teachers this evaluator witnessed and heard of similar "victories and defeats:"<sup>66</sup>

- There was a palpable sense of excitement among teachers and learners about the "power of the projected stories" on teaching and learning
- There was also real excitement about having access to mother tongue storybooks, especially when they were printed off as 'big books', and to the fact that they were attractively illustrated
- Educators were reported as teaching in a far more child-focused manner (getting children to read independently) and more soundly (moving from recitation to word recognition, etc).
- ASb training was frequently mentioned by interviewees as the reason for being able to "teach differently... (and) to keep the child in mind when selecting stories"<sup>67</sup>
- This conscious selection of a story, and the confidence of some to write or translate stories, were two examples of a sense of agency evident among some teachers
- The African Storybook work within pilot site schools – and the excitement that accompanies this - has also evoked interest from other (non-involved) teachers.

It is as clear that pilot sites where there is a sense of social cohesion, and/or an influential champion (sometimes an individual, sometimes officials in a school department), and/or a basic level of resourcing sites benefit from ASb's resources and training at a much higher multiple than do others. It is less clear which of these factors is more important. It was evident from the *limited* observations carried out as part of

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<sup>64</sup> *Mid-term Review of the African Storybook Project, May 2015, Hilary Janks and Ken Harley*

<sup>65</sup> *Case Study Report 2 - Extension of pilot site work into broader systemic implementation: the Lolupe hub, October 2016, Ken Harley*

<sup>66</sup> *A phrase used by a member of the Lunyole Language Association during an interview, September 2016*

<sup>67</sup> *Interview: Kabubbu teachers, October 2016*

this evaluation that especially poorly resourced schools in areas in which deprivation was evident are struggling to make good use of storybooks.

**Second**, ASb have built a **formidable set of partnerships** – sometimes influential or passionate individuals, often organisations - who use the ASb materials in new and creative ways. (Many of the same organisations also advocate for ASb or for the use of open resources in literacy development, but these are discussed under Outcome 3). In this sense, ASb are well on their way to achieving their vision of a “project of partners” where the website resource and the project’s vision “is increasingly independent of the main project team.”<sup>68</sup>

Some of the partnerships, like iMlango, an NGO working with the Kenyan education department, **borders on being a systemic initiative**: it is large, gets to many teachers in many parts of Kenya, and is closely integrated with the national schooling system.

While formal agreements with partners – there are now 30 in place - are important for ASb, and working systemically, is also important, it is as clear that ASb’s success is due in large part to their ability to leverage the **enthusiasm of individuals** and turn these into strong and productive relationships. This is true, also, of tapping the potential of spontaneous take-up and making this more formal and systematic.

**Thirdly**, African Storybook’s strategy – an open publishing project built around an online website - makes **‘viral’ distribution (and production)** possible. The fact that it has large stocks of attractive storybooks in languages where books are scarce, and the fact that these may be used and adapted without a cost, makes spontaneous use likely. Some of these independent or spontaneous users have come on-board formally (see Outcome 3 for a discussion about how expansion into both Ethiopia and Ghana started with this kind of contact) while other organisations and individuals continue to use the materials on projects independently of ASb. In both cases these ‘partners’ bring aboard very large numbers of beneficiaries – some relatively passive, as readers, and others much more active, as teacher.

These partners provide the promise of sustainability - mother tongue storybooks offered through an open resources model will continue to be produced and used, at minimal cost to ASb’s central office. They also contribute to the ASb the richness of new ideas, and provides fora through which ASb’s ‘concept’ can be discussed.

**Finally**, the pilot sites were spaces where ASb could test out and learn about the validity of a number of dimensions of their overall concept. The work in these spaces combined with ASb’s impressive processes to reflect on practice (among these, their Learnings Questions) provided ASb with a much clearer idea<sup>69</sup> of how to address the catch-22 problem they are tackling - namely how to provide reading to people in languages and places where the ‘market’ will not provide – by means of technology and an open publishing model.

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<sup>68</sup> Grant start-up form to Comic Relief, Revised, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>69</sup> The ASb internal document - Learning question 3: What are the success factors for particular delivery methods and what challenges are faced? – includes careful calculations of what kinds of resourcing, and at what levels, work best to drive a pilot site towards successful take-off. It also highlights many of the challenges faced.



## DISCUSSION

### 1. ASb's pilot sites achieve the desired outcome

Pilot sites were established to 'root' the ASb project in contexts where it was needed and would, thus, contribute positively to the development of early child literacy.

They were also sites where ASb could 'prove their concept'; their belief that an open publishing model using online technology thoughtfully could address the lack of mother tongue reading materials in Africa's most deprived locations. In addition, they wanted to test their assumptions about teachers taking of the role of story producers, about accessibility of, and teachers' preparedness to use, technology) and simply to learn more about the enablers and deterrents to using the website within technology-poor contexts found in many parts of Africa.

The pilot sites have provided answers to the questions ASb were asking. These are documented in the mid-term evaluation, the case studies produced for this evaluation, and in the learning questions papers produced by ASb staff. This evaluation highlights some of the findings from these papers, with a focus on accountability. The more nuanced discussions of the quality of the changes that have been achieved are covered in case study 2, and learnings question 3 (and a number of published papers).

### WHAT DO THE NUMBERS SAY?

#### *Pilot sites were established and 'transitioned'*

ASb said, in their 2012 grant application that they would set up 12 pilot sites<sup>70</sup> - a combination of schools, a primary teachers college, community libraries and NGOs. All of these sites were established in 2014, on schedule, in three<sup>71</sup> African countries and in contexts that vary widely; urban and rural, schools and libraries, single institutions and clusters of institutions.

Officially ASb ended these sites as "pilot" sites in 2015. Some were selected to be 'hubs' and supported – at a lower rate than during the pilot phase - to extend their work. A number were judged strong enough to continue without ASb support: notably Kabubbu (in Uganda), two Atteridgeville schools, Bathokwa and Makgatho (South Africa), and the Family Literacy Project (South Africa). The idea was also that the Kibera (Kenya) and Saulsville (South Africa) library pilot sites would spark a broader engagement with library systems in Nairobi and the City of Tshwane. This had not occurred by the end of the evaluation period (November 2016) but has now.<sup>72</sup> (See Table 13 for a list of pilot sites, in 2014 and 2017)

In terms of accountability, defined narrowly as a willingness to accept responsibility, ASb have managed these sites with a mix of listening to those who must implement and then setting mutually agreed upon targets (as they put it, letting the local lead), but also holding pilot sites to these agreements. In cases where

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<sup>70</sup> By the end of 2014, the pilot sites numbered 14, with one of the sites (LLA) having a number of satellites.

<sup>71</sup> Paleng, In Lesotho, is categorized under South Africa.

<sup>72</sup> In an e-mail Tessa Welch noted that the Kenyan country co-ordinator, Dorcas Wepukhulu, "has just (i.e. end January 2017) had a workshop with librarians from four more libraries in the Nairobi area, and, building on the large numbers reached through Kibera (estimated to be 14 000 children) ASb are donating a laptop and projector to each of these libraries to follow Kibera's example".

it is necessary they have closed down sites quickly, and with reference to the signed, mutually agreed-upon agreement.

In a wider sense ASb have demonstrated a keen understanding of the project's long-term goal of becoming sustainable. Their resource support has been strategic: enough to give the project some momentum within a pilot site (but no more), and examined in order to make sure the resources worked for that particular pilot site's needs. They have also kept a careful eye on sites that could become independent, and worked with them to become so, and sites that could be expanded, to become 'hubs' encompassing more schools and libraries. Here is how pilot sites transitioned into 'hubs' or independent initiatives:

First year pilot 2014	Second year pilot 2015	Hubs and further sites 2016
<b>Kenya</b>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Oloosirkon primary, Kajiado</li> <li>2. Lolupe primary, Turkana</li> <li>3. Munanga primary, Kakamega</li> <li>4. Early Child Development centre, near Munanga</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Oloosirkon primary school</li> <li>2. Lolupe primary school</li> <li>3. Munanga primary (ECD dropped because of non-performance) [Kibera Library, Nairobi]</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lolupe school and library -responsibility for lending and advocating in surrounding schools</li> <li>2. Turkana Research and Development project in five schools, Dr Ng'asike, Mt Kenya University.</li> <li>3. Kibera library</li> <li>4. Khabukoshe Primary, Kakamega (where head of Munanga transferred)</li> </ol>
<b>Uganda</b>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Arua Primary Teachers' College</li> <li>2. Arua Hill Primary school</li> <li>3. Kabubbu development centre (primary school and library)</li> <li>4. Gayaza (family literacy centre near Kabubbu) – minimal support</li> <li>5. Lunyole Language Association who managed: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Busolwe Community library</li> <li>b. Mugulu Primary</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Arua Primary Teachers' College</li> <li>2. Arua Hill Primary school</li> <li>3. Kabubbu development centre (primary school and library)</li> <li>4. Gayaza (family literacy centre near Kabubbu) – minimal support</li> <li>5. Lunyole Language Association -increased number of schools: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Busolwe Community library</li> <li>b. Mugulu Primary</li> <li>c. Bubaali Primary</li> <li>d. Kaguja ECD</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lunyole Language Association managing: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Busolwe Community library</li> <li>b. Mugulu Primary</li> <li>c. Bubaali Primary</li> <li>d. Kaguja ECD</li> <li>e. Magambo Primary</li> <li>f. Bwiry Primary</li> <li>g. Mango Grove Primary</li> <li>h. Busaba Project Primary</li> <li>i. Hwenghimbe &amp; Tuluta women's groups</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Pan Education Network: Story development and use, St Benedict Korobudi Primary (Tororo), advocacy, story development in the community.</li> </ol>
<b>South Africa/Lesotho</b>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Paleng children's library, Malealea, Lesotho</li> <li>2. Family Literacy Project (FLP) with 2 community libraries in KwaZulu-Natal.</li> <li>3. Atteridgeville schools: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Makgatho Primary</li> <li>b. Bathokwa Primary</li> <li>c. Patogeng Primary</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Paleng children's library, Malealea, Lesotho</li> <li>2. FLP with 2 community libraries in Underberg, KwaZulu-Natal.</li> <li>3. Atteridgeville schools: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Makgatho Primary</li> <li>b. Bathokwa Primary</li> <li>c. Patogeng Primary</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Paleng children's library, establishing another library, and working in primary schools and ECD centres in area.</li> <li>2. Saulsville library (Atteridgeville), drawing in more schools from area, with story writing competition and story reading sessions. The FLP is now independent and publishing ASb materials for their use.</li> </ol>

**Table 13: Pilot sites over time**

## Beneficiary targets met

By the end of 2016 ASb reported that 541 educators<sup>73</sup> at pilot sites had benefited from **using** ASb’s storybooks in early literacy development. Just over half – 284 - were women. The ASb target was 580 educators, 193 men and 387 women, for beneficiaries at pilot sites **and** through partners. Most impressive was the momentum suggested by the growth in 2016: from 110 (in 2015) to 514, an almost 400% increase in pilot site beneficiaries.

ASb estimate that they reached 15 492 learners through the pilot sites in 2016 (and over 28 000 in all, against a target of 1 200 per year for **both** pilot sites and partners). This is, likely, an underestimation given that Kibera library alone had about 14 000 children attend story sessions at the library in a three-month period in 2016<sup>74</sup>. This tallies with an observation of a story session at the library and interview with the chief librarian who said, “We have about 150 children every day from schools in the informal settlements ... many that have no resources because government doesn’t support them.”<sup>75</sup>

Most of the beneficiaries in pilot sites are educators so the multiplier effect is significant. In two observations in the Butaleja district in Uganda, this evaluator watched teachers work with 47 learners in one class and 66 in another. This was the range of numbers in all classes observed in Kenya and Uganda with one outlier class of almost 100 children. In all observations more than one teacher was involved in the teaching and, in many another teacher observed.

## Storybooks produced at pilot sites

Although this is not a specified indicator of success, ASb have attempted to record how many storybooks were used, and how many produced (created, adapted, or translated) at pilot sites. Between January and October 2015 they found the following:

Number stories...	Total	Uganda	Kenya	South Africa
Titles used	345	176	56	113
<b>TOTAL USED</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>113</b>
Translated	131	78	20	33
Adapted	82	51	14	17
Created	127	71	18	38
<b>PRODUCED</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>88</b>

**Table 14: Number of story titles used, and produced, at pilot sites between January to October 2015**

<sup>73</sup> This excludes the 200 pilot site educators who used the website to find stories (counted in Outcome 1), those educators reached through partners, and the many thousands involved through ASb’s systemic initiatives.

<sup>74</sup> Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017. Welch wrote: “We have ascertained that there were 20 000 visits to Kibera in just over 2 months. Many of these will have been repeat visits by the same kids. So we followed up with Mary Kinyanjui (the Chief Librarian) and she said that about 50% of the kids from the surrounding 70 schools (including ECD schools) use the library with their teachers (in the week during library periods – the schools in Kenya have no libraries), and kids come on their in the weekends and holidays. The average number of kids per school is 400. So 70 x 400 divided by 2 = 14 000 kids, which is what we eventually put down.”

<sup>75</sup> Interview, Mary Kinyanjui, September 2016

Ugandan pilot sites were significant producers of stories – especially unique stories – as well as users of a wide range of stories. This speaks to the success of the Lunyole Language Association’s work in the Butaleja pilot site (now a hub). Kenyan sites used, and produced, a much smaller number of stories. Welch says targets were set in the deliverables listed in MoAs. “Country Coordinators pushed hard for the targets to be reached in 2014 and 2015. Although certain sites under-performed, like Arua Core PTC and Oloosirkon, the others met and in most cases exceeded their targets”<sup>76</sup>.

Challenges with pilot site reporting was an issue raised by ASb central office leaders, and evident in this evaluation. Clearly targets have been met, and that the project is having impact, but it is more difficult to quantify this impact accurately.

## WHAT KINDS OF PEDAGOGIC CHANGE IS EVIDENT?

The mid-term evaluation, final evaluation case studies, and learning question 3 reflections (among a number of other documents) provide many examples of ASb’s positive impact on pedagogy at pilot sites, analyses why this impact is uneven, and makes recommendations about what can be done as the initiative moves forward.

This evaluation **focuses more narrowly on accountability**, but draws from these documents. It is clear that ASb have had an impact in these pilot sites. As a member of the Lunyole Language Association said during an interview, “We have travelled a long road with African Storybook, and we have learnt a great deal...and there have been victories and defeats.”<sup>77</sup>

What are these “victories and defeats”?

### *Excitement, increased collaboration and a sense of agency*

Effective literacy teaching requires improved **skills**, but it also requires the ability for teachers to work together (**collaboration**) and the confidence to act (**agency**). In many schools in resource-deprived areas, run by strongly bureaucratic district managers, teachers – who often are minimally trained and often in a pedagogy that teaches obedience – tend to show none of these characteristics. The ASb baseline reports that the pilot sites – with a few notable exceptions – were characterized by this sense of lethargy.

The most evident “victory” was the palpable sense of excitement among teachers and learners about the “power of the projected stories” on teaching and learning. This was both the kind of excitement one gets from watching a good show, but also something deeper – a sense by teachers that they could take control of what they were teaching.

In the sites that by ASb’s estimation are operating well, there was increased reference by teachers to “discussing which stories to use with other teachers” and “planning – even on a Saturday – how we will teach”<sup>78</sup>. At both sites where this was evident teachers spoke of how new this was to them, and how much they enjoyed it. As one said, “It has made teaching happy for me again ... and these stories they make the pupils start giving their own stories.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> E-mail correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017

<sup>77</sup> A phrase used by a member of the Lunyole Language Association during an interview, September 2016

<sup>78</sup> Interview: Team of teachers at Kabubbu school, Uganda, October 2016

<sup>79</sup> Interview: Olive Namisi, a teacher at Bubaali primary school, Uganda, October 2016

Many spoke of the excitement the project has generated among learners and other teachers. “When we give them (the children) a composition to write about what they have seen they finish their work with no delay ... this is different from the past.”<sup>80</sup>

There are numerous examples of teachers – and pilot site co-ordinators – exhibiting high levels of agency, both as literacy promoters and as ‘project managers’. Whether this is a result or not of ASb’s intervention the fact that it exists speaks positively to the project continuing once ASb withdraws its resource support.

One of the most exciting examples of agency - of actions taken to extend or deepen the project but not mandated - this evaluator witnessed was through the **Busolwe community library** (managed by the Lunyole Language Association in eastern Uganda).

The librarian, at her initiative, decided to ask a member of the Tuluta’s widow’s group with whom they work to “tell her story”. Many of these women are illiterate – and often marginalised by the community - but they (a number of women volunteered) took to the task with enthusiasm. The video clips attest to lively story-telling. The librarian is transcribing these and plans to upload them to the ASb website as illustrated stories. The idea for this came from something heard during the ASb - that “anyone can make stories<sup>81</sup>” - and her experience of the “funny stories” she’d heard when working with the group. She hoped they might be used to teach literacy to the group at some point.

In an interview with 31 members of the group (they have 52 members in all), they spoke about how pleased they were that “ASb spoke to us as human beings.” This sentiment was reinforced later when one member of the group said, “the stories in the videos is proof of our existence.” They said that in the librarian’s first meetings with them they found “those books educative and they can be a cure for depression...they make you happy because they carry a message.<sup>82</sup>” They said that while many did not know how to read they “wanted these books because they will help others to learn to read” and because “we want to learn how to write stories”.

A number of other examples of pilot staff having the confidence and competence to ‘take the project run’ are mentioned in the case studies and mid-term evaluation (and evidenced again in this evaluation):

- A teacher at **Lolupe School** (in the far north of Kenya) said the combination of ASb training and the availability of so many stories on the website has made her more confident about selecting a storybook for use, and ‘keeping her learners in mind’ as she does this. This sentiment was expressed to this evaluator in a number of the interviews too. In the process of selection, the Lolupe teacher says, she finds herself reading and enjoying the storybooks on the website. In this way, she has learned to predict the kinds of storybooks her pupils would enjoy reading – and feeling confident about her prediction.
- At **Kabubbu primary school**, a teacher told this evaluator about the joy in “recognising himself as a writer” and how “proud” it made him feel that “people around the world will read my story.”<sup>83</sup> that made him feel. Given that he was technologically literate he found the ASb website templates really useful in helping him write. In a 2015 Lolupe (Kenya) group discussion the site coordinator said something remarkably similar: “I am now an author, something I am very proud of. I am also a

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<sup>80</sup> Interview: Josephit Nalwenje, a teacher from a Kibera independent community school, Kenya, September 2016.

<sup>81</sup> Interview: Rose Alungho, Busolwe community librarian, Uganda, October 2016

<sup>82</sup> Interview: Tuluta widow’s group, Busolwe, Uganda, October 2016

<sup>83</sup> Interview: John Emongot, Kabubbu (Uganda), October 2016

translator.”<sup>84</sup> As Stranger-Johannessen and Norton in their study of a rural Ugandan school note: “Through the ASb initiative and its storybooks, teachers began to imagine themselves as writers, readers, and teachers of storybooks, reframing what it means to be a reading teacher.”<sup>85</sup>

- A teacher and member of the **Lunyole Language Association** who is not a native Lunyole speaker, spoke about how much more confident she felt in classrooms “after ASB had been here”. An important part of feeling more confident was, she said, “having a structure (to guide teaching) and having the stories ... which we did not have before.” A consequence of this renewed confidence is that she had taken on a role to train other teachers in the district about how to use African storybooks, and how to use the technology to project stories.

In addition to this qualitative evidence, the number of teachers who are creating, translating and adapting stories (see outcome 1) for ASb, both within pilot sites but also independently, attest to a sense of increased agency (or, at least, that ASb has provided an outlet through which this creativity and agency can be released).

In other cases the signs of agency are more ‘managerial’. Site coordinators have used subsidy money – and/or money they had raised independently - to add resources they feel they need to strengthen this project. Among the examples of this is purchasing a laminator to strengthen self-printed copies of the storybooks and making of teaching aids, creating friendly reading spaces in libraries (with lino and carpets on the floor, child-sized bookshelves, painting windows to create a darkened projection room, etc), printing T-shirts for the children and the teachers for advocacy purposes, and seeking out other sources of money to support the drive to increase mother tongue reading. (In one instance the money will support the continued employment of a highly productive community librarian).

The Kabubbu community library and school is an excellent ‘case study’ in how ASb has helped a group of teachers realise their sense of agency, pedagogically and managerially. The trust-funded community is clearly well-run and the pilot site co-ordinator was led through a budgeting process by their financial director when ASb allocated funds. Funds were, therefore, spent wisely and creatively to strengthen the project. In an interview in September they were actively seeking out new funding sources too.

Furthermore, the nature of the work has led Kabubbu teachers – and teachers elsewhere – to work more collaboratively. Librarians work with teachers to decide on books to print as hard copies, or which class will illustrate the covers of stories they have printed as photocopies, or how to use the library for storytelling. And teachers work together to select stories and decide how to teach them.

But what is significant is that the sense of purpose created by being able to write and upload their own stories **combined with ASb’s technical support**. At the most basic level the teachers said that ASb’s IT training (and the knowledge that they could access virtual support anytime) had teachers motivated towards using computers which they already had “but had not felt safe using”<sup>86</sup>.

In interviews conducted as part of this evaluation – and in other ASb documents – the teachers talked (and demonstrated) how powerful an experience their involvement with ASb has been at other levels too. They feel they have become part of a community of like-minded people because of ASb initiated visits to other sites, the ability to ‘speak with people’ from ASb head-office, joint workshops with teachers from other parts

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<sup>84</sup> *Mid-term Review of the African Storybook Project, May 2015, Hilary Janks and Ken Harley*

<sup>85</sup> *Published paper, Stranger-Johannessen, E., & Norton, B, The African Storybook and language teacher identity in digital times, 2015*

<sup>86</sup> *Interview with site co-ordinator Annet Sebaggala and teachers at Kabubbu, October 2016*

of Kenya and Uganda, and, of course, their ability to create over 70 stories in Luganda, Ateso, and in English and then “see people all over the world reading these”. This excitement has been infectious and is evoking unprompted interest from other (non-involved) teachers.

ASb lead, Tessa Welch captures this feeling of increased significance like this: “Because digital storytelling places the responsibility for storybooks in the hands of individuals and communities with local interests, but at the same time puts authors and their ideas in a global space on a website, it bridges the local and the global. The global is the space for use of the dominant language of wider communication, and the local is the space for the use of local, familiar languages. It is a medium, therefore, that is ideally suitable for multilingual literacy development<sup>87</sup>.”

ASb’s support, resource-wise but especially its training and coaching – has been pivotal and is still necessary, even in schools like Kabubbu, and the Family Literacy Project (in South Africa), that have been declared strong enough to work independently. Many of the new ways of thinking and doing literacy development, as well as the production and use of open licence storybooks (by teachers and learners), and even the technological skills needed to teach and produce, are fragile. The chance of reverting to old habits is still easy. The support will be different, but is an investment that needs to be made for turning this excitement and agency into long-term change.

### *More learner-focused, interactive teaching*

ASb’s baseline study suggested that many “teachers (were) ill-prepared to teach reading - the instructor reads *for* the learners, learners listen”<sup>88</sup>. Teacher training in the pilot countries tended to emphasise a dominant reading teacher and children who listen, chorus and memorise. In addition, they were encouraged “to use English to teach reading because no matter where you go, English is spoken.”<sup>89</sup>

Observations conducted during this evaluation revealed a more progressive pedagogy in many classes - more interactive, child-centred, and focused on meaning and word recognition rather than rote recitation. Teachers and volunteer assistants at libraries *are* getting children to understand words, read more fluently (as a class but also individually), and be more creative with the stories (and so reading for pleasure). As the mid-term evaluation said there is evidence that,

*“(Teachers now) take time to help children engage emotionally with storybooks, relate text to illustrations and engage with characters rather than just answering simple, factual comprehension questions. They recognise the importance of children enjoying storybooks instead of teaching only to satisfy curriculum demands.”<sup>90</sup>*

But the evidence of change was variable, and often tentative.

Most schools and libraries observed used the stories by projecting them onto a classroom wall and this “projected story” was cited by many as one of the most exciting aspects of the African Storybook project. Teachers said they really appreciated the “beauty and relevance” of the ASb artwork, whether as laminated A1-size big books, or as projected images. One teacher explained why: “Children like it but it also helps me

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<sup>87</sup> Presentation, *Digital storytelling for multilingual literacy development: implications for teachers*, Tessa Welch, 2014

<sup>88</sup> Internal ASb document, *Baseline study*, 2013

<sup>89</sup> Interview: CODE facilitators and Maa teachers, Nairobi, September 2016

<sup>90</sup> *Mid-term Review of the African Storybook Project*, May 2015, Hilary Janks and Ken Harley

teach ... because the children can recognize the object and relate it to the word.”<sup>91</sup> She said many readers – with black and white artwork - made this more difficult. Illustrations were used to develop the child’s literacy but also to elicit discussion about topics within other curriculum areas.

The digital method of delivery has challenges, many of which were resolved by teachers with ASb’s assistance:

- It requires a darkened room. Some sites painted windows of a selected room, or bought curtains, or projected into a cupboard where “the sides of the cupboard acted as curtains and the cupboard was portable.”
- It requires electricity and an internet connection. Where this was lacking sites used solar power and stories downloaded onto a laptop computer or USB key.
- It (mostly) required more than one teacher to manage the projector, computer and teaching. In one case it was clear that users were unfamiliar with the technology and thus tentative in its use. (An out of focus – thus unreadable – text was projected for a good 15 minutes before an observer corrected this).

Observations in this evaluation revealed many example of solid teaching, where teachers were drawing on individual learners and asking them to read (even in large classes). Other evaluations provide examples of imaginative use (over and above just solid early literacy pedagogy) and these include:

- Children illustrating stories. Sometimes this is on newsprint as a class activity, but some teachers have asked classes to design book covers “that capture the moral of the story.”<sup>92</sup> In a few cases children’s illustrations were uploaded to the ASb library.
- Children imagining, discussing and then writing new endings to existing stories. In some cases these were simply contextualizing stories set elsewhere but in other cases it was an imaginative act in response to a question like, “Is there another way I which this story could end?”<sup>93</sup>
- Some pilot sites, like Paleng<sup>94</sup>, got children to dramatise the stories. The children’s own workshoped story was then enacted and videoed.

In the schools where little change was evident – and these schools did, in this observation, lack both the most basic resources (a classroom and books!) and agency – teachers sometimes taught Grade 2 children for over an hour without a break and only asked for group oral responses from learners. It was clear in observations conducted as part of this evaluation that children had memorized responses:

- In one class under a tree many were looking back at the observers as they ‘read’ new words from a big book

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<sup>91</sup> Interview, librarians, Family Literacy Project (South Africa), October 2016

<sup>92</sup> Interview, Kabubbu (Uganda) teachers, October 2016. All the covers of the photocopied hard copies of stories in their library had been drawn by children as part of teaching activities. Rather than ‘moral’ the teachers seemed to be referring to the key ‘theme’ of the story.

<sup>93</sup> Interview, teachers at Bubaali (Butaleja, Uganda), October 2016

<sup>94</sup> Internal ASb document, Paleng site report, 2015



- In another – a relatively well-resourced school with a local champion - the projection was so small and washed out by sunshine that the observer could not read the words ... yet the children were “reading” enthusiastically<sup>95</sup>.

As the pilot site case study notes:

*“It’s noticeable that reading some stories is not very fluent and that is also another reason for re-reading them many times. Some children stumble over some words. This may mean that the children can read only when they know the story well enough, that is, that they are memorizing rather than actually reading the stories.”<sup>96</sup>*

But contexts – especially the lack of many hard copies of books - *do* mitigate against ‘best practice’. Teachers are aware of this and in more than case asked when ASb might provide these. They noted that “there was no chance of getting these from the department and the only option is through an NGO, like World Vision or African Storybook.”<sup>97</sup>

The lack of hard copy books makes individual or small group reading practice impossible. In the best cases (and these are few), teachers have leveraged the open licence and the printers provided by ASb to print/photocopy storybooks for use in class. At sites with more resources, colour A3-sized laminated books and even booklets have been printed for use. At one Kenyan school – supported by iMlango - learners were reading individually at computers. Another librarian at the Family Literacy Project spoke positively about using the reading app on her phone, which she said she “uses with my children at home ... I read to them and they read to me.”<sup>98</sup>

The danger of not finding a solution to the lack of a means to read individually is that the excitement of what is almost regarded as “going to the movies” – and the power that the image and person projecting it have - may distract from the harder work of learning to read.

These new practices are nascent and tentative in some schools, and much stronger and more established in others. ASb recognise this. The pilot site case study notes that while “projecting stories on a screen has engendered great enthusiasm for story reading both from teachers and pupils in Lolupe Primary School ... (and the case study) demonstrates actual success of story reading, creating and adaptation” it also notes the importance of continued “capacity building”.<sup>99</sup>

In fact, in this evaluation’s interviews one of the most frequent unprompted comment from teachers and pilot site officials, was to the positive influence of ASb training on their teaching.

### ***Moving from an ‘English-first’ approach***

ASb’s baseline study suggested educators’ prioritisation of English over local languages in early literacy development impedes both literacy and learning. The mid-term evaluation noted that in Uganda the new

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<sup>95</sup> *From observations at Tororo and Butaleja (Uganda) schools, October 2016*

<sup>96</sup> *Final Evaluation of African Storybook project: Extension of pilot site work into broader systemic implementation: the Lolupe hub, Ken Harley, 2016*

<sup>97</sup> *Interview, Lunyole Language Association, Busolwe (Uganda), October 2016*

<sup>98</sup> *Interview, librarians, Family Literacy Project, October 2016*

<sup>99</sup> *Final Evaluation of African Storybook project: Extension of pilot site work into broader systemic implementation: the Lolupe hub, Ken Harley, 2016*

curriculum required both mother tongue teaching materials and teachers able to teach in the mother tongue, and lacked both. The ASb's mission was to change this preference for English over mother tongue languages and provide the mother tongue materials and competence to use these appropriately in class.

The assessment of Outcome 1 suggests that ASb are succeeding in moving towards the optimal number of mother tongue storybooks in pilot site locations to support its new approaches to early literacy development and its "reading for pleasure" focus. (Ugandan interviewees were particularly sceptical about the possibility of the government providing readers or storybooks).

The mid-term evaluation, case studies and learnings question papers, as well as a number of other research pieces, provide deep insight into how ASb's work at pilot sites have changed the way in which educators use English and mother tongue instruction.

They note that there were national differences:

- In **Ugandan** sites, the choice seemed to be either English (the dominant choice) or a local language, but there were no concrete examples of use of two languages together. For example, in the Butaleja district ASb's work with the Lunyole Language Association (LLA) advanced their work on Lunyole orthography but also led to a lot of work creating and translating books into Lunyole. This made it possible for teachers in the associated schools to use mother tongue stories in their literacy teaching.
- Sites in **Kenya** and **South Africa** exploited the fact that storybooks are available in English and one or more local languages. In South Africa's Atteridgeville (an urban context) some schools read in Sepedi but created in English (and translated the storybooks into Sepedi), while in another they used isiZulu, Sepedi and English for accessing storybooks, creating, translating and adapting. In the pilot site report reflections, a prominent response was that the storybooks were used to teach English.
- In **Paleng, in Lesotho**, English appears to be the favoured language for teaching and learning. For this reason the librarians at Paleng work with English and Sesotho (Lesotho) storybooks. "We always tell/read storybooks in both English and Sesotho. If there is no Sesotho version online, we translate it ourselves verbally for the children."

There is, thus, some evidence of the website nurturing trans-languaging approaches to early child literacy teaching in Kenya, South Africa and Lesotho. The interviews conducted in Kenya, Uganda and KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa) for this evaluation supported this convention. Because the stories are now *available* in English and one or more local languages, and because children have to learn English as well as a local language, a number of educators used the stories to teach both languages.

A striking example of trans-languaging comes from the far Northern Kenyan pilot site, in Lolupe. A teacher projected "*Curious baby elephant*" in English. He had read the story before in Ng'aturkana with the class. As soon as the story was projected, pupils recognised it. They read the title in English, the teacher asked them what the title was in Ng'aturkana, and they remembered it. They struggled to pronounce some of the words in English but when he showed them the text in Ng'aturkana, they read it fluently without stammering. They pointed out pictures in the English and Ng'aturkana versions. The atmosphere was relaxed and pupils and teacher interacted with ease, asking and answering questions. Since the class was small, the teacher could use the print book alongside projection, enabling pupils to read the story in two languages at the same

time<sup>100</sup>. This final point demonstrates, again, the importance of having print versions available alongside digital storybooks. This is made possible by the ASb publishing model but requires more resources.

Some teachers – primarily at schools in Uganda - spoke of their excitement at seeing “our language next to international languages like English ... and seeing how they tell our stories in that language.”<sup>101</sup>.

But there is also hesitation among some teachers to teach reading in their mother tongue because, in the written form, it “feels like a foreign language.”<sup>102</sup> In an interview with the Lunyole Language Association (LLA), members spoke of teachers’ having very little knowledge of *written* Lunyole and so were often more comfortable reading English. Consequently, the idea of teaching reading in Lunyole was regarded as daunting. An ASb research paper notes that when Lunyole speaking teachers were invited to participate in ASb literacy research, they “requested that the initial focus of the research meetings should be on extending their own knowledge of reading and writing in Lunyole.”<sup>103</sup>

LLA members felt that as teachers became more familiar with the language “it would be natural for teachers to switch between them as they teach”. A teacher-member of the LLA demonstrated this in a class she taught, which was observed by three other teachers. The authors of the ASb research paper concluded that because teachers now “had access to a range of texts in Lunyole and thus could see *value* in being literate in it – both for themselves and for the learners in their classrooms.”

Clearly, while teachers feel incompetent in reading in their mother tongue, they will not be that keen to teach it. ASb’s training is cited by teachers as being important in ‘giving (them) confidence’ to teach differently.

While uneven, the availability (now) of storybooks in multiple languages, ASb training, and (at some sites) the passion for their mother tongue and work to create storybooks in that language, does seem to have nurtured less English-centric approaches. In some cases, it has increased the use of trans-linguaging approaches to literacy development.

### *Reading for pleasure: mixed messages*

The baseline study showed that there was little reading for pleasure, or for general knowledge, or a sense even that this was valuable. Instead, reading was treated very much as something that must be learnt to be successful. These attitudes seemed prevalent on the part of learners, and teachers and even librarians. ASb wanted to change this attitude and instil a “reading for pleasure” culture instead.

There is certainly evidence that African storybooks, and especially the projection of these stories, the attractiveness of the full colour artwork, and the fact that the stories are, as one teacher put it, “culturally exciting” has increased the excitement of reading for both teachers and learners. This supports the ASb’s early (2014) judgment that the “website and its storybooks ... arouse children’s desire and curiosity”, creating an atmosphere where “children want to read all the time”.

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<sup>100</sup> Described in the *Learnings Papers Version 4 reflection*.

<sup>101</sup> Interview, Kabubbu teachers, October 2016

<sup>102</sup> Interview, Lunyole Language Association, Busolwe, October 2016

<sup>103</sup> Published paper, *Languaging in and about Lunyole: literacy teaching and learning in two Ugandan primary schools*, Juliet Tembe and Yvonne Reed, 2016

School teachers told the ASb – and this evaluator - that children “want to be given storybooks to read – any time they are given a book (regardless of the subject), they quickly open it to look for stories like the ones they have read with the teachers.”<sup>104</sup>

A large part of this enthusiasm, it seems, has to do with the lack of *any* reading material (so “anything is better than nothing”), and with the novelty of projected stories (with its vivid colour and culturally appropriate content and artwork). In interviews, many teachers spoke of the fascination with seeing their language in print, and of reading stories “about their lives” accompanied by “culturally appropriate illustrations”. (Often this had to do with something as simple as the colour or pattern on a shirt, or headwear, or the kinds of trees – detail was important!)

For this evaluator a more powerful indicator of “reading for pleasure” were the many references by interviewees about teachers and learners wanting to take storybooks home:

- One of the most moving stories from Kabubbu (Uganda) was that of an 8 year-old boy, supported by his mother (who had come to Kabubbu not able to read, and had been supported to learn to read) reading out a story in Kinyarwanda at a certificate ceremony<sup>105</sup>
- In KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa) an ASb librarian spoke about how the mobile app now allows her to read stories to her children at home and “they even want to read the story on my phone”<sup>106</sup>. This seems to be a reading option that many teachers found potentially attractive – when alerted to it - but were not aware of.
- The Kibera (Kenya) chief librarian, and teachers from local community schools, spoke about the many learners who had asked to take storybooks home. “They want to read to their parents”<sup>107</sup> ... some of whom are illiterate. This desire was expressed by teachers and librarians at almost all the sites visited.

There were only two examples of a site in which children had actually borrowed copies of storybooks. It seems that this is not more common despite requests because many sites were not able to afford to photocopy storybooks, and librarians and teachers were really concerned about preserving books (“Just one week and the book is torn or folded up<sup>108</sup>” said one teacher referring to her need to continually photocopy new books).

The work done by the Busolwe community library with women’s (widows’) groups is possibly also an indicator of the power of reading. Their initial involvement was through telling stories to camera. But this has led to requests to see the storybooks on the ASb site, and to learn to read.

Pleasure isn’t an impetus to read commonly cited by teachers; utility still features more strongly than many other criteria if this evaluation’s interviews are to be believed. This may be influenced by culture, but in interviews it seemed that curriculum pressure (through the allocation of school time) played a big part in reinforcing the idea that reading is a means to an end rather than an activity enjoyable in and of itself.

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<sup>104</sup> *Presentation, Using a digital multilingual story publishing model, Dorcas Wepukhulu and Ephraim Mhlanga, 2014*

<sup>105</sup> *Report of visit to Kabubbu Pilot site 22 July 2016 and re-told in the September interview with teachers*

<sup>106</sup> *Interview, librarians, Family Literacy Project, October 2016*

<sup>107</sup> *Interview, Kibera chief librarian and private schools who use the library, September 2016*

<sup>108</sup> *Interview, Kabubbu teachers, October 2016*

In some pilot schools in Kenya, for example, the Mother Tongue lesson on the school timetable was often donated for other subjects to be taught which were considered more relevant to the academic achievement of the learners. Where teachers can ‘justify’ reading – by showing how the issues raised in the story link to other subjects (or moral improvement) – they create more time for reading. This may be why country coordinators report that “the most popular stories are about animals both domestic and wild, about human characters that bring out virtues and vice, folktales, stories about heroes in the community and stories about school”.

One of the sites visited had a very different set of reasons for selection: They wanted “stories that foster self-expression and creativity, stories that give us a chance for discussion with the children”. This – the Kabubbu school pilot site – was also relatively well-resourced and staffed by teachers with a good understanding of both technology and pedagogy. A small concern is that this school – which is funded by an NGO – employs teachers on contract and some of the best teachers interviewed were not sure “how long Kabubbu will have us ... we need to re-apply soon”.

A less often spoken about selection criteria in interviews was the children’s reading level. Teachers were aware of this – prompted, they said, by what they’d learnt in ASb workshops – but the most common response was that they were not sure how to do this practically. As a consequence, they relied on their intuition.

## HOW SUCCESSFUL HAVE LIBRARIES BEEN AS PILOT SITES?

ASb has worked with five library **partners** in the three pilot countries since inception. These can loosely be divided into two ‘kinds’:

- Pilot sites in **community or school-based libraries**: Kabubbu (Uganda), Busolwe (Uganda) Paleng (Lesotho), and Family Literacy Project community libraries in the Underberg area of KwaZulu-Natal
- Formal relationships (supported by MoUs) with **libraries that are part of systems**: Kibera (Kenya) & Saulsville (South Africa)

ASb also works with school libraries in KwaZulu-Natal, although this relationship is more about schools than about library systems. (See Outcome 3 for a discussion of the KwaZulu-Natal **systems partnership**).

### *Libraries (potentially) within systems*

ASb’s relationship with both Saulsville Library and Kibera Library are part of ASb’s strategy to seek systemic partners as opposed to stand-alone pilot sites. They are, according to ASb, an

*“important way to facilitate the integration of the ASb website and stories into library activities in communities, towns and/or school libraries. ... Where there are libraries in communities, there are often programmes to encourage reading. Being part of these campaigns and events will further market ASb and encourage people to contribute to the repository of stories, translate stories and use them to read”<sup>109</sup>.*

From this evaluation it seems libraries have one powerful advantage over schools as pilot sites (or hubs) and that is that books, and more books, is their core business. For schools, fulfilling curriculum requirements often overwhelm ASb’s desire to get more books into the system and get children reading for pleasure.

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<sup>109</sup> Internal ASb paper, *Building the sustainability of the African Storybook Initiative*, Vis Naidoo, March, 2016.

Early this year, after the end of the evaluation period, ASb made a breakthrough with Kibera and are now beginning to implement a systemic library-based initiative. The descriptions of Kibera and Saulsville below are based on observations and data in the evaluation period:

### **Kibera Library (Kenya)**

This library is part of the Kenya National Library Service and is partly funded by the central government.

It is a lively place where, on the afternoon of observation, over 200 children came into the **story reading** sessions (using projected African Storybooks) and maths sessions. The story-reading sessions have been run daily since April 2016 for schoolchildren from Kibera schools, many from the unfunded 'private' schools. (There are 70 schools, many unfunded private schools, in the area around the library, according to Mary Kinyanjui (the Chief Librarian). None have libraries and many use the Kibera Community Library.

Initially a story reading session was held in the school holidays, attracting 118 children and 9 teachers, where a story written by two of the children in 2015 was read, in English. Subsequently, story reading has taken place daily from 4 to 6.30 pm after school. Over a two-month period in May to June a total of over 20 000<sup>110</sup> children attended, with an average of 238 per week, according to Kinyanjui.<sup>111</sup>

Thirty stories were read in this period, mostly in English; eight of them were popular and were read multiple times. The stories were facilitated by volunteers who checked understanding and flow, and the children were encouraged to tell their own stories after the session ended. Such interactions were mainly in the Kiswahili language in contrast to the story reading.

**Writing competitions** were initiated at Kibera in 2015 and then successfully implemented at the Saulsville library too. (It is also to be used in Ethiopia). Kibera has held two successful competitions. The first drew students from 5 schools and produced a total of 53 Kiswahili and 52 English manuscripts. The winning story, *Kidnapped*, was written by two boys from one of the informal settlements in Kibera was uploaded to the ASb site and has now been translated into 11 different languages. It also forms the basis for which Kenya National Libraries Kibera, applied for Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL), a Public Library Innovation Award 9 for funding for the library<sup>112</sup>. The April 2016 competition produced 49 manuscripts, 34 of which were not entirely original. Two winning stories, namely, *Sofia escapes* and *Cunning Madola* are being illustrated by the children who wrote them with the help of their school mates prior to being published on the website.

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<sup>110</sup> According to Tessa Welch, "Many of these are probably repeat visits by the same kids. As a consequence ASb, after follow-up, estimated that unique visits probably total about 14 000".

<sup>111</sup> The numbers provided at different times seem contradictory. I counted over 200 attendees on the afternoon I was there, and Kinyanjui said this "was typical". If this is so, then in a week they should attract between a 1000 and 1400 learners, or between 9 000 and about 13 000 over a two-month period. Her estimation of 238 **per week** seems wrong at all levels.

<sup>112</sup> Lorato Trok, *African Storybook Initiative Writing Competitions: A sustainable way of getting more stories published online through community involvement*, September 2016.

<sup>112</sup> Case Study Report 1 - *African Storybook's Systemic Implementation through Libraries: A Case Study of Saulsville Community Library*, Tshwane, October 2016, Hilary Janks

<sup>112</sup> Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, February 2017

The library has no budget for printing so no books have been printed off for **borrowing**. There is, however, strong demand from the community for printed books. As mentioned earlier, teachers from the private schools that use the library said that “their children were always demanding” that they take books home.

### **Saulsville Library (South Africa)**

Saulsville is part of the City of Tshwane Library Services, and wholly funded by the city. Like Kibera, the library is envisaged as a hub for schools in the Atteridgeville region and will also act as the core library for other libraries in that region, making it a good partner for extending the work of ASb beyond its pilot sites. An MoU was signed with the Tshwane City Library Services in January 2016 and a letter of agreement with Saulsville Library in March 2016.<sup>113</sup>

**Story reading** was started in 2016 and takes place regularly during the week facilitated by volunteers from the library user group. As in Kibera, the stories are read in English and the children invited to translate what has been read into their own languages. A recent visit to the library showed that this practice has been adjusted in the light of Janks’s comment in her evaluation: children now choose the language to be read, and then interpret for each other in either English or another African language. Janks is concerned that children should be reading stories in their **own language** and have print versions available too.

A **writing competition**, “Writing in your mother tongue”, was launched in May 2016 and received 117 submissions in five languages by children across grades 4 to 9. Four retired teachers judged the stories and chose three winning stories for Foundation Phase and four for the Intermediate Phase. The well-attended prize-giving ceremony resulted in individual winners receiving tablets and the schools being awarded storybooks. Although the seven winning stories were judged by ASB as “not great” they are trying to “work two or three into publishable stories” and they “have a plan to involve local illustrators in illustrating them”<sup>114</sup>.

The Saulsville library submitted a list of 42 storybooks in Sepedi they would like printed, and 10 copies of each will be ready in 2017 after which the library will institute a system of **borrowing**. This evaluator’s visit and the case study, revealed a dearth of books in African languages (in fact, a shortage of books for children of any kind). Black and white photocopies of ASb storybooks were available to read and borrow at some Atteridgeville school libraries.

### **In summary**

Kibera and Saulsville are to be core libraries through which to reach a much larger number of libraries and schools within the regions to which the libraries cater. But, according to pilot site reports and evaluation interviews, this has been challenging, but there are also some positive signs:

- The Saulsville library reports that the “logistics of transport made it difficult for some Atteridgeville schools, including three pilot schools to visit often”. One school did not participate in the story writing competition in 2016, but another non-pilot school was the most active school in the competition. And the story writing contest was judged a success, and is likely to have increased interest in the African Storybook Initiative.

- Kibera library reports provide very little information on outreach or relationships with other libraries or centres. Yet the head librarian, Mary Kinyanjui, was very positive about both the benefits ASb had brought to her library but also of plans for outreach: “Next year we will run another writing competition and we will use the 61 government and community branches of this library – I want to form a network... It is really important to focus on the community schools and libraries that are not funded by anyone.”<sup>115</sup>

ASb’s 2017 strategy for libraries is about “broadening engagement with a single library into engagement with a network of libraries”. This has now started at Kibera in Kenya, but still in the planning phase in Saulsville (South Africa).

### *Community libraries at pilot sites*

This evaluator’s visit to two of the sites – Busolwe and Kabubbu – and reading through evaluations and other documents suggest that the library sites are among the most dynamic in ASb, even though they are extremely poorly resourced. Here are some observations:

#### **Busolwe Community Library (Uganda)**

This is the home of the Lunyole Language Association and LLA members serve on the library’s board and, from 2017, a ‘hub’ for an expanded number of schools in the Butaleja District in Eastern Uganda. In reality the library has no more than, perhaps, 50 books. Many are donated and are out-of-date sets of encyclopedias and American adult thrillers.

But it is an example of how mother tongue passion allied with a few resources can push a small organization to the point where it now manages nine schools, two women’s groups, a library and has managed to produce over 100 storybooks in Lunyole. As a library it is also wanting to increase its stock of books so are far more engaged in trying to print off hard copies.

The LLA has played an important role in developing Lunyole, producing a Lunyole dictionary and stabilizing the Lunyole orthography. They see ASb as supporting their work and have played a central role in writing and editing stories in Lunyole. LLA’s strong advocacy for local language use in schools and its partnership with ASb has had a big influence on the use of Lunyole language in pilots.

The LLA 2016 report says that they have established two women’s groups Hwenghimbe and Tuluta, and they read storybooks but also record oral stories. This is the only concrete example of the storybooks being used for adult education and is an initiative driven by the LLA. This, again, points to the power of a ‘hub’ being led by a library rather than school. Schools tend to be focused on fulfilling crammed curriculum demands, and on their learners. Libraries are focused on getting the community to read; the central ASb mandate. It is unlikely that a video initiative like this would have emerged from a school, it seems.

The LLA also works with education department officials in the Butaleja District as well as with World Vision on their School and Community Accountability for Learning Enhancement (SCALE) programme.

#### **Kabubbu Library (Uganda)**

A donor funded community library and school staffed by an enthusiastic group of teachers and librarians, and managed by a hands-on team. Prior to ASb working with the Kabubbu primary school, the library did not cater for children’s reading needs and their book collection – while much better than that observed elsewhere – was small and largely unsuitable for children.

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<sup>115</sup> *Interview with Mary Kinyanjui, September 2016.*



The library now has a reading section, with a carpet and book shelves carrying African storybooks, and the equipment supplied by ASb. The collection does, now, include printed copies of African storybooks. Some are black and white photocopies with covers illustrated by learners which is testament to the creative joint work done by teachers and librarians. The school has also brought on-board local entrepreneur who has sourced well-priced printing, and so the library now has a number of full colour and laminated versions of selected ASb storybooks.

The librarians see this professional printing as a way to proceed because, they say, “it is cheaper than buying books” and “these books will last longer than the photocopies”<sup>116</sup> The pilot site was primarily a library (within a school) with a mandate to improve their stock of books and this may explain the impetus to explore the professional printing of books more seriously than others.

Kabubbu is now independent, and working off a really strong base. However, given the school’s private funding staff are all on short contracts and have to re-apply for their jobs. Some of the ASb’s most passionate advocates have contract renewals in 2017, and are anxious about this.

### **Paleng (Lesotho)**

This is another donor funded library that operates with limited resources. Its aim is to support children’s literacy development – it was set up as a story reading library - and support from ASb has provided access to storybooks for the children it serves.

Although its numbers are small (17 children, 2 librarians and a preschool teacher) it has networked effectively with a nearby museum and a literacy project (with 24 children). It has been an important ‘ideas’ centre for ASb, in terms of its lending system, its creative literacy development pedagogies, and the fact that it prints its own books, and books for its partners (and possibly, for sale).

Paleng’s reading sessions have proved to be excellent models of literacy development that the ASb is working to spread through the project. ASb has asked them to develop a series of video clips of creative literacy practices that work in community and mainstream library settings.<sup>117</sup> Paleng has also run workshops in local two orphanages and one for teachers in Morija.

Writing competitions have not been run at Paleng, due to the relatively small numbers of children involved. But many other exciting activities, like making a video of children dramatizing a story, have been conducted. The Paleng director, a literacy educator, writes and illustrate stories which are donated to ASb.

At Paleng there is a relatively sophisticated lending system for books which ASb has asked them to record on video for use by other libraries. Children 9 years or older can borrow two books at a time, managed by child volunteer library assistants. There is no time limit on borrowing, and children are rewarded for every 20 books they can demonstrate they have read. “About six ASb titles have been borrowed and are ‘constantly taken out and read, which we take to mean they are enjoying them’<sup>118</sup>.

### **In summary**

The two community libraries observed have been, in this evaluator’s experience, the most dynamic sites visited. The third – Paleng – is also described in ASb documents as an exciting and creative hub. They:

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<sup>116</sup> Interview, Kabubbu teachers, October 2016

<sup>117</sup> Paleng Field Report, 15-18 June 2016.

<sup>118</sup> Paleng Field Report, September 2016.

- Straddle schools and community, which makes initiatives like Busolwe’s story-telling work with widows’ groups possible. (But still, as in Busolwe, co-ordinate school activities).
- Focus is on books (and reading) – and thus, as in Kabubbu, innovate around accessing hard copies - while also being interested in *books for schools and learning*.

Arguably, it is this positioning that may make them the ideal hubs for future growth.

## HOW IMPORTANT IS ASB’S SUPPORT?

If interviewees are to be believed – and, of course, they must be! – then ASb’s support has been very important. The most frequent unprompted response was how much they had learnt from ASb, and how much more they want.

The mid-term evaluation demonstrated how important pilot site educators found ASb’s training and resource support:

- Interviewees spoke of how ‘life-changing’<sup>119</sup> the training on how to use storybooks effectively was in their teaching literacy and reading
- Interviewee’s responses to ASb-provided ‘kits’ – computers, projectors, printers, solar panels, laminators, etc - were more mixed. All were unanimous about how necessary they were, and all wanted more. But this was also the area where the most unprompted criticisms emerged about breakdowns, or lack of support, or shortages.
- African Storybooks – online, on USB sticks or as hard copies - were often the only children’s books, or *African* children’s books, in evidence. In Kenyan and South African sites, interviewees were hopeful that the education departments would provide more texts. In Uganda, all interviewees said it was unlikely that books would be funded by government.

## Training

Two ideas were repeated frequently by interviewees who had participated in ASb-led workshops:

- That they should select stories on the basis of what their learners wanted, but also on the basis of what their learners’ level was.
- That it was critical to get individual learner’s to “recognize the word and say it” rather than have everyone in the room chorus. Responses.

A number spoke fondly, but vaguely, about learning about “the structure of stories” but much more passionately about their excitement (and fear) of writing their own stories.

Organisers and teachers at a number of sites spoke about wanting more training. In one case the person assigned to train teachers – mostly in how to use the technology, but also in how to use stories to teach reading - said she really felt she “needed more knowledge.”<sup>120</sup>

An ASb co-ordinator spoke strongly of the need to make the training “more systematic ... teachers need ongoing support and inspiration if this (changes in pedagogy) is to take root.”<sup>121</sup> She said that changing

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<sup>119</sup> Interview, Lunyole Language Association, October 2016. This phrase was used here but similar sentiments were expressed by teachers at schools in the Butaleja district and elsewhere.

<sup>120</sup> Interview, Rose Alungho, Busolwe librarian, October 2016

<sup>121</sup> Interview, Juliet Tembe, Uganda country co-ordinator, October 2016.

pedagogic practices – **habits** developed over many years – in contexts of ill-equipped schools, large classes, and often poorly trained teachers, is hard and will take time. It requires a “simple set of new procedures” that are easily practiced:

- A teacher described this as “a teacher’s guide to use stories. If it is P1, then teach this level of story...teach like this.”<sup>122</sup>
- Later, the co-ordinator for this region explained that what teachers wanted was “a step-by-step guide about how to teach literacy properly. They need something really simple and practical...”<sup>123</sup>

ASb faces a difficult choice, and one that they are aware of and discussing. Increasing resourcing and training in schools that are severely disrupted – either through lack of resourcing or lack of social cohesion and agency – may drain resources from areas where their ideas are taking root. There is evidence from development projects elsewhere that removing support prematurely because projects seem successful can doom them; the projects fade as funding is removed because habits have not changed and the context does not encourage the new habits.

The challenge of moving into the most poorly resourced schools is, I believe, captured in a comment as part of a side conversation with a district inspector in Tororo, Uganda. He said that he had “allocated African Storybook to” the school because it was one of the “worst schools in terms of facilities...it was the school most in need, and we prefer to begin with the worst ... it needed something”<sup>124</sup>.

## Books

Many interviewees spoke of how ‘thrilled’ they were to be able to add to their ‘hard copy’ reading supply – often significantly – by printing storybooks from the ASb website. Library activities – and thus the strength of libraries - were bolstered by the easy availability of African storybooks. Projected stories facilitated by teachers or volunteers were popular and increased the numbers of children using the facility. But so were individual after-school reading sessions.

As the chief librarian at Kibera Community Library said: “Since the projected stories have started this library gets hundreds of children. These children may become readers and join the library...”<sup>125</sup>

These are clear examples of the benefits of the OER publishing model, and a benefit that pilot sites are increasingly recognising. It provides libraries and schools with the opportunity – and resources - to strengthen their institutions and practices, and do so relatively easily and cheaply.

Two challenges need to be addressed, according to people interviewed:

- **The “need” for hard copies of the storybooks.** Both teachers and librarians said that while projected stories were extremely popular, their biggest demand is for conventional books.
- **Technological support that enables book printing.** Some schools are advanced in this regard and have no problem printing off PDFs, or even of getting quotes to print books professionally. But many find both challenging.

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<sup>122</sup> Interview, teachers at St Benedict’s, Korobudi (Uganda), October 2016

<sup>123</sup> Interview, Ogot Owino, Pan education Network, Tororo, October 2016

<sup>124</sup> Side conversation with the Chief District Inspector of an eastern Ugandan school district, Tororo, October 2016

<sup>125</sup> Interview, Mary Kinyanjui, Kibera, October 2016

The storybooks and ASb training have spurred on new teaching-reading practices and, possibly more importantly, created an interest by other (non-involved) teachers in new ways of teaching. There is a sense of excitement, agency, and emerging new practices.

The website – as a free repository of storybooks – is critical to this. As Welch says, “... (they have) ... a digital library of illustrated storybooks for early literacy development, where teachers and learners are not only free to translate and adapt and create storybooks, but also to publish these for others to see”. Instead of waiting to receive the correct materials in the correct languages and correct numbers, they can make their own – downloading and printing or projecting on a classroom wall. They can reclaim their agency as teachers.”<sup>126</sup>

But these positive stories do not hold for all sites. Local conditions – from resource scarcity through rigid curriculum demands to low morale - can sap this agency. It seems that much of the best work is done within schools and contexts where there are passionate advocates (for ASb or for mother tongue teaching), some level of resourcing, and a sense of social cohesion.

A start has been made. But ASb’s support is critical to the start becoming a self-sustaining set of new practices. ASb recognize this and their reflection on this demonstrates their learning:

- They are, correctly, positive about the ability of “digital, open licensing” with “a little support” to develop “teacher innovation/creativity”, and that “digital and print together can lead to new and expanded reading experiences”.
- They are also correct that the presence of “local language experts” provides important “support to teachers and librarians (which) has resulted in greater reading in local language”. (From this evaluation it seems that it is a passion for language rather than just expertise that matters.)
- And they note that “Teachers and librarians need support to effectively use storybooks for teaching reading and to write good storybooks.”<sup>127</sup>

All of this requires ongoing support, allocated strategically.

## 2. ASb’s structured partnerships

ASb have built a strong set of partnerships who **implement**; who either work directly with teachers, or teacher educators or education departments, or who ‘distribute’ ASb storybooks to a much wider audience through web-based distribution.

These partners are both known and cultivated, and unknown and spontaneous. At the most basic level, partners are attracted to ASb because of its open publishing model – it enables them to offer African stories attractively illustrated to large audiences, or enables them to do the work they are contracted to do.

In addition, partners spoke of the authenticity of the stories, the fact that they were available in ‘unusual’ languages, that the artwork was attractive (‘they look good’), and that they are conceptually sound (ASb’s reading level descriptors were used in major international study).

For ASb these partnerships promise sustainability; that mother tongue storybooks offered through an open resources model will continue to be used, at no cost to ASb. In addition, the partnerships provide

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<sup>126</sup> *Presentation, Increasing teacher agency through use of openly licensed digital stories for early literacy development, Tessa Welch, 2015*

<sup>127</sup> *ASb internal paper, Learnings question 3, January 2017*

“connections to other organisations and state actors working in the fields of literacy development, reading, and OER”, and “access to new ideas” that have informed and shaped ASb’s approach to this endeavor.

## WHAT DO THE NUMBERS SAY?

Those who have benefitted directly and indirectly by their work does exceed by a very large number – the targets ASb set (as we noted earlier).

The 2012 grant proposal estimated that ASb would form partnerships with “at least 10 level 2 organisations (organisations who use storybooks and the ASB website in their own projects). By November 2016 “active agreements” had been signed with 30 organisations (these include system partners discussed in Outcome 3) in South Africa, Lesotho, Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, Ethiopia, Tanzania/UK, and Canada. Twenty-one of these are memoranda of understanding (MoUs), agreements that include financial commitments to each other. Partners with agreements are varied:

- Some focus on **systemic implementation in schooling**, with government departments like the Department of Basic Education in South Africa (see Outcome 3 for more detail about systemic implementation) as well as NGOs who work closely with government, like RTI International, iMlango (Kenya), Molteno (South Africa) and Imagine1Day (Ethiopia). The KwaZulu-Natal Partners in Early Reading systemic initiative includes NGOs - Room to Read and PILO – and government – the provincial Department of Education.
- Others work to integrate mother tongue storybooks into **teacher education**, like Kenyatta University (in Kenya) and the University of Mpumalanga (Siyabuswa, in South Africa). (See Outcome 3)
- A number do **story development**, like Kibale Forest Schools Programme (Uganda) and Molteno Institute (South Africa)
- Some are **small scale users**, like Makini schools and OLE in Ghana, and Debre Berhan University, CODE, and Beyond Access in Ethiopia)
- Finally, there are **libraries involved in systemic implementation**, such as Saulsville (and the City of Tshwane in South Africa) and Kibera (discussed above as pilot sites)
- One MoU – with University of Nairobi – is dormant.

In addition, there are partners where there aren’t formal agreements but productive working relationships. These include:

- **Organisations for influence and advice**, such as the Global Book Alliance based in Washington and organisations associated with the Global Book Alliance such as CODE Canada; Goethe Institute; and Reading Associations in South Africa and Uganda
- **Funders**: Vodacom, for example, has donated equipment for story writing competitions, and Oppenheimer Memorial Trust for development of mathematics storybooks. Vodacom also carries African Storybooks on its teacher support website in South Africa.
- **Organisations involved in small scale use of storybooks and/or website tools**. These include, for example, the Lima Rural Development Foundation, Philegathemba project, Little Zebra, Ingrid Schechter (with Education without Borders), and Puku Books
- **Partners with whom to apply for additional funding for systemic implementation** like Educators International and Open Learning Exchange in Ghana; KZN Dept of Ed library services/Room to Read/Programme for the Improvement of Learning Outcomes

- **Partners for long term funding for implementation of large scale literacy programmes**, like the Foundation for Professional Development, Molteno Institute, Oxford University Press, and the Voluntary Service Organisation.
- **Others:** A number of other individuals and organisations play different roles – from being a ‘friend’ who advocates, through providing advice, to distributing stories. These include with Pratham India, CODE Canada, Grace Rwanda, Bonny Norton (an early champion and very important advisor and advocate), Library for all, and World Reader (a possible MoU to come).

Glennie and Welch, in their Pan Commonwealth Forum presentation, say that there are a “further 60 potential partners on the ASb partner list”.

These partner organisations make concrete ASb’s aim that they position themselves as

*“a necessary partner to government and large-scale literacy development projects, supplying openly licensed multilingual materials that can be customised and printed for distribution in schools” and “...through a wide network of partners...the initiative is hoping to stimulate expansion to further languages and contexts, without relying on a small team located in Johannesburg to manage the effort.”<sup>128</sup>*

More recently ASb refined their understanding of the kinds of partnership necessary to move the initiative towards long-term sustainability. They ‘represented’ them on a continuum in terms of levels of dependency on the ASb team:

*“From 2017 onwards ASb see an additional form of structured relationship - joint funding proposals with others working in the field (for example, with Room to Read, KZN DoE ELITS and Jika iMfundo to support ELITS to set up, resource and maintain school libraries in 5 schools in each of 12 districts in KwaZulu-Natal (10 of these libraries will be digital); or with Educators’ International in Northern Ghana to improve literacy teaching through a phonics based approach supported by creation of local language readers published on ASb website.”<sup>129</sup>*

In addition, the ASb mailing list now regularly sends out news flashes to over 1000 interested parties.

## WHAT IS THE QUALITY OF THESE PARTNERSHIPS?

ASb’s aim has always been to make this initiative a “project of partners” where the website resource and the project’s vision “is increasingly independent of the main project team.”<sup>130</sup>

ASb do not work directly with children and achieves its literacy goals by working with partners. These partners are of many different kinds, located in a variety of African contexts – “from extremely remote rural places such as Turkana in the North West of Kenya, to township/peri-urban settings; and across languages, both official/mainstream, as well as marginalised”.

In this section we will explore partners that are **not** state actors. In the next chapter we explore systemic partners.

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<sup>128</sup> Published paper, *Open educational resources for early literacy in Africa: The role of the African Storybook initiative*, Tessa Welch and Jennifer Glennie, 2016.

<sup>129</sup> 2016 Annual report to Comic Relief, February 2017

<sup>130</sup> Grant start-up form to Comic Relief, Revised, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013

The numbers suggest that ASb are having an impact. Here are three short descriptions of partnerships that *show how* the impact plays out (the quality of the partnerships) and why these partnerships are likely to foster further growth:

- **iMlango**, an NGO working with the Kenyan education department, delivers an interactive online learning platform (and offline tablets) with mathematics and reading resources to 205 primary schools in Kenya. They reach 150 000 children – 68 000 girls - in 4 counties. They have uploaded 71 ASb storybooks onto their portal – and onto the tablets they distribute to schools - and “have received positive feedback to these”<sup>131</sup>. As an example of use, here is the data from two random months in 2016 – March and October – with March being a more “typical month” than October:
  - In March 19 393 “unique students” in four counties spent 5 338 hours reading 71 different English and Kiswahili titles; in October 14 684 “unique students” in four counties spent some 1 683 hours reading 71 storybooks in Kiswahili and English (in about equal proportions).
  - In March, some 535 teachers used African storybooks; in October 123 teachers did.
  - Interestingly, only 15 to 23% of learners were in the first three ‘grades’ (or standards). Most readers were from more senior classes: Standards 6, 7 and 8 accounted for between 50 and 54% of readers. The % of young learners increased between March and October.

In a visit to Kibiko primary school (one of the schools with which iMlango works, in Ngong outside Nairobi), twenty children were in the computer laboratory reading storybooks in pairs, and in another classroom a teacher was using a projected story to teach literacy. The school head said that teachers liked the storybooks because the “stories reflect our everyday lives”. General manager, Simon Kaniu, said they were “very good, very customized”. The head also said that the Tusome readers “are important ... but they are not really stories...it is more about pronunciation and not about creativity. That’s why children like African Storybook...”<sup>132</sup>

iMlango staff members mentioned that given the heavy use “more stories are necessary ... teachers tell us that they have exhausted the stories ... some children can narrate the stories to them!”<sup>133</sup> The school head’s key recommendations were also “more stories, and more grades or levels”. Kaniu agreed: “There are so many requests for more stories...”. In the interview he said they were in the process of uploading more stories. He wasn’t sure why iMlango did not link directly to the ASb website. In a January 2017 e-mail Kaniu said: “No new stories have been added to the learning platform since September but I have been informed by my team we’ll likely add some in the next month or so.”<sup>134</sup>

- **Molteno** is an important literacy NGO in South Africa and was, initially, a reluctant partner because of their opposition to open resource licensing. (We discuss the OER dimension more fully in the next chapter). But after long discussions with them ASb have developed a very useful working relationship with them. As Tessa Welch says: “We have had a great deal of mileage from 10 Molteno storybooks for level 1 developed with Kenyan and SA writers under the guidance of Jenny Katz. Also

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<sup>131</sup> Interview, iMLango fieldworker, September 2016. Teachers interviewed at the iMlango school observed provided positive feedback too, saying children especially liked their contextual relevance. The one criticism was that they wanted more stories.

<sup>132</sup> Interview, School Head, Kibiko School, Ngong, September 2016

<sup>133</sup> Interview, iMLango fieldworker, September 2016

<sup>134</sup> E-mail correspondence, Simon Kaniu (iMlango General Manager), January 2017

we have been part of arguing for Molteno to release their Vula Bula readers as OER. And we approached them to partner with us for the Reading support programme – so now we’re working very closely with them.”<sup>135</sup>

Bringing aboard partners like Molteno are important. They bring more resources to the online platform, but they also bring aboard an influential literacy player, in South Africa and Africa. Aside from this influence, there is also the likelihood that Molteno’s projects will begin using African Storybooks to supplement their readers.

- **Aga Khan Development Network.** Their ‘Strengthening Education in Schools in East Africa programme’ (SESEA) works with libraries in West Nile (Uganda). They selected 10 out of more than 50 ASb titles in Lugbarati and Aringati and had these printed and distributed to the 130 SESEA supported libraries in West Nile. 9 of these titles were translated into Kakwa and distributed to schools in the Arua, Yumbe and Koboko districts of West Nile, reaching approximately 1500 children.

**National Book Development Council of Kenya (NBDCK).** In Kajiado (Kenya) ASb is collaborating with NBDCK on big book printing to test Maa titles. This may be followed up by joint funding proposal. The NBDCK has now used 22 ASb stories to “build teachers’ skills in teaching reading in Kajiado County and to help them see that they can create their own stories for use.” In a workshop in December 2016, the Kenyan country co-ordinator worked with teachers to select and quality assure six titles in Maa: 100 copies of each of these titles will be printed and distributed across 8 schools. Through NBDCK, some testing will be done to see the effect of local language storybooks on reading achievement. This is an example of a partnership that started small but is slowly developing into a systemic initiative.

### 3. Independent engagement is growing, but is largely unknown

#### WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF INDEPENDENT USE?

Independent use is both ‘spontaneous’ (a person or organisation comes across the ASb website and begins contributing to it, or using it, sometimes without ASb’s knowledge) and networked but independent (a person or organisation gets to know about the ASb website through ASb or its partners and begins contributing to it, or using it, but doing so without any need of ASb support).

Independent uptake in 2015 and 2016 has been significant and these new ‘partners’ are:

- Contributing new stories, or adapting or translating storybooks thus increasing the supply available
- Using storybooks in a variety of ways to improve literacy, especially in mother tongue, and to increase the pleasure of reading
- Distributing storybooks through their networks to much larger populations, sometimes on different continents and through new technological applications.

ASb began exploring these ‘independent partners’ – both organisations and passionate individuals - more deeply after the mid-term review. Late in 2016 the ASb began drafting a ‘case study’ of ten randomly chosen

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<sup>135</sup> E-mail correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017



'independent users' to get a sense of who they were, why they had accessed the ASb's resources, and how many people benefitted from the African storybooks through these organisations. Users ranged widely:

- Individuals and small scale projects with pedagogic and/or research interest
- Large scale government linked/funded projects needing content
- Individuals interested in technological innovation
- Individuals wanting content for Apps
- Organisations collecting and re-publishing reading material.

### **Individuals and organisations involved in developing education, reading or literacy**

Some of these partners came to ASb through random internet searches, while others did so through ASb networking events. They are **Ingrid Schechter** (an educator and literacy activist), a small not-for-profit organisation, **Little Zebra** (involved in the development and distribution of African-language books for children), another small not-for-profit within a larger Maths and Science development initiative, and a large scale educational project, Aga Khan's SESEA.

It seems their total impact has been significant, in terms of using ASb materials to strengthen their offerings, donating stories, translating and adapting existing ASb stories into new African languages, and contributing ideas to ASb about pedagogy:

- In 2016 they **used** 86 of the ASb titles in their school or literacy development work
- They **donated** 28 original stories and there are 114 versions of these in 28 African languages (Ateso, Maa, Oluwanga, Luganda, Lumasaba, Turkana, Lugbarati, Alur, Ma'di, Rutooro, Swahili, Lamnso', French, Lunyole, isiZulu, Tswana, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, SiSwati, Sepedi, Nyungwe, Portuguese, Lomwe, Sena, Chewa, Yawo, Meetto, Mahuwa, and Chuwabo.) Some of these translations are on the ASb site, and some are not.
- In 2015 and 2016 they **translated** 44 ASb titles into 3 languages (isiXhosa, Portuguese and Xitswa. (One of the NGOs plans to translate (probably to Sepedi) and adapt stories and traditional folktales - in 2017 with support from a university librarian.)
- Given their mandates, these organisations **printed hard copies** of 134 ASb titles in 2015 and 2016. These prints came in different formats: A3 'big books' and A4 formats for wall reading, and small readers (conventional book size). Many of these were printed to be housed in libraries.
- Most **beneficiaries** here are concrete and reliably tallied (which is not as easy with large web-based distribution). These three users benefitted 17 educators (primarily women) and 621 learners.

**Ingrid Schechter** - alone and under the auspices of Education without Borders - is especially interesting. She developed a literacy curriculum with 12 different approaches for mediation of 20 African storybooks and other openly licensed books per year from Grades 1 to 7. It is being used in a Western Cape school. Before this work she translated many of the ASb stories into Portuguese while working in Mozambique.

The **Aga Khan** project in West Nile is now an ASb partner but operates independently. (It is described in more detail above, as a partner.) It is an interesting example in the sense that it provides ASb with a number of important networking opportunities: with funders, teacher education institutions, language boards, and community libraries and primary schools in West Nile.

### **Organisations working to improve reading and literacy in the Global South**

Some are linked into educational initiatives (FunDza Literacy Trust and Center for the Study of Learning Performance at Concordia University (READS)) while others are committed primarily to distributing reading materials (World Reader and Library for All) although both organisations partner with NGOs, schools and libraries.

The mission of these four are suggestive of what they do: ‘create literacy in the world through technology, curation and field work’, ‘a scalable, digital library solution to the lack of accessible books in developing countries’, ‘a repository of stories necessary to allow practice in reading skills developed through the 32 interactive activities’, and ‘develop literacy through growing a community of readers and writers among its teen/young adult demographic’.

Most found ASb interesting because they provided content for their sites. From ASb’s perspective their value was in distributing their storybooks far more widely, and in publicising their work. Although measuring impact here is more challenging, the benefit to ASb is significant:

- **Users** (and **beneficiaries** in this instance) are measured by the number of times a story has been opened on a website or mobile app, the number of stories ‘pushed’ to an institution, and the number provided to institutions on USB sticks. A conservative measure of this suggests that some:
  - Some 54 000 people **opened** individual stories – 51 different titles - and anthologies of stories developed by one organization.
  - About 56 000 anthologies and individual stories were **pushed** to schools and libraries.
  - Some 1000 people accessed stories through the distribution of **USB sticks** with stories on these.
  - Organisations distributed between 61 and 200 ASb titles with one organization offering these in 50 languages.
- One organisation **donated** three anthologies - *Folktales Anthology, People and Family and Animals* in Kiswahili, French and English. These were compiled from existing ASb stories with a cover designed by World Reader, the compiler. Another organisation has developed audio versions – in Kiswahili and English – of four titles ASb titles.
- No stories were **translated** although one organisation – Library for All – plans to translate some titles into Kinyarwanda in 2017.
- Given their mandates most of these organisations did not **print**, but it is likely that some of the ‘opens’ and ‘pushes’ and USB-based stories – especially those pushed or distributed to schools and libraries - will have been printed. One organization – FundZA – did collaborate with another ASb project in KwaZulu-Natal and in this instance books were printed. (See Chapter 3 – Systemic implementation).

#### **Organisations interested in technological innovation or wanting content for Apps.**

The last two studied are interested in technological innovation. In both instances, though, they bring to ASb an ability to broaden their distribution – and their use by educators - and to get stories translated into new languages:

- **Global African Storybook Project**, started by a postgraduate student from the University of British Columbia, is an open resources project directly inspired by African Storybook. It has as its goal translating their “freely-licensed materials ... into all of the world’s languages so that children

everywhere can enjoy these wonderful African stories and create new ones in the same spirit of sharing, literacy, and open access”.

It is an excellent testimony to the power of OER. By the end of November 2016 it had **translated 442 ASb stories into 26 languages**, as diverse geographically as Jamaican Creole, Nepali, Tagalog and Norwegian!

In the process, the founder has experimented with alternative ways to translate stories online, and has created an easy-to-use online translator app which dispenses with metadata, and uses the text together with accompanying illustrations in stories to search for illustrations in any language.

- **Education Technology for Development (Et4d)** is a social enterprise with a mission to “provide educational opportunities for the world’s most financially disadvantaged people”. It does so by providing a digital suite of reading acquisition tools called the **MoToli Suite**. The software includes a digital library that enables and encourages consistent practice.

Isabelle Duston, the CEO, also assists the Plan Niger/Project Niger Education and Community Strengthening project to create stories in the 4 local Niger languages.

- Use of ASb stories: **100 ASb** stories are linked via the [educationappsforall.com](http://educationappsforall.com) site and are **republished** on the Motoli App. These are in **Swahili** and **English**.
- Translate/Adapt: The 100 stories have also been **translated in French and Swahili** and **from Portuguese to French and English**.

Both of these organisations have prominent click-through links to the African Storybook site.

## WHAT IMPACT ARE THESE INDEPENDENT PARTNERS HAVING?

Have these partners been successful in changing early literacy teaching practices? Are stories generated through partner literacy development organisations used in diverse pedagogical and technical ways? Are they initiating new reading activities and opportunities?

None of these organisations have conducted any systematic evaluation of African Storybook’s contribution, so it is difficult to answer these questions definitively. But all the organisations said they found the ASb stories interesting and said their readers found them useful.

It is certainly clear that these independent partners are creating a much larger reading footprint for ASb. It is also clear - from anecdotal information collected on these ten organisations and shared earlier - that the materials are being used in a variety of ways.

The **World Reader** director says that they are “some of our most popular and valuable ... because they’re being used across our programmes. Engagement and interest is fairly high on mobile and great in our schools and libraries.” World Reader distributed storybooks to 44 393 children (and their teachers) through their e-reader projects in 2016. The numbers reached through their World Reader App are even larger, but it is difficult to confirm who the readers are or whether they actually read ASb storybooks.

In an interview<sup>136</sup> with the director in January 2017 it became clear that:

- In World Reader’s schools and libraries projects, the educators or project coordinators select the titles (from ASb and other suppliers) they want downloaded onto e-readers (with World Reader

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<sup>136</sup> This interview was conducted by Tessa Welch and communicated to the evaluator via email.

staff's advice). But they do not choose for local people, suggesting that the popularity of the ASb titles is among users, not simply World Reader staff.

- There was a lot of use of the titles that ASb have had translated into French which suggests the work done by the ASb publishing office to translate these titles was worth it.
- World Reader are already collating African storybook stories into anthologies. They would like to create more anthologies, and are presently reviewing ASb titles to include in the new anthologies. They have asked for ASb's assistance. This has benefits for ASb – they will push the anthologies to their projects and ASb and increase the number of anthologies available on their site for use by others.

**Library for All** was even more effusive: “We love African Storybook and I am planning to be in Rwanda early next year (2017) for a writers’ workshop we’re doing with Save the Children. While I’m there I would like to find volunteers who would be willing to translate the stories into Kinyarwanda. I have asked our Rwandan advisory board to help us with this too. “

The **Center for the Study of Learning Performance** at Concordia University noted: “In training, when we demonstrate how to locate Kenyan stories within READS, for example, their eyes light up. And when they see that many stories are available in Kiswahili and English that is even better. We have mentioned that we have had four narrated books in both languages and they are very anxious for more. There is no question that the addition of the African Storybooks in our database has significantly enriched the content for our African users. They are desperate for local content.”

**Aga Khan** said: “The children love the pictures and simplicity. The fact that they selected the stories that fitted the curriculum is an indication of relevancy.”

The feedback is positive. The numbers are positive. What is concerning – from a social media perspective - is that so few, especially the largest organisations, do not acknowledge ASb as a partner. Where they do, the acknowledgment is often difficult to find and does not include a live link. In a social media world these kinds of links are important.

### *Spontaneous independent use*

In addition to the ten ‘cases’ there are many more examples – well over 100 - of spontaneous use discovered only when the user emailed ASb or through a chance meeting. In some cases, these have spurred ASb to begin working systematically in new countries, like Ghana and Ethiopia.

Here are a few examples:

- A former Pearson Publishing employee used Kiswahili and English storybooks in an app he created – on Google Play - for parents of children in **Tanzanian** public schools. The experiment involved encouraging parents to let their children use the app on the parents’ phones. Using a Randomised Control Test, he proved that after one month, the children’s reading speed had improved by 10 words per minute.
- Diane Ross (Otterbein University) spent a sabbatical working in **Uganda**, and wrote: “I just need to tell you how amazing using the ASP website has been. I have shared it at two schools, one orphanage, and with two universities; Ugandan Christian University (UCU) and Makerere University. I bring this website up at any meeting I have with anyone. People are so impressed. The students have been mesmerized. I read English stories with groups of 50-80 students and there can be a range of ages from 3-15 and they all read together as I project the story. However, the most

fun has been when they choose a Lugandan story and then teach me their language. They love that.”

- A chance meeting during this evaluation with a Canadian supervisor of two students working at the Busolwe community library, Janice Spencer from Douglas College, led to information about stories being used in two projects unknown to ASb. She writes, “A colleague, Wendy Parry, has created stories using African Storybook and shared this great resource with the intern group and one intern from our 2015 Global Affairs **Canada** International Youth Internship Program (IYIP). Jefferson Fernandez is another person who has used this. He worked with individual members in the community (in **Uganda**) to write about their lived experience of mental illness and stigma. The books he used were written in Lugandan and English.”<sup>137</sup>
- The expansions into **Ethiopia** and **Ghana** started with ASb staff noticing stories in the languages of those countries appearing on the website, and then following up on these. The Kenyan country coordinator visited Ethiopia and ran a couple of workshops which led to ASb signing agreements to expand into that country. In Ghana, Kofi Essien of Open Learning Exchange Ghana, used 400 ASb stories. In the North, Educators’ International found ASb’s website and were excited enough to write to ASb. ASb followed up with both organisations - the beginnings of an expansion into that country.

### *In summary*

ASb had focused most of their energy on work in pilot sites, and developing productive working relationships with partners. Both were successful, and partner relationships will probably grow rapidly in the years to come.

Spontaneous growth was under-estimated, and is still not entirely understood. It is clearly significant, and ranges much more widely than ASb’s more formal work. Its potential for growth is massive.

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<sup>137</sup> *Email correspondence, Janice Spencer, November 2016*

# Outcome 3: Recognition that openly licensed stories can support early literacy

## EVALUATION FOCUS

Outcome 3 is explored here as measure of ASb's **influence on the debate about using open educational resources** to improve early child literacy in Africa. In some cases, partners studied were also studied in Outcome 2, where the evaluation explored how partners **used African Storybooks; how they contributed to the pedagogy**.

In their 2015 annual report to Comic Relief ASb argue that,

*“This outcome focusses on **changing mindsets** away from a restrictive copyright approach which prevents adaptation of resources for own use and cost-effective re-production of resources, towards a mindset that recognises the value of openly licensed resources in addressing the critical shortage of local language stories at early literacy level, as well as ease of their distribution.”*

Influence – having important people and institutions (especially in Africa) – **valuing and talking about** ASb and an open publishing model for education also addresses the question of long-term sustainability (see Chapter 5): If others like the idea they are more likely to promote the idea, and begin using the ideas even if they do not use ASb's infrastructure.

A 'harder' measure of influence (and sustainability) is having ASb resources (and ideas) **integrated into formal public systems**, especially the schooling and teacher education systems.

ASb aimed to **engage** public sector players, and did not necessarily expect them to **implement**. But given their desire for sustainability and going to scale, they have worked hard to move beyond engagement to use, and this evaluation looks at their success in this light. ASb's indicators – as specified in this evaluation's ToR (and drawn from their Learnings Plan and annual data reports) – are examined in two broad categories: ASb's **influence on thinking** about OER, and on **systems implementation** of the OER model.

**Influence:** ASb's 'extent of alignment with', and recognition by, the international literacy development community and OER communities:

- Is there is an expanding **network of advocacy partners** participating in (and talking about) the ASb's project?
- Are **authors, academics, and other influencers** attending conference presentations, citing ASb's contribution to the debate, and/or championing ASb's work in other ways?
- Are **literacy activists** indicating interest in, and awareness of, potential for Open Educational Resources to increase access to stories for early literacy in Africa?

**Systems integration:** The ASb initiative is being integrated into public systems, at a number of levels and in a number of areas (schooling, teacher education and libraries). Indicators include:

- Are ASb **engaging** with government department/province/district government to persuade them to explore the use of openly licensed local language early literacy materials in the schooling system?
- Are government departments **indicating support** – rhetorically and monetarily - for systemic implementation of OER, and/or using ASb materials?

- Do **teacher educators** recognise the usefulness of ASb storybooks as a resource in large scale reading programmes, and use ASb in their training of teachers, and are they involved in creating, translating and revising stories and uploading these to the website?

**Expansion:** Is the ASb initiative successfully **expanding the project** beyond the three pilot countries?

## FINDINGS SNAPSHOT

Rather than simply promote a ‘growing *recognition*’ of the potential of open educational resources to improve early child literacy development in Africa, the African Storybook Initiative has persuaded important players to begin *using* this model.

This is evident quantitatively - it has exceeded the beneficiary targets set – and in terms of the quality of their engagement around this issue.

### 1. ASb reached 15 times its target of **partner beneficiaries**: 15 690 against a target of 1 000<sup>138</sup>:

- **Network of advocacy partners:** In total, 164 individuals and partners have had some form of engagement with ASb.
- **Pilot site advocacy events:** More than 10 212 people have attended ASb events at pilot sites. These numbers were not collected in 2016 and so are, likely, an under-estimate.
- **Conference sessions, or story development workshops:** About 4 030 people have attended sessions or workshop events during which the African Storybook initiative was discussed.

In addition, **mailing list numbers** now sit at over 1000. These organisations and individuals receive regular newsflashes from ASb on its work, and on OER.

### 2. ASb has comfortably exceeded their **systemic implementation targets**, in quality and quantity:

- It has signed **formal agreements** and **started work** with four government departments providing Grade 1 to 3 schooling in South Africa and Kenya. Their commitment was having ‘at least one government department *explore ways* for the provision of openly licensed materials’.
  - Through these agreements ASb has easily exceeded its **beneficiary targets** of “between 3 300 and 10 000 educators”
  - 150 people (often decision-makers) will benefit directly and 5 000 educators will benefit from one province’s printing of a hard copy teacher manual
  - By the end of 2016, over 500 000 children are estimated to have been indirect beneficiaries. This is more than the ASb target for indirect beneficiaries of “between 100 000 to 300 000”. The number will increase further in the period 2017 to 2020, where 600 000 children and their teachers will be exposed to African Storybooks through USAID’s Reading Support project in two South African provinces.

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<sup>138</sup> These numbers are drawn from the Outcome 3 data in the 2016 Annual Report to Comic Relief, February 2017 where the totals for up to the end of 2016 have been corrected to be the sum of the numbers beneath it.

### 3. ASb's systemic integration work within **teacher education** has not been successful:

ASb has had some success with discrete teacher education activities but they have not been able to engage systemically in any of their pilot countries. Although a number of translations and storybooks have been created, there are no examples of student teachers using the storybooks in classrooms. A case study evaluation commissioned as part of this evaluation has provided ideas to guide its future work in this regard.

### 4. ASb has begun expanding into four new countries:

- In two (Ethiopia and Ghana), substantial networks have been set up and/or agreements signed
- In two others (Zambia and Rwanda) the expansion is still very much in its start-up phase

### **This evaluation identified powerful examples of the quality of this influence on the thinking about and practice of using the open publishing model:**

- The initiative is being noticed, published and used by **global influencers** like the Global Book Fund (now called the Global Book Alliance and linked to the Global Partnership for Education) and were invited to sit on one of the technical working groups; and is cited positively in two other influential publications - *Global Open Policy Report 2016* funded by the Hewlett Foundation and *Open Educational Resources: Policy, Costs and Transformation*, a UNESCO publication.
- ASb's work has influenced the way in which **planners and activists think** about the use of OER: Both the Kenyan Institute for Curriculum Development and KwaZulu-Natal's DoE ELITS have asked ASb to advise them about a broader use of OER (in addition to using African Storybook as part of their resourcing);
- A remarkable **body of knowledge** about using an open publishing model for early literacy development is being developed through ASb's research. This includes the rigorous although informal Learnings Question process; presentations and publications by partners, ASb staff and advisors; and Masters and Doctoral students doing in-depth research on ASb (and thus speaking to the validity or not of their 'theory of change').
- A final indication of ASb's influence is its successful **expansion** beyond the three pilot countries. Aside from the four countries mentioned earlier, the independent and spontaneous use of ASb materials in a country like Nigeria – to which ASb has not travelled – speaks to the power of this publishing model.

ASb's advocacy work has been slow and difficult, and still has important points of resistance, especially in publishing. But in 2016 the fruits of this hard work became evident in a number of very concrete initiatives. ASb's influence on global debates is much greater than their size, or their Global south location, might have predicted.



## DISCUSSION

### 1. ASb has influenced the OER debate, in Africa and globally

#### WHAT DO THE NUMBERS SAY?

ASb has easily met the outcome's numerical targets in relation to influencing partners with whom it considers using a model of openly licensed educational resources (OER) to address early literacy challenges in Africa.

It aimed to have 1 000 partners benefitting directly from their work with the ASb. By the end of 2016 they had had **more than 15 times this; 15 690<sup>139</sup> against a target of 1 000**. These numbers include partners who are actively engaged in promoting ASb and the use of OER while others are – at this point, anyway – simply interested in hearing more about OER and the African Storybook Initiative:

- **Advocacy partners:** Active partners listed on ASb's website now number 55, with another 98 organisations or individuals (with a record of independent engagement – not just passive 'partners') listed on the partner grid.
  - Formal agreements – a sign of a really engaged partner -MoUs, MoAs, or a letter of agreement- have been signed with 30 partners, a 40% increase over 2015.
  - In all, the partner grid lists 165 individuals and partners as having some form of engagement with ASb, an increase from 124 in 2015. The majority of partners are, predictably, in the pilot countries (102 of 165). But a growing proportion are from other African countries (37 of 165). The top non-African partner is the USA with 18 based in that country.
- Attendees at **pilot site advocacy events** number 10 212 since the project started. These numbers were not collected in 2016 and so are, likely, an under-estimate.
- ASb have presented their ideas at some **30 international and regional conferences** through which they reached some 4 030 by the end of 2016. These include a wide variety: from intense work with international organisations like the Global Book Alliance in Washington, through well-received presentations at UNESCO's Mobile Learning Week in Paris and the Pan Commonwealth Forum in Kuala Lumpur, to smaller regional events like the Ugandan Reading Association and eLearning Africa events in Kampala and Cairo respectively.
- **Other forms of publicity:** Mailing list numbers increased from 809 to 1 000 during 2016. These organisations and/or individuals receive five themed newsflashes and one newsletter from ASb annually. ASb also use two forms of social media, Facebook (where their weekly story reaches between 300 and 600 reads) and Twitter (where ASb has 479 followers and has posted 666 tweets).

The African Storybook Initiative's influence goes well beyond its aim, namely of fostering a “*growing recognition* that openly licensed stories ... have a significant role to play in supporting early literacy

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<sup>139</sup> *These numbers are drawn from the Outcome 3 data in the 2016 Annual Report to Comic Relief, February 2017 where the totals for up to the end of 2016 have been corrected to be the sum of the numbers beneath it.*

development in Africa". Instead, it is an influence and passion powerful enough to move important players to implementation.

## HAVE INFLUENCERS BEEN INFLUENCED?

The initiative is being noticed, published and used by global thought leaders. Their 'promotion' of ASb and its championing of OER has given the initiative both intellectual clout and an audience far wider than its target audience in Africa.

In 2016 the highly influential review of local language supplementary readers for early reading conducted by **RTI International for the Global Book Fund** (now Alliance) wrote extensively about ASb's contribution to global thinking about book development and provision. It focused on ASb's influence in the use of openly licensed early reading materials in two of the countries reviewed, Kenya and Uganda. In addition, three of the five key findings of the RTI survey endorse the approach the African Storybook initiative is taking:

- Foster the development of materials in African languages
- Foster the sharing and use of titles within and across language groups
- Encourage the use of Creative Commons licensing.

More significantly, they use ASb's typology of early literacy reading levels – slightly adapted – as their model for approaching this issue. This is a concrete recognition of ASb's knowledge building and is likely to be taken up by others. (ASb have, in fact, begun using RTI's adapted description of levels on their website).

ASb now sit on one of the working groups of the Washington-based Global Book Fund (now called the Global Book Alliance) and is part of the discussions of how to transform book development, delivery and use in the developing world. It has engaged critically with the Book Alliance's ideas about publishing.

In an April 2016 Judith Baker, an ASb advisor, intervened by writing (with ASb staff) a critical response to the Book Fund's feasibility study. They argued for a greater focus on energizing local initiatives in Africa and considering the use of "six very promising technologies ... that may be part of a cost-effective strategy"<sup>140</sup> unearthed by ASb work and research. It argues for more examination of the potential of "digital transmission to remote areas" on the basis of ASb's successful experiences.

ASb are also participating actively in discussions and research by two other influential international development players - the **USAID/Norad Global Digital Library** initiative. This library would contain "quality-assured reading materials in a number of languages, and ... could constitute an important resource for both learning materials in schools and for the encouragement of reading at home and in the local community."<sup>141</sup>

Other high level policy interventions made by ASb are presentations to significant global players in the OER field, or articles in their policy-directed publications. Here are a few examples:

- *Open Educational Resources: Policy, Costs and Transformation, a UNESCO/Commonwealth of Learning* publication, devotes a chapter to the African Storybook initiative.

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<sup>140</sup> *Global Book Fund Feasibility Study – Some observations and additional ideas, a response to the Fund by Judith Baker and the ASb (April 2016).*

<sup>141</sup> *Innovative education projects, extracted from the NORAD website, <https://www.norad.no/en/front/thematic-areas/education/innovation/innovation-and-education/> on February 6, 2017.*

- A keynote address on “Using OER to Address a Fundamental Educational Challenge” to the influential **Pan Commonwealth Forum** in Malaysia in 2016
- *Global Open Policy Report 2016* funded by the **Hewlett Foundation** as one of three African case studies.
- A submission to the *State of the Commons Report 2015* which is quoted as part of the **Creative Commons** website’s regional African impact highlight.<sup>142</sup>

These high-level engagements are important. Global South players and, even more, Global South communities are often positioned as the receivers of wisdom; ASb have positioned themselves as contributors to global wisdom. More importantly, their inputs are encouraging concrete changes in the manner in which policymakers understand how OER can address some of the book shortage problems in African education.

## HAVE THE MINDS OF IMPLEMENTERS BEEN CHANGED?

**Educators, publishers, writers and literacy activists** independently and within a variety of organisations have promoted the use of African storybooks in literacy development, or donated stories to the ASb site, and/or begun using openly licensed materials at some level. Many of these experiences are discussed in Chapter 2.

But ASb’s interactions with them on the issue of open licensing is instructive. Here are three very different mini case studies:

- The **Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy**, a large and influential South African early reading publisher and educator, was (as we said earlier) a reluctant ASb partner. Like many cash-strapped NGOs they wanted to use their materials to raise funds or, at least recoup costs. After months of debate they were persuaded to release their full set of graded readers under a Creative Commons licence. Now “they are exploring an alternative business model to earn revenue from their services, rather than from their content.”<sup>143</sup>

Molteno’s OER position isn’t a full-blooded acceptance of OER: their graded Readers cannot be re-published on a site like African Storybook because people can translate and adapt without permission (which they won’t accept). So, while they have accepted the idea of openly licensed distribution, it is limited. Another literacy NGO, the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in SA, publishes the Nalibali and Little Hands imprints, have funders who insist that their books cannot be sold for profit. This creates problems for re-use of illustrations.

Nevertheless, as influential literacy players (and publishers) like Molteno begin nibbling at this idea, it makes it easier for others to follow. It has also led to more partnerships between ASb and Molteno. They are currently working together on the USAID Reading Support programme in North West and Limpopo (discussed under systems below.)

- **Oxford Publishers** have given African Storybook verbal support in their drive to popularize OER. Although this has not translated into concrete action, it is a rare move for a publisher. Others, like Cambridge University Press, wants publishing control, and “would only release its content

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<sup>142</sup> *State of the Commons*, from Creative Commons website, <https://stateof.creativecommons.org/2015/>, accessed on the 20 February 2017

<sup>143</sup> *Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017*

under a no derivatives licence. The notion that people can alter/interfere with a published work is anathema to them”<sup>144</sup>.

So, while ASb may persuade publishers to make their books available at no cost, and this has enormous value, they may not agree to ASb’s request for a completely open licence (where individuals or organisations can adapt stories and illustrations before using them).

Publishers elsewhere – Kenya and Uganda for example – are very nervous about losing the significant revenues they earn from educational publishing and so tend to be opposed to an open licensing model. (Although they will often couch it in an argument about destroying African publishing capacity, the ASb country co-ordinator in Kenya suggested that the main reasons for publisher resistance was likely to be “special interests.”<sup>145</sup>) Yet, these publishers are an important interest group for ASb, and they are working hard at developing strategies that might persuade publishers embrace OER more readily, if only in a limited way.

- **Independent writers:** ASb are having similar debates about the notion of open educational resources with writers. A number of international writers, including Germany’s pre-eminent children’s author, Kirsten Boie, are happy to allow ASb to re-publish their work under an open licence. Some famous South African writers, like Gcina Mhlope, donated stories for re-publishing but did not embrace open licensing in its entirety.

On the other hand Elinor Sisulu, a writer and influential book ‘activist’, “is uneasy about OER because she thinks it’s a threat to the livelihood of writers in African languages”.<sup>146</sup>

A few pilot site staff also told this evaluator that some of “our writers” had said to them: “They always say they like the appreciation ... they like that people all over the world can read their story ...but then they say, ‘Oh, but can’t we have a bit of soap too?’”<sup>147</sup> It did seem, though, that this had more to do with a once-off remuneration than with an objection to open licensing.

Given that this issue is central to ASb’s work, they commissioned a case study<sup>148</sup> as part of this evaluation in order to develop strategies for addressing this issue going forward.

## HOW SIGNIFICANT HAS ASB’S ‘KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION’ BEEN?

A remarkable **amount of research is being undertaken**, by the project itself, by partners, and by academics and post-graduate students interested in the field.

At one level this is to be expected. ASb described the first four years as a “pilot” in which they were testing out their theory of change. They were exploring whether their notion that an open publishing model using online technology could address the “catch-22” of mother tongue publishing in Africa.

A reflective learning process - ASb’s Learnings Questions - was set in place early and adapted through the project as new puzzles emerged that needed exploration. This, combined with a Saide culture of learning

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<sup>144</sup> Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017

<sup>145</sup> Interview: Dorcas Wepukhulu, September 2016

<sup>146</sup> Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017

<sup>147</sup> Interview: Lunyole Language Association, October 2016

<sup>148</sup> ASb publication, *Open Licensing and the African Storybook Project*, Lerato\_Trok, Jenny Louw, Tessa Welch. 2015

from practice and Saide's ability to pull in experts in OER and literacy, has led to a significant amount of research being done.

The results are used to inform project implementation, and much is being published or presented at conferences, and thus reaching a much larger audience. These publications and presentations tend to serve both an OER advocacy and knowledge building function. Here are some examples of the audiences who benefitted and the kinds of issues ASb were talking about:

- **Language and literacy experts:** Presentations at the International Literacy Association conference and African Language Teachers Association conferences (both in Boston), and to the Reading Association of Uganda conference in Kampala. The Ugandan presentation is an example of ASb's belief that the "local should lead" in that it was presented by Tessa Welch, Juliet Tembe (ASb country co-ordinator), John Emongot (a teacher from Kabubbu) and Owino Ogot (a partner and eastern Uganda oragniser). The title was *The role of ICT in Putting Reading within Reach: The Case of the African Storybook Initiative*.
- **University educators:** Two panels at the 2016 Comparative and International Education Society (a conference for educators interested in the relationship between education and international development) – in Vancouver. Another paper was presented by Yvonne Reed at the International Conference on Education and New Developments (2016) called *Something New out of Africa: The African Storybook Initiative as a Catalyst for Curriculum Making*.
- **Technology and learning:** Presentations at UNESCO's Mobile Learning Week in Paris, an eLearning Africa conference in Cairo in 2016 (a paper by Tessa Welch called *Digital storytelling for early reading in marginalised African communities: the African Storybook experience in Kenya*), a Mobiles for Education Alliance colloquium in Washington and a workshop on mobile learning for librarians organised by the Goethe Institute.
- **Teachers:** A presentation to the Teachers' Peer Learning Fair in KwaZulu-Natal and a paper by Alan Amory and Tessa Welch called *Design for Interaction* to the 2016 National Association for Distance Education and Open Learning in South Africa (NADEOSA) conference in Johannesburg.

ASb believe they reached over **1 500 people** at these events. More importantly, though, these events boost ASb's credibility as a global player in the open educational publishing and early literacy space. It also "develops existing relationships, forges new ones, provides "interesting insights" as to how people use the website and storybooks. It was at a conference, for example, that ASb learnt about the American University in Nigeria using ASb storybooks "as the core of their digital storybook collection reaching 20 000 beneficiaries"<sup>149</sup>, and contributes to ASb's own learning.

As an ASb partner, advisor and enthusiastic champion Judith Baker said:

*"This project has made experts of people at Saide. Don't misunderstand me ... they started amazingly and were able to conceive of this project in a way that was much more sophisticated than anything we had conceived of. But over the four years they have grown their knowledge of a range of issues significantly. For example, they were not involved in child literacy ... it was new to them. Now they are acknowledged as experts ... and people seek their advice. Just look at the range of publications that have emerged from this. Their impact has been significant."<sup>150</sup>*

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<sup>149</sup> 2016 Annual Report to Comic Relief, February 2017

<sup>150</sup> Interview: Judith Baker, October 2016

What are these publications? In 2016 alone the following were published or accepted for publication (in addition to the publications mentioned under the global influencers section):

- Tembe, J., & Reed, Y. (2016). Langaging in and about Lunyole: African Storybook materials as a catalyst for re-imagining literacy teaching and learning in two Ugandan primary schools. Reading & Writing-Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa, 7(2), 1–8. (A paper by a country co-ordinator and South African literacy academic.)
- Stranger-Johannessen, E., & Norton, B. (In press). The African Storybook and language teacher identity in digital times. Modern Language Journal, 101. (A paper by two Canadian-based ASb champions and advisors.)
- Norton, B., & Tembe, J. (In press). The African Storybook, multilingual literacy, and social change in Ugandan classrooms. Applied Linguistics Review. (A paper by a Canadian-based literacy expert and ASb country co-ordinator).

ASb's contribution to knowledge about implementing an open publishing model in Africa, about building a bottom-up mother tongue publishing industry, and about how to have a meaningful impact on books and reading in Africa – in other words, knowledge developed as they sought to prove their concept – is significant (as the presentations and papers above attest).

But there are also Masters and Doctoral students currently studying ASb as a 'model' for an alternative way of addressing stubborn educational problem, and this work is also likely to boost ASb's impact on the debates about OER.

Finally, these ideas are also being diffused – systematically and more organically through Saide's open learning networks like NADEOSA or OER Africa or a number of other Saide associates.

## 2. ASb's systemic initiatives are taking off

ASb's success in persuading governments to begin using open licensed materials within education systems started slowly but increased significantly in 2016. It is impressive - quantitatively and qualitatively – and consolidating these gains is critical to the initiative's longer-term impact and sustainability.

### WHAT DO THE NUMBERS SAY?

ASb made a commitment to **engage** 'at least one government department to explore ways for the provision of openly licensed materials'. Instead, it has achieved far more:

- It has agreements to **implement – and to supply storybooks** - with four government departments in two pilot countries.
- Direct beneficiaries – educators – exceeds the target of "between 3 300 and 10 000": KwaZulu-Natal's printed teacher's manuals – each copy of which is likely to be used by more than one teacher - number 5 000 alone.
- In addition, in both Kenya and South Africa officials have been brought into the "quality assuring" part of the publishing process, which increases their understanding of open licensing and ASb.

Beyond 2017:

- In Kenya, if the roll out of tablets to all schools happens successfully, teachers in all primary schools will have African storybooks available both on tablets and on the Kenya Education Cloud. If fully implemented this means African Storybooks will reach about 1.2 million children.
- By 2020, indirect beneficiaries in the two South African provinces other than KwaZulu-Natal are estimated at some 600 000 children.

The ASb target was between 100 000 and 300 000. Even working conservatively these quantitative targets have easily been met. This does not include the number of people reached through the iMlango project, a Kenyan partner whose work is integrated into the Kenyan school system, or the Aga Khan Foundation’s work in West Nile with the Kenyan government (See Chapter 2).

## WHAT IS THE QUALITY OF ASB’S SYSTEMIC ENGAGEMENT?

The African Storybook Initiative is being integrated into public systems, at a number of levels (national and provincial), and in a number of areas (primarily schooling, but also to a lesser degree, in teacher education and libraries). While the work towards systemic implementation started when African Storybook was launched, 2016 seems to have been a breakthrough year with a number of agreements being signed, and implementation commencing.

In addition to implementation, ASb seems, now, to being perceived as an OER expert that can help them to use the open OER model to strengthen their systems. This suggests that there is increased recognition by governments of the potential of openly licensed materials to strengthen early literacy development within schooling systems.

### *The school system*

By the end of 2016 ASb (or Saide, using the ASb as a key source of reading materials) had signed three agreements (with a fourth about to be signed):

#### **1. Department of Basic Education (DBE)(South Africa)**

An MoU was signed in June 2016. ASb has offered and delivered to the DBE 720 storybooks on the ASb Reading App for uploading onto the DBE Cloud, and a curated collection of 210 storybooks (30 titles in 7 languages and English, across four levels) in PDF format for distribution via CDROM and for uploading to the Cloud. In addition, the ASb will provide 4 videos showing how best to use the storybooks to improve early child literacy.

This central government approval stands “ASb in good stead for participating in bids for large scale proposals in South Africa”<sup>151</sup> thus increasing their sphere of influence. In addition, this agreement is important in two other ways:

- ASb worked successfully to have the ASb Reader App listed as a DBE-approved app. This makes it more likely to be picked up by other provinces, districts or schools.
- They asked DBE officials to quality assure the ASb materials. The immediate impact has been to move ASb influence beyond the division with whom they signed to other important DBE divisions – Learning Teaching and Support Materials, and the Curriculum directorate more broadly. One of the DBE quality assurers said, “I found, even as an adult, the stories very capturing. I don’t remember the last time I quality assured literature for young readers that I

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<sup>151</sup> *Narrative report to Comic Relief, 2016*

thought would make them want to learn as much...These resources answer a cry from teachers ... Now decision-makers must get together to grow this project.”<sup>152</sup>

## **2. Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development (KICD)(Kenya)**

An MoU was signed in April 2016. ASb offered KICD 50 ASb titles in 3 languages – English, Kiswahili, and Ng’aturkana – to be uploaded to the Kenya Education Cloud, and in English and Kiswahili onto tablet devices that the education authorities have begun to provide for all primary schools in Kenya. In the first phase of the roll-out these will reach 11 000 pupils. Since delivery of these stories, KICD has requested a further 85 titles (50 English and 35 Kiswahili). If the plan develops to its full extent 1.2 million learners in Kenyan schools will read African Storybooks.

The KICD were initially reluctant to use African Storybooks. An indication of ASb’s power in advocating for OER is that the KICD now see OER as a crucial part of their strategy to populate the Kenya Education Cloud and they have approached Saide to assist with the provision of openly licensed materials in other curriculum subject areas. This is a significant shift in attitude from that encountered when the ASb country co-ordinator first approached KICD in 2014.

## **3. KwaZulu-Natal Education Library, Information and Technology Service (ELITS)(South Africa)**

An MoU has been drafted but not yet signed. However, KZN DoE ELITS have already paid for the printing of 5 000 teachers’ isiZulu anthologies (one each for Grades 1, 2, and 3 and made up of ASb storybooks), 166 000 single copies of learner storybooks for group reading and 5 000 flash drives containing over 100 storybooks. These books were distributed to 4 136 primary schools in two districts. ELITS has asked (and will pay for) three further sets of anthologies and flash drives pre-loaded with storybooks and other library-related material for 2017.

Through Room to Read, ASb is working in 14 of these schools with departmental subject advisors on how they could guide teachers to use the books in classrooms.

As in many instances, a key challenge that ASb is addressing is the lack of space in crowded timetables. Teachers prioritize examined subjects and ‘reading for pleasure’ slips down the list.

The reasons for departmental buy-in here was, again it seems, the cost advantages and publishing flexibility of an OER model. As Welch says, “The buy-in was due to the fact that these materials – because of their open licence – were “more than five times cheaper than other material which they could purchase”. And, second, they had “struggled to find quality material in isiZulu”<sup>153</sup>.

The provincial implementation with KwaZulu-Natal’s DoE ELITS demonstrated, vividly, how much further their grant for library provisioning would go if the content they purchased was free and only the printing had to be paid for. This working example of the benefits of OER has led to further requests for materials in 2017.

This initiative has also attracted attention from other providers in the province. For example, Vodacom has uploaded ASb stories and advertised the initiative on their Digital Classrooms website (<http://digitalclassroom.co.za/digitalclassroom/other-resources-3/african-storybook-stories>) which is used by thousands of teachers as a support resource.

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<sup>152</sup> Interview: Pumla Mdontswa and Keitumetse Modiba of the Department of Basic Education, Pretoria, South Africa, October 2016

<sup>153</sup> E-mail correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017



#### **4. Reading Support Programme (two provinces, South Africa)**

Saide is responsible for the Learning and Teaching Support Materials component of a USAID funded consortium to improve literacy teaching in all schools in two large provinces, North West and Limpopo, 2017 to 2020.

Together with the Vula Bula graded readers developed by Molteno, ASb storybooks (and expertise) are the foundation of this support. They will develop a handbook on the use of storybooks – African and others - in the first three grades of school, accompanied by packs of openly licensed readers in both the relevant African languages and English. In addition, the African Storybook Reading App will be uploaded onto the tablets provided to all Heads of Department and Curriculum Advisors in 4000 schools.

This means that by 2020, African Storybook titles will have reached approximately 600 000 learners across the two provinces.

#### **Uganda**

Systemic work in **Uganda** has been less successful. This is partly due to a strongly decentralised education system that gives significant decision-making power to districts. A further reason was due to the poor health and subsequent death of its country co-ordinator in late 2016.

Two attempts were made for larger scale systemic change that would span more than one district:

- **RTI School Health and Reading Programme:** ASb discussed a cost share relationship for the production of ASb titles as supplementary readers for schools that are part of the USAID funded School Health and Reading Programme, which is engaged in resource provision and teacher training for mother tongue reading instruction in 12 Ugandan languages. This work wasn't completed before the death of the Ugandan Country Coordinator and ASb believe "it is unlikely that it will be because the programme came to an end in 2016."<sup>154</sup>
- **Basic Education Working Group:** As a result of ASb's early relationship with this USAID programme, but also through the advocacy work of the Country Coordinator, ASb were invited to make a presentation to the Ugandan Basic Education Working Group in April 2015. The response was, according to the ASb, good; "They were extremely impressed by the fact that ASb have stories in local languages - such as Lumasaaba (68), Ateso (30) and Lunyole (126) - in which there are currently no available storybooks for early reading". ASb aims to resurrect this work in 2017. In Uganda, the cornerstone of ASb strategy in 2017 is to "build on the exceptionally strong pilot project in Busolwe working with an entire district in eastern Uganda, in order to build a foundation for a systemic drive in Uganda."<sup>155</sup> (This 'partner' initiative is discussed in Chapter 2).

#### ***Quasi-systemic initiatives***

Aside from these formal engagements with government actors, a couple of other ASb 'partner' initiatives, although NGO-initiated, are also systemic in character and breadth:

- **iMlango** has uploaded 71 of ASb's storybooks onto their portal through which 205 primary schools - and 150 000 children in 5 counties – are reached. This initiative is integrated into the Kenyan government's school development initiatives. (See details in Chapter 2)

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<sup>154</sup> Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017

<sup>155</sup> Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017

- **National Book Development Council of Kenya:** This partnership in one Kenyan county will run a pilot programme with 100 printed copies of six ASb titles in eight Maa language schools in 2017. If successful, it will be used across all primary schools within the Kajiado county school system.

### *Impact?*

What is evident is that ASb's 'long game' – networking, discussions around the details of MoUs, and general advocacy in earlier years – has been converted into concrete systemic implementation agreements in 2016 in two of the three pilot countries.

Moreover, there are indications that the momentum generated by these first large systems agreements – evidence of a visible 'working model' and the fact that other officials have taken a risk – is likely to translate into increased interest and commitment by other parts of the public system to use openly licensed materials within schools. Already, in the Northern Cape (South Africa) ASb's advocacy work and story development workshops is likely to "translate into systemic commitment in 2017".

Perhaps more importantly, the overtly sceptical attitude by authorities about using openly licensed materials within their systems has shifted to the point where they are not only using ASb materials, but they are asking ASb to formally advise them on the OER model and how it can be implemented within their systems.

All four implementation agreements include educational authorities paying to print hard copies of single stories, anthologies, and teacher manuals rather than only relying on online, or tablet and USB key access. They have noticed that while the latter is significantly cheaper, printing books that are openly licensed also lead to significant savings. In addition, though, by printing the project is beginning to address a burning need in many of the countries in which they work for physical copies of books in schools and communities, especially books in mother tongue languages.

### *In the teacher education system*

ASb's attempts to integrate their storybooks, and an open publishing model, into teacher education systems have not proved successful.

Teacher education is regarded as important to ASb's future by the mid-term evaluators because "it has a multiplier effect in terms of children reached" and so ASb have worked hard to make it work. ASb have engaged with teacher education institutions in all three pilot countries, and have worked with two cohorts of students in each, with the focus being "to integrate the use of the ASb stories and website into teacher education programmes – requiring story creation, translation, use and evaluation".

ASb has benefited by expanding the range of stories on their website, and using stories checked by lecturers of the African languages. The gains were relatively small and certainly not at a level that could be called 'systemic'.

In the instances where collaborations have occurred reports have been good. They have reported that students benefited from exposure to contextually relevant stories in English and local languages, liked the fact that assignments – writing, adapting or translating stories – were 'authentic tasks', and were "highly excited to see their stories or translations actually published"<sup>156</sup>.

But as the ASb project leader says,

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<sup>156</sup> Interview, Tessa Welch, October 2016

*"I think we have to work much harder at the management level – to get commitment to resourcing student use of the website and printed booklets, particularly on teaching practice. If we don't get ASb into teaching practice, we haven't really succeeded. I think that Kenyatta produced good stories because it was voluntary, and involved small numbers, and could therefore be edited/re-shaped. Perhaps story use should be mainstreamed and translation/creation remain a voluntary extramural activity? However, what was achieved at Siyabuswa in 2015 was significant – quality assured translations of 24 /27 stories in each of two very marginalized languages in South Africa."<sup>157</sup>.*

Here are examples of their work:

- **Mpumalanga University's Siyabuswa Teacher Education Campus (South Africa).** In 2014 a story translation and evaluation assignment was incorporated into the curriculum for 99 Foundation Phase pre-service teachers. Quality assured translations of 24 and 27 stories in each of two very marginalized languages in South Africa were uploaded to the ASb website. In 2016, these numbers were doubled with created stories in siSwati and isiNdebele. A study found that students reported improved ICT proficiency and understanding of translation and writing conventions. It was also the first time teachers had done any form of translation or story creation, let alone work online. They were also involved in storybook evaluation. In this way the ASb process became an important site for a more progressive engagement by teacher educators with teaching and learning, and with literacy. But it also unearthed challenges in the translation process and understanding of the concept of OER.
- **Kenyatta University (Nairobi).** An MoU was signed in 2016 (although discussions started in 2013). The university has published 12 stories (in more than one language) on the ASb website since a partnership began in 2013. But the ASb says that 'due to large numbers of students - classes of 500 - the engagement with the stories and website tends to be voluntary'. It is also very much a personal mission of one lecturer rather than being integrated systemically. That lecturer, Adelaide Bwire confirms that it has been "hard" to interest students ... "until they "went away and came back for fourth year. Then they told me, 'My work (the stories they wrote) has been accepted by potential employers'." What became clear in the interview, though, is that her association with ASb has been valuable: "I have trained teachers in schools to write stories and I have borrowed the steps to story development from ASb."<sup>158</sup> She is also convinced that, however hard, ASb must continue to work with teacher education institutions: "Maybe ASb should organize a seminar in Kenya to strengthen collaboration?"
- **University of Pretoria:** The partnership with this university has been difficult and is, in Welch's words, "probably a case study of how not to partner, given that it created significant work for ASb with relatively little positive return"<sup>159</sup>. While stories – the consequence of work with a 400-strong student class - were written, translated, illustrated and uploaded, the "quality of the stories created was not very good". In addition, many of the stories were into Afrikaans, which was not a priority language for the initial phase of the project. Janks<sup>160</sup> reports that collaborations with historically white universities such as Pretoria, Cape Town, and

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<sup>157</sup> Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, December 2016

<sup>158</sup> Interview, Adelaide Bwire, September 2016

<sup>159</sup> Skype conference, final report on case study evaluations, with Ken Karley and Hilary Janks, December 2016

<sup>160</sup> Case study evaluation 3 – Teacher Education

Witwatersrand have “been productive, as they have staff who can work independently with the ASb initiative, and have ICT access and capacity”. But, they are also institutions that don’t really need an African storybook intervention. Those in need are very dependent on ASb staff to drive the process, which in the long term is not sustainable. She argues that “some limited support would be needed going forward, in order to encourage the initiatives to continue, as well as promote a greater African feel to the stories”.

- **Arua Core Primary Teachers College (Uganda).** An ASb pilot site that, “despite getting far more support than other teacher education institutions, did not achieve what had been hoped.”<sup>161</sup> Welch argues that a systemic problem in Uganda is that language lecturers - “the appropriate people to take up African Storybook” - are itinerant and paid for the amount of support they provide, rather than being salaried permanent College employees, and hence it is difficult to secure commitment from them.

ASb sum up their success and failure in the 2016 Comic Relief report:

*“...Although we are succeeding in terms of numbers of storybooks and translations produced, teacher educators in South Africa are still heavily dependent on us to drive the process”.*

But ASb recognize that potential for growth in the ideas of mother tongue literacy and OER could be significant if teacher education institutions come on-board which will also be beneficial to the institutions. New teachers need IT skills, and an initiative like ASb can provide a curriculum-linked way to develop these skills. In addition, in most African countries, the policy is that reading must be taught in the local language, although usually there is little or no reading material to support this.

Consequently, ASb has re-committed itself to working with teacher education institutions. Janks, in the teacher education case study, makes a number of recommendations about how ASb could work with teacher education institutions:

- “Work with as many HEIs in the pilot countries as funding permits to ensure that pre-service teachers, particularly in rural institutions become familiar with the ASb website. In a phased and scaffolded manner, encourage HEI staff to become as self-sufficient as possible so that they can run workshops with students themselves. Videos of exemplar workshops might assist less confident staff
- Train others in the HEI, particularly librarians (as originally envisaged in the ASb-Siyabuswa MoU), to support and assist lecturers in student workshops
- Pursue ways to embed ASb within teacher education qualifications such as those overseen by the Education Deans Forum in South Africa and KICD in Kenya (this might involve additional funding).”<sup>162</sup>
- One challenge is to work across institutions (rather than with individual institutions) and with management (rather than only with an interested individual lecturer). ASb have committed to begin this kind of advocacy and networking through participation in an upcoming Distance Education and Teachers' Training in Africa (DETA) conference in Kigali, Rwanda.

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<sup>161</sup> *Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, January 2017*

<sup>162</sup> *Case study evaluation 3 - Teacher education - Hilary Janks*

## With library systems

The third leg of ASb’s systemic integration strategy was working with libraries who ASb describe as “strategic in that they are based in communities, and, have the potential to reach large numbers of children”.

ASb’s work in Kibera (Kenya) and Atteridgeville (South Africa) has been successful, both in terms of numbers benefited but also in terms of laying the foundations for sustainability. It is clear, though, that aside from the partnership with KwaZulu-Natal Education, Library, Information and Technology division, much of the library work is successful project work rather than being systemic. (See Chapter 2 for details of library partner work).

In 2017 ASb have committed themselves leveraging these successes in order to integrating into existing library systems, in Nairobi and in Tshwane.

## 3. ASb is expanding into new African countries

### WHAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE?

Another important indicator of systemic integration and longer-term sustainability is the size and nature of ASb’s expansion into new African countries, countries outside of the three pilot countries.

By November 2016 ASb had developed important beachheads in four countries - Ethiopia, Ghana, Zambia and Rwanda – with Ethiopia significantly more advanced than the others<sup>163</sup>. In all cases these new countries were opened up on the basis of either leveraging independent take-up, or through personal connections, and then working to solidify progress by creating a working network of partners of different kinds. Here is a snapshot of progress in the four countries so far:

Ethiopia	Ghana	Rwanda and Zambia
<p>MoUs with four partners, all of which have already yielded concrete contributions – 37 Amharic and 22 Afaan Oromo storybooks):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>CODE Ethiopia</b> (A book development NGO): Donated one story for the website and seven hard copies. Will provide ASb with feedback on reader responses to Amharic and Afaan Oromo ASb stories.</li> <li>▪ <b>Beyond Access</b> (International technology in education organisation): 40 ASb stories on 100 tablets distributed to 25 libraries operated by CODE Ethiopia.</li> <li>▪ <b>Imagine1Day</b> (School-based NGO): Proposal to work collaboratively to improve literacy in the Southern Region</li> </ul>	<p>Two agreements have been signed and ASb have commissioned the translation of 10 titles into 11 Ghanaian languages. The two key organisations are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Open Learning Ghana (NGO):</b> In terms of an MoA, they will manage a process of translating 10 ASb titles into 11 Ghanaian languages; work with ASb to run a story development workshop to create 10 ASb storybooks. There is also an ‘emerging’ joint funding proposal for local manuscript development and illustration, for locally grounded storybooks.</li> <li>▪ <b>Educators International (NGO in Northern Ghana):</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Rwanda</b></p> <p><b>In start-up phase:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Exploratory visit and (volunteer) translations of 21 stories into Kinyarwanda (2016)</li> <li>▪ Concrete plans to expand relationship through workshop with 15 education college representatives, planned for April 2017.</li> </ul> <p><b>Zambia</b></p> <p><b>In start-up phase:</b></p> <p>Leveraging connections through another Saide project working with untrained community school teachers, ASb has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Uploaded 30 storybooks - translated into 4 Zambian languages by an NGO partner –</li> </ul>

<sup>163</sup> This section is based on the three ASb reports on new country developments, interviews with the project leaders, and on the 2016 annual report to Comic Relief.

Ethiopia	Ghana	Rwanda and Zambia
<p>and will be supporting the NGO with a story writing workshop in 2017.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Debre Berhan University Cultural Centre:</b> Working through a person who promotes Ethiopian culture and reading in schools – and who independently accessed the ASb site and translated/ donated stories. Discussions for action are proceeding but MoU signed. </li></ul> <p>Three other relationships have yielded contributions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Ras Abebe Library &amp; Bookstore.</b> Started by Mezemir Girma, a Debre Berhan University lecturer. Run two story development workshops which have a number of potential stories for publishing. Also establishing a community library.</li> <li>▪ <b>Addis Ababa University.</b> A lecturer, Haregewoin Fantahun, who has written stories for the website, will introduce ASb to the Department of Education who have a number of outreach schools in which African Storybooks may be useful.</li> <li>▪ SPANA, an NGO, have committed to donating a number of storybooks.</li> </ul>	<p>Joint proposal (REACH for Reading) developed (but not successful). So far, 15 Mampruli language storybooks have been developed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Partner network created</b> Independently of the above - there are two further Ghanaian languages - Gurune and Likpakpaani – into which writers are translating current ASb stories.</li> </ul>	<p>onto tablets used by teachers at 500 schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Working to develop collaborative activities and ultimately a network of partners, but this is moving slowly.</li> </ul>

**Table 15: Progress in moving to new countries**

## HOW DO ASB DECIDE ABOUT EXPANSION?

In all ‘expansion’ countries embryonic relationships were established because of unsolicited contributions of storybooks to the ASb website, and/or through building local networks:

- In **Ethiopia**, ASb’s strong networking capabilities – initiated by an ASb partner - yielded the contact who organised an introductory meeting with potential partners. Two academics who had spontaneously contributed storybooks are now key contacts in Ethiopia. The expansion is driven by a network of NGOs (involved in book development, education, and technology), a university (expertise and interest in local languages), and strong and passionate individuals (and their private projects). ASb supplied the ASb Reading App for large format tablets to 25

Ethiopian libraries for use in Amharic and Afaan Oromo to reading groups in order to jump-start the project.

- In **Ghana**, staff at a small NGO discovered and liked the ASb website so much that they invited ASb to Ghana, volunteered stories, and introduced them to Open Learning Ghana (OLE). Introductory working meetings were subsequently concluded. Similarly, Ghana has enthusiastic individuals driving the process with a combination of not-for-profit organisations (one connected to government) in different parts of the country taking the lead.
- **Rwanda's** proximity to Uganda was important when considering expansion but the introduction came through a Wits University lecturer doing contract work for ASb. She introduced ASb to her PhD students from the University of Rwanda. Development here has been disrupted by the death of the Ugandan country co-ordinator. It is less clear where the momentum will come from in Rwanda as it does not have the same networks as the other countries.
- In **Zambia** work started through an existing Saide training project with community teachers. While ASb has found it difficult building working relationships – and collaborative action – in Zambia, the current Saide project and partners may prove to be a powerful base for future development.

An important part of ASb's process is to embark quickly on joint, concrete actions, like a workshop, in order to nurture the relationship and gauge whether it was likely to develop into something sustainable and mutually beneficial. ASb ensures that there is a "representative collection of storybooks translated into local languages"<sup>164</sup> and works to create more with local people. Investments in all countries have been minimal and, it seems, 'paid for' in terms of stories developed and uploaded to the ASb website in, often, small minority African languages.

Part of their decision is based on country need – does the country require local language literacy materials? This is calibrated through a strategic lens on sustainability with questions like:

- Will this help us expand ASb's language repository? Will this enable us to launch in strategically important parts of Africa?
- Are there potential collaborators? Is there already some initiative, or strength, on which to build?
- Is it relatively easy for ASb staff to travel there? Is the new country work relatively easily integrated into existing work?

ASb's commitment to sustainability – and in order to become 'more visible' – means they look for internal 'networks'. In Ethiopia, their partnerships were attractive because Beyond Access was working with Code Ethiopia and Imagine1Day worked with the Ministry of Education and Save the Children. In Ghana, the links between OLE Ghana and Educators International, and the former's connection to government, are regarded as important.

Ethiopia carried an important lesson for ASb in terms of change. All but one of the initial contacts responded positively but the NGO which did not, Save the Children, is significant. Like many large NGOs Save the Children plays a role of 'shadow government' in countries like Ethiopia and can either enable or disable systemic integration.

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<sup>164</sup> *Narrative report to Comic Relief, 2016*

# Outcome 4: Are Saide’s change and project management processes more rigorous?

## EVALUATION FOCUS

The final outcome evaluated is whether the commitment to use the African Storybook project to strengthen Saide’s **organisational effectiveness**, in particular, its ability to **manage change**, was met. Three sub-outcomes were identified:

- A new project management system is introduced into other Saide projects
- Saide improves its ability to manage a growing number of collaborative relationships (or, as it is worded elsewhere, “learning about new ways of management of a wide range of partners is mainstreamed”)
- Saide has a better understanding of changes required (through its engagement with the ASb initiative) (or, as it is worded elsewhere, “learning about change management is mainstreamed”).

In this evaluation the impacts of two kinds of ASb choices - the use of new **technologies** (project software) to improve organisational effectiveness and changes in **strategy, decision-making and people management** processes – are explored. Aside from addressing the explicit question – “Did ASb manage effectively?” – the evaluation also explores the implicit question – “Did ASb and Saide learn from this experience?”

## FINDINGS SNAPSHOT

The ASb initiative has had a positive impact on **Saide’s organisational effectiveness**:

- **New project management and data storage/communication technologies** have enabled ASb to function more effectively, and are being ‘mainstreamed’ into other Saide projects. They have met their predicted target – 26 people in four Saide projects are ‘directly benefitting’ (the target was 25) through their use of all or parts of Prince2 and Sharepoint. In addition, although the ASb website is not a system technology, the learning and activity focused design thinking behind its new iteration is being inserted into Saide’s other distance and online education work.
- **Saide has improved its ability to manage collaborative relationships.** ASb has grown its number of partnerships significantly, and they vary widely in kind. Their ability to manage this rapidly growing array of collaborations has been tough but, with a few weaknesses (which ASb acknowledge and are addressing), they have been remarkably successful. Their learning has been diffused through Saide, both deliberately in new projects (and in this sense they have met their target of 25 beneficiaries), through the fact that Saide expertise moves in and out of ASb work and discussions as needed (thus influencing other projects).
- **ASb’s learning about change management is being applied to other Saide projects.** ‘Change management learning’ has been applied to at least three new and existing Saide projects and, again, the target of 19 beneficiaries has been met. In reality, this thinking has spread more widely. Pilot site co-ordinators – who are not counted above – commented on how impressed they were by the way in which ASb central office had managed the project, how they had learnt from this, and that they had applied these lessons in their own local management practices.



It is also important to note that thinking about how to manage within fluid and changing contexts has always been part of Saide's management strategy. What ASb did, as a "large and complex – continent-wide" initiative was to "make these change discussions more explicit<sup>165</sup>".

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Numerical targets achieved

ASb achieved the targets they committed to in the start-up document:

- They predicted that 25 people would 'directly benefit' from new project management systems (Prince2 and Sharepoint) and by the end of 2016 it was being used directly by 26 people (20 women and 6 men) in at least four other Saide projects - OER Africa, PAR, Siyaphumelela and Agshare.
- ASb has grown its number of partnerships substantially: formally (through MoA's and MoU's) to 30, those listed on their website now stand at 55, and their partnership grid numbers at 165. This has pushed ASb to refine its management processes – which it has done – but they have also diffused this learning through Saide. A target of 25 beneficiaries was set; 26 people in four Saide projects have now learnt about managing collaborations.
- 'Change management learning' is also being applied to at least four other Saide projects and, again, the target of 19 beneficiaries has been met (19, with 16 women and 3 men). But it is clear in this evaluation that the impact is wider, and is in small ways being taken on by, for example, pilot site workers.

### 2. Project management systems improved and 'mainstreamed'

Project management is both a matter of technical efficiency and overall effectiveness. Saide, through the ASb initiative, embarked on changes in both:

- ASb began using a project management system called Prince2, and set up Sharepoint as a data storage and sharing repository. Other projects at Saide have begun using both.
- The complexity of ASb, and the dispersed nature of its management and staff, pushed Saide to explore new ways to communicate and manage their often dispersed staff. Again, some of the models developed are now being used by other projects.

It is evident – from the numbers, from internal discussions (recorded in minutes of meetings and learnings papers), and in interviews with staff – that these systems have had an impact, on ASb and more broadly. Moreover, what is impressive is Saide's ability to thoughtfully adapt and use these technologies for smaller projects in ways that enhance effectiveness rather than impeding them.

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<sup>165</sup> Interview with Jenny Glennie and Tessa Welch, September 2016

## HOW HAVE NEW TECHNOLOGIES BEEN USED?

A recognition on Saide's part that the ASb project was a "multi-faceted and complex" project – with the dispersed nature of their staff and the many different strands of the initiative most often spoken of as the key complexities - led to an early agreement to deploy a 'principle-driven project management methodology' called Prince2 and a data storage system called Sharepoint.

As with all new technologies – and the new behaviours that it requires from staff – Prince2 and Sharepoint were not universally popular. Some felt that Prince2 was "overkill" and balked at its "over-formalized" reporting procedures: "it was hard for people"<sup>166</sup>. Sharepoint, it seems from interviews, was less controversial. To Saide (and ASb's) credit, these challenges were tackled by finding ways to adapt both systems to "meet the needs of differently sized projects"<sup>167</sup>.

### *What did these technologies contribute to Saide?*

**Prince2's** biggest contribution was that it established, for ASb, a work stream approach where "budgeting and reporting was attached to streams"<sup>168</sup>. This "helped draw a somewhat disaggregated project together and get it done". Given the visible advantages of this, the "model is increasingly being used for other Saide projects".

Another benefit of this stream approach that the approach lends itself to "building a next layer of leadership" at Saide.

Prince2 processes (with adaptations) also focused "our thinking (on the) 'importance of disciplined and consistent communication". This, said Glennie, allowed those working on, and especially managing, the ASb project to stand back and reflect on where the initiative was going rather than just "running, running, running". Here are some of the Prince-related processes that improved communication<sup>169</sup>:

- **Stream leader meetings** are held monthly. Stream leaders (who report to the project leader) are responsible for "completing their section of the progress tracker" - updated on a monthly basis – to ensure that the stream was "meeting targets". The products of the tracker became the agenda items for the meetings, and served to focus these on critical issues.
- Ensure, through regular **checkpoint meetings**, that activities turn into deliverables. These meetings are held monthly and limited to an hour in length. The team "reflects on progress", but the meeting also "provides systems for communication and support. For example, Juliet and Dorcas attended each other's meetings and proved important sources of support for both of them".
- **Highlight meetings**, "a more detailed reflection on checkpoint meeting reports", provide the full ASb team "with an update of where we are" but also to "get above the mundane nuts and bolts"<sup>170</sup>. It has enabled ASb (and other Saide projects) to "gather better advice" and keep project on track.

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<sup>166</sup> Interview: Tessa Welch, October 2016

<sup>167</sup> These quotations are from interviews conducted with ASb staff at Saide in September and October 2016

<sup>168</sup> All of these quotations, unless differently referenced, are from an interview with Jenny Glennie and Tessa Welch, January 2017.

<sup>169</sup> This information is from an undated ASb document, *Prince2: Project Management Review Meeting (Revised)*

<sup>170</sup> Interview: Tessa Welch, October 2016

The documentation from these meetings feed into Steering Advisory Committee meetings and other planning.

The organized mix of stream, steering committee, highlight, and checkpoint meetings have provided ASb with a way to streamline management – “to manage the complexities of a multi-faceted project (while) not losing site of the big picture”<sup>171</sup> - but also ensure that its widely distributed staffing are kept informed and, critically for some, able to support each other. Here’s a Saide diagrammatic description of how they have adapted Prince2 ‘principles’ to guide their project management processes:

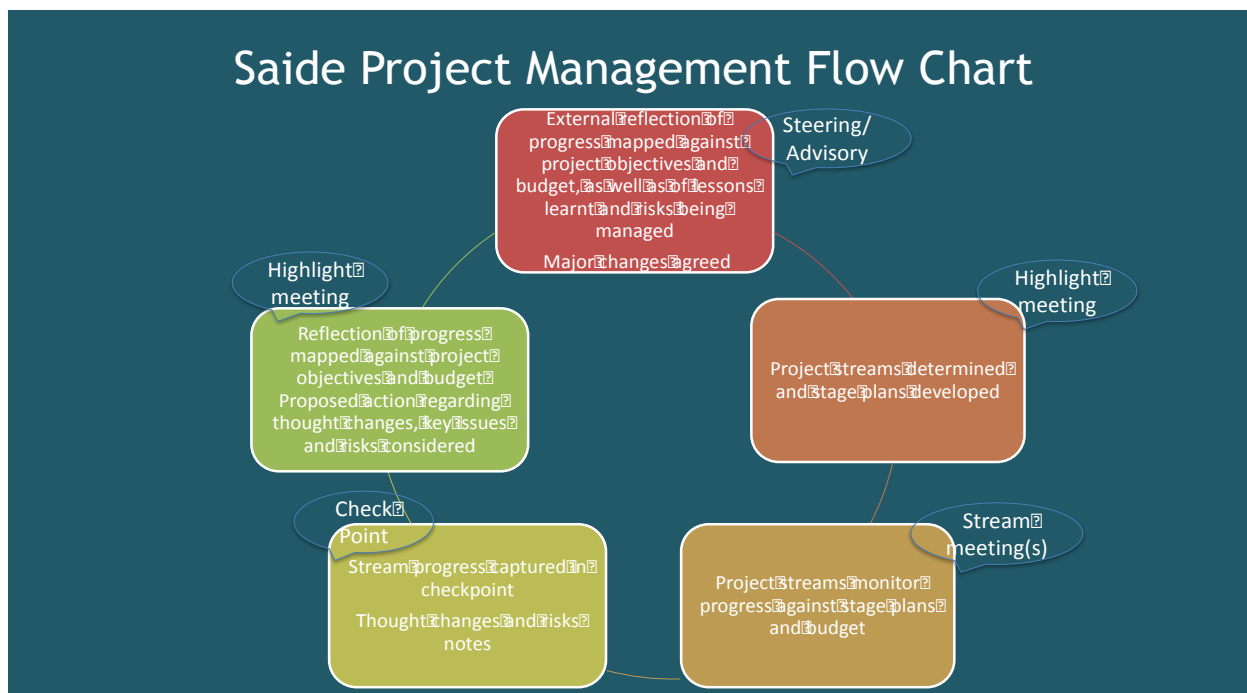


Figure 6: Saide project management flow chart

Two other benefits of the Prince2 system mentioned were:

- Focusing staff thinking on the business case “to ensure that you are achieving your objectives, costs are within budget and that you are operating cost-effectively”.
- Helping “track our thought changes. You forget how you were thinking, the assumptions you were making when you designed your logframe...there is little reflection. In the past the records of that thinking were poor or non-existent”<sup>172</sup>.

Rather than using Prince2 as-is Saide staff felt that the model was “probably too large and complex for all Saide projects and that they should explore an adapted version for smaller projects”.

A simple – but important - example of this is recognizing that a less complex project like Siyaphumelela “can be managed at the stage plan level ... (and that) you only want to go to a stream level if it is more complex and where you want to have a different plan for each stream”.

Part of the learning they went through with Prince2 – and the adaptations they made as they proceeded – was (among a number of others):

<sup>171</sup> Interview: Tessa Welch, October 2016

<sup>172</sup> Interview: Jenny Glennie and Tessa Welch, January 2017

- Saide were concerned that Prince2 tended to have a too “narrow an idea” of products, arguing that “a *relationship* with a pilot site could be a product”. They noted “that products very often emerge as the project unfolds.” They increasingly focused on outcomes in order to “to lift these up to a higher level, to impact”.
- The separation of project *management* from project *work* was regarded as a “useful discipline” but Saide staff felt that the two roles were often conflated - “sometimes through necessity” – in smaller projects and so should be more thoughtfully applied.
- Concern was expressed that the ASb team was operating at “too much of a macro-level ... and not doing sufficient micro-planning in streams”. This was addressed.

This serious grappling with new technologies and processes – rather than applying the process mechanically, or ditching it prematurely – fits in with the overall impression of thoughtfulness that is evident in ASb’s (and Saide’s) management style.

### Sharepoint

Sharepoint filing has been “organized according to the workstreams identified in the Prince2 process”<sup>173</sup>. Initially there was also frustration with staff asking why the same kind of data storage couldn’t simply continue to be done on the Saide server.

The reasons for migrating to Sharepoint was that it proved more cost-effective and allowed for more reliable remote file-sharing, within ASb and with other Saide projects. The ability for everyone to update documents like the partner grid in real time was seen as a major gain of using Sharepoint.

For Welch ASb funding allowed “us to test the idea of a remote system, a distributed filing system, which has been important for this project but also for other Saide projects which are increasingly working Africa- and even worldwide”<sup>174</sup>.

Evaluators – this evaluator and the mid-term evaluators - have found the Sharepoint ‘filing system’ impressive in its size, and convenient in that it can be accessed anywhere, but difficult to navigate. To complicate matters further some working documents are not dated making it difficult to know what the reporting period is that it refers to. Often, also, the titles on documents are different from the title under which it is filed, thus making a search difficult. (An example: An internal document used for this research is titled, “Collective impact and partner engagement – ASb as a case study” but is labelled as “ASb lessons: Using a CI heuristic”.) Like all libraries – online and other – it requires a system, and a librarian.

Another example of Saide’s ability to think organizationally and systemically (rather than in a project-to-project fashion) is the 2017 plan to merge “Saide’s growing set of platforms (initially just one site, but now Saide, OER Africa, Nadeosa, African Storybook, and an envisaged platform for our openly licensed courses)<sup>175</sup>” and manage them as one, with single service provider hosting all sites.

### HOW HAS THE WEBSITE BEEN DEVELOPED?

ASb core technology, its website, has been evaluated and significantly reworked to address usability challenges reported by both staff and potential story writers. The new design also followed a different

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<sup>173</sup> Interview: Tessa Welch and Jenny Louw, September 2016

<sup>174</sup> Interview Tessa Welch and Jenny Louw, September 2016

<sup>175</sup> 2016 Annual Report to Comic Relief, February 2017

philosophy about how users interact with, and learn from, sites such as these; a more “user-focused” design informed by “activity theory”<sup>176</sup>.

In addition, in 2016, two new services were launched, a story reading section within the new website, and a Reading App for mobile devices.

Initial reaction from users and partners was negative but, according to ASb, it soon became clear that the negativity was largely the predictable response to the inconvenience of change rather than problems with the site. As users have become more familiar with the changes the “negative comments disappeared”<sup>177</sup>. ASb have noted this reaction and comment that they “will ... remember this as we go live with the new translation and creation tools in the first quarter of 2017”.

In interviews, reports and passionate office conversations this evaluator noticed ASb’s awareness of how challenging website changes were for internal staff, and how important “ensuring ... collective ownership of the website and its tools”<sup>178</sup> was. The same sensitivity to making changes seamless was evident as they prepared for 2017 changes: they are carrying out rigorous beta testing with users, producing a website guide, and will “invest in face to face visits to our hubs to assist them in adjusting to the changes”<sup>179</sup>.

ASb’s new web designer, and a strong new design rationale for websites, has been ‘mainstreamed’ into Saide debates. Its focus on activity and learning fits comfortably with other Saide work and, in a sense, pushes Saide staff to consider interactions with a website through a learning lens that they already apply to much of their work. As an organisation committed to improving online and distance learning, this is of value.

## 9. Improved ability to manage collaborative relationships

ASb have grown their number of partnerships significantly, and they vary widely in kind – from relatively closely managed pilot sites or hubs, through formal agreements with partners (small and large, distributors and implementers) who operate with little ASb input through to government systems (provincial and national). (See Chapters 2 and 3 for more detail)

The challenge is that “the relationships we’d like to build are not consultancy relationships – they’re more ‘embedded’ ... partners are involved in many more parts of the process” and the relationships are more fluid...<sup>180</sup>.

Their ability to manage this rapidly growing array of collaborations has been tough but, with a few weaknesses (which ASb acknowledge and are addressing), they have been remarkably successful. This is evident in the interviews conducted with partners who, without fail, spoke of a management style that was “both flexible and structured; both humane and focused on deliverables”<sup>181</sup>.

The continually updated partner grid has been a useful device through which to keep track of how relationships are being built in different kinds of ways (all staffers can input into this grid). Increasingly, as ASb has begun to recognise the size of independent use of the ASb website, it is beginning to build a more

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<sup>176</sup> Interview, Alan Amory, September 2016

<sup>177</sup> 2016 Annual Report to Comic Relief, February 2017

<sup>178</sup> 2016 Annual Report to Comic Relief, February 2017

<sup>179</sup> 2016 Annual Report to Comic Relief, February 2017

<sup>180</sup> Interview: Jenny Glennie and Tessa Welch, September 2016

<sup>181</sup> Interview: Juliet Tembe, Ugandan country co-ordinator, October 2016

systematic way “to synthesise and reflect on” the correspondence they receive by email. “Up till now this has been a bit ad-hoc ... although Jenny (Louw) has been very good at getting back to people about requests”<sup>182</sup>.

The ASb learning is being diffused through Saide, both:

- **Deliberately:** New projects are asked to use innovations developed by ASb – like managing dispersed relationships – or read about ASb’s learnings about moving, for example, towards a “shared understanding of issues like the measurement of impact”. ASb’s learning questions and other papers provide a rich repository of information that is being used by new projects.
- **Structurally:** Internally, Saide staff share their particular expertise among different projects, this diffusing of ideas about managing relationships between projects in a less deliberate but nevertheless powerful manner. One example that struck this evaluator was how ASb’s ‘partnership’ experience with the Washington-based Global Book Alliance became part of mainstream discussions about “how to situate oneself in relation to global forces without being subsumed”<sup>183</sup>

### HOW IS ASB USING ‘COLLECTIVE IMPACT’ TO IMPROVE COLLABORATIONS?

Despite ASb’s success and the fact that new Saide projects were learning from ASb’s experience, ASb and Saide management staff spoke about the “frustrations” of trying to build “meaningful partnerships”, within ASb and with outside groups. To deepen their understanding of collective impact, and to “gain more momentum” with partners working in conditions that are complex, they employed a Saide staffer to develop a briefing paper to ignite more discussion about this issue.

The outcome is a heuristic – “definitely a work in progress” – which provides Saide projects with a collective impact lens through which to analyse the potential of different relationships, and to identify possible challenges, pre-emptively.

Saide, “because they didn’t want this developed in vacuum”<sup>184</sup>, applied this to their partnership with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD).

The key early learning from this work about working collectively with impact – and something that has been applied to another Saide project where there are five partners “all working differently towards the same goal” – is that of shared aspirations. “This may not be there in the beginning of a partnership, but if there is consistent authentic engagement, it can emerge”<sup>185</sup>.

A lesson to other projects is the importance of this engagement and probing “because sometimes this is shared even when it seems it might be.”<sup>186</sup> An ASb staffer compares their partnership with the KICD to another Kenyan partner in a way that illustrates this learning - about the importance of authentic engagement in order to test for shared aspirations well:

*“This is another organisation with whom we partnered at the same time as KICD, they could be using what we have produced, but aren't. It is another example of a partnership for*

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<sup>182</sup> Interview: Jenny Louw and Tessa Welch, September 2016

<sup>183</sup> Interview: Najma Agherdien, Saide researcher, October 2016

<sup>184</sup> Interview: Najma Agherdien, Saide researcher, October 2016

<sup>185</sup> 2016 Annual Report to Comic Relief, February 2017

<sup>186</sup> Interview: Tessa Welch, October 2016

*potential impact, but it isn't working. I think P1 is right, they aren't playing open cards. This is essential if you're going to work together*<sup>187</sup>.

Two other 'learnings' from this research have been that:

- Understanding that while activities can be different, they must be mutually reinforcing
- Discussions about shared measurements of impact, against the shared aspirations, is agreed to. This is an issue ASb say they are "struggling with", in common with many organisations working in collaboration with others.

These understandings, says Glennie, "will help us remain faithful to our niche. It is easy for ASb to get pulled into, for instance, working in schools. But that is not our mandate ... and this kind of tool allows us to get back to our piece of the jigsaw..."<sup>188</sup>

As Agherdien said, these are early days but Saide is committed to improving working collectively to maximize impact. They realise it "is hard" but are committed to making it work "because it is worth it"<sup>189</sup>.

## 10. Change management is being mainstreamed

'Change management learning' has been integrated more explicitly into Saide discussions and applied to at least three new and existing Saide projects.

But the 'mainstreaming' is broader than that: some pilot site co-ordinators spoke glowingly of how ASb had 'managed' them, and how this had rubbed off on the ways in which they managed their sites. Unlike some other funders and leading NGOs they had worked with, they said Saide "understood that things change here all the time"<sup>190</sup> and "respect us as we work in different ways to ensure "deliverables are met". While they had found reporting documents "difficult" they appreciated the "guidance (the documents) provided"<sup>191</sup>.

ASb's success rests on driving two important changes: that people buy into the relatively new idea of open educational resources for education, and that systems take on this idea (and ASb resources). ASb is, slowly, achieving both and in the process demonstrating interesting ideas about change:

- The process of discussing the content of MoAs and MoUs – often seen as a necessary but irritating pathway to signing - is regarded by ASb as an important stage for talking about the nature of the change, of expectations, etc. It can lead to more commonly shared aspirations than if in-depth discussion does not occur.
- Many large NGOs play a role similar (and often as powerful) as state players in Africa. These "shadow governments" provide opportunities for organisations like Saide to get to the levers that make systemic implementation possible, they can also block access to state players.
- Individual pace-setters, and ASb's assiduous networking to get them active, has played a powerful role in ASb (and Saide more generally) driving change. They work at many levels at once, and

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<sup>187</sup> Internal Saide document: *Collective impact and partner engagement - ASb as a case study (undated)*.

<sup>188</sup> Interview: Jenny Glennie and Tessa Welch, January 2017.

<sup>189</sup> Interview: Najima Agherdien, October 2016.

<sup>190</sup> Interview: Lunyole Language Association, October 2016.

<sup>191</sup> Interview: Lunyole Language Association, October 2016

understand that the same goals can be achieved from very different starting points; sometimes individuals and other times more formally through organisations.

- Likewise, ASb has taught Saide that a project – however attractive and useful it seems to Saide – must seem necessary to the potential partner. ASb needed to be more skillful in letting potential partners know what ASb has and what of their problems ASb can solve, said Welch. “We know where we want to achieve, but it is really important that we get better at knowing what the person we are speaking to wants, and how what we do fits”.

A number of ASb innovations – changes in the way in which Saide has managed people and projects – have now been taken on by Saide more broadly. Here are a few:

- One seemingly prosaic ‘change’ dilemma that ASb raised was about how to “monitor a project with a number of different currencies that changed rapidly”. This was true for the ASb initiative which worked in five currencies (UK Pound, SA Rand, Ugandan Shilling and Kenyan Shilling and, less so, US and Canadian \$). This currency mix, with currencies that are not especially stable, is, increasingly, a challenge for other Saide projects.

ASb provided the space to develop a system that could “safeguard budgets across the life of the project” but also serve as models for other projects. In addition, Saide core administrative staff – who play an important support role - have begun to ‘mainstream’ this notion of change.

- Another issue was managing people ‘dispersed across Africa’ and who “did not work out of offices...in a very decentralized project”. As Saide management noted, “if we had chosen to go with offices almost half of the budget would have been spent on this item”. But saving that cost also required country co-ordinators to carry an office float and be trained to manage this and report on it.

The choice to not use formal offices and run ‘virtual’ offices – people with office floats, supported by the central office – has now become a model for other Saide projects. This should, they believe, lead to much more cost-effective use of funds. But it does underline how important a structured communication system – information, updated regularly and dated, storage on a Cloud server like Sharepoint, network, support and information meetings, and a clear reporting process and line – will be for future projects.

- A big learning about change was the viral power of web-based projects. Much of ASb’s work was focused on what happened in pilot sites. Yet, the amount of independent uptake – and changes brought about by this – was largely unrecorded; follow-up was sporadic, online analytics did not capture some important data, etc. Now ASb, and Saide, are aware of this and are setting in place systems to capture better data, respond in a more structured manner, and explore ways to leverage this viral growth.

ASb (and Saide) management were also impressive in their ability to intervene rapidly when things seemed to be going awry, and when unexpected opportunities presented themselves. Here are few examples:

- Independent usage, or an email from an unknown but interested person, or the appearance of stories in languages from countries where ASb is not operating, is quickly followed up and, where there is potential, ASb visits and sets in motion a process towards more systemic intervention. Both Ethiopia and Ghana expansions are examples of this.



- Under-performing pilot sites were quickly closed down. The ability to talk about this in relation to not meeting agreed-upon deliverables, or working in an agreed-upon manner captured in the formal signing of agreements) proved important here.
- Early challenges with users using the website to read and create stories was followed – quickly – by an evaluation of the website, and then a re-design using the evaluator’s advice. The new site is currently being tested.
- Judith Baker talks about how impressed she was at “Saide’s fast turnaround” when it became clear that cell phones - “which, two years ago, were a tiny part of this” – were an accessible medium for story reading in Africa. “Now they have a Reading App for mobile which I’m sure will be popular”<sup>192</sup>.

When one evaluates the idea of ‘mainstreaming thinking’ it is important to look at change **practices**, but it is also about getting an organization to learn and to make that learning available to others – the idea of knowledge transfer.

ASb have been impressive in this regard: they are meticulous in documenting these learnings, through internal ‘monitoring’ documents but also through academic research. This reflection on practice, and the attempt to theorise what it means, deepens ASb’s understanding of managing change and makes it available to many other organisations.

This evaluator observation of the manner in which ASb has been implemented suggests a deep understanding of how change is initiated and sustained (especially within the unpredictable and fragile systems that exist in many parts of Africa) and, possibly as important, an understanding of how organisations function within contexts of continual and unpredictable change and fluidity.

## 11. Saide’s existing strength has contributed to ASb’s success

What became evident to this evaluator was that Saide’s existing strengths – its experience in managing large projects, its existing networks (in Africa and beyond), its considerate but methodical approach to managing people, and its commitment to being a learning organization enabled it to manage many of the complexities of this project. For example:

- The systems technologies introduced are large and complex - and necessary – but insistence on their use could cripple rather than assist weaker organisations. Saide was able to adapt Prince2 to its varying needs.
- Saide’s performance management systems integrate staff as *independent* practitioners who must constantly refine and redefine their goals and job descriptions. This enabled ASb staff to work within the fluidity of a complex and dispersed project like ASb.
- A prior commitment to a non-technicist understanding of management meant that ASb emerged in an environment where reflection on practice – both through formal research and through ‘action’ research – was commonplace. This enabled “people at Saide to become experts in a range of issues regarding child literacy in Africa ... and so they could respond to emerging challenges quickly and skillfully.”<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Interview: Judith Baker, October 2016

<sup>193</sup> Interview: Judith Baker, October 2016

One issue – and Saide is acutely aware of this – is that ASb relies too heavily on one or two people. This star power, it could be argued, is what “makes the magic possible”<sup>194</sup> but it also makes ASb as a systems change project vulnerable. The illness and untimely death of the Ugandan county co-ordinator – “someone with a unique combination of academic assets and political connections”<sup>195</sup> – weakened what ASb could have achieved in Uganda but, more problematically, makes the search for a replacement difficult. A number of the interviewees – Janks, Baker, and Welch – spoke about the urgent need for more high level core staffing (“a person who can connect the dots”, “a person who can speak an African language and who knows people”), but also acknowledged that “they are exceptionally difficult to find, as our early search revealed.”<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Interview: Judith Baker, October 2016

<sup>195</sup> Interview: Tessa Welch, October 2016

<sup>196</sup> Interview: Tessa Welch, October 2016

# Is the ASb initiative relevant and sustainable?

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS

African Storybook asked that four overarching evaluation questions be considered, all of which drive towards the big question of sustainability:

- **Relevance:**
  - Is the initiative meeting a need for affordable access for educators and the children in their care to enjoyable storybooks in the languages of Africa for early reading?
  - Is it meeting a need for the support and development of local initiatives in the creation of early reading materials that are culturally and linguistically appropriate, and in contexts in which access to technology and education have been severely limited in the past?
  - To what extent is the initiative being recognised and taken up internationally as well as in the pilot countries?
- **Design relevance and appropriateness:**
  - Are the activities designed to meet these needs in technologically and pedagogically innovative and theoretically sound ways?
  - Are the changes that have been made/are being made to the project design appropriate? What improvements could be made?
- **Efficiency and effectiveness:**
  - How well is it being run?
  - Is it able to adapt to the evolving needs and conditions, both local and global?
- **Sustainability:**
  - Is the initiative paying sufficient attention to the sustainability of its results?

Relevance (and relevant design), and organisational efficiency and effectiveness, are necessary conditions for sustainability, but each on their own is not sufficient. In addition, sustainability requires that other conditions are met, like community buy-in (acceptance) and some measure of economic viability.

Some of the issues discussed in this chapter overlap with evaluation issues tackled earlier, in the discussions of the four outcomes. The lens through which they will be discussed, however, will be **longer-term sustainability**.

## FINDINGS SNAPSHOT

The African Storybook Initiative have set in place strong foundations for its ongoing success.

By a number of measures, it is proving **relevant**, its design (in critical areas) is appropriate and rapidly adapted when it proves not to be, it is run **efficiently and effectively**, and it meets most of the important criteria for **sustainability**.

### *Is the initiative relevant?*

Yes, it is. It provides affordable access to culturally appropriate texts, and provides the means for local creation of texts. And it does so in contexts where electricity and internet connectivity are non-existent or fragile, which speaks to the ASb's design appropriateness.

The initiative – and its core idea, using open educational resources to address early literacy development – is also being “recognised and taken up” locally and internationally: systemically, through influential think tanks ‘selling’ ASb ideas to a larger audience, and by partner organisations and teachers who benefit from the use of the open education resources provided and who, in turn, feed the collection of resources.

A remaining relevancy challenge is reading for *pleasure*. In cash and time-strapped African contexts people are likely to say, “Let’s get the basics correct, then we will look at reading for pleasure”.

### *Is the initiative run efficiently and effectively, and is it adaptable?*

ASb has worked effectively and demonstrated real adaptability. It planned what it would do systematically (and adapted it where necessary); it was guided throughout by clear success indicators (for the projects and less explicitly so, through Saide budget procedures); and throughout it has evaluated and monitored progress (and used insights gathered from this to tweak the initiative).

Impressively, while organized, management never proved to be rigid. Instead, an atmosphere of reflection and adapting to changes fluidly, seemed to prevail, even as they began integrating the Prince2 project management tool to guide their processes. Part of the reflection was ASb's learnings questions.

One concern did emerge. While responsibilities were clearly allocated, ASb seemed to rely overly on their project leader. This makes the project vulnerable.

### *What about sustainability?*

ASb easily met their outcome, namely “**paying sufficient attention** to the sustainability of its results”. ASb documentation is laced through with questions about how to ensure that the initiative continues after central ASb support is removed.

More impressively, it does seem that the initiative has successfully laid foundations for future sustainability in four commonly accepted indicators:

- ASb are actively – and successfully - seeking **funding** through grants, partnerships, and by creating income streams.
- They are working to **operationalize** their ideas. The website is, itself, an “operationalization” of the OER idea. In addition, public systems are beginning to buy into the OER idea with some enthusiasm. ASb have also researched what levels of support are optimal for ‘take-off’, or sustained operationalizing of their ideas in pilot sites or hubs. But this concrete execution is still fragile. The challenge is to turn state support for initiatives that are free to them into initiatives that become their policy and are funded by them.
- Sustainability depends on moving partnerships from being utilitarian and initiative-focused into **longer-term, jointly conceived, partnerships** that will persist beyond the life of any one project. ASb have a number of these in place and regard this as central to its, and Saide’s expansion strategies.

- ASb are working towards having their ideas **codified in policy**, but still has some work to do. There is increasing support for the idea of OER from a growing body of people with formal authority, with global influence, and leaders with local credibility. These are useful.

Moreover, ASb have thought deeply about a **post-implementation expansion strategy**. But, in addition to expansion they need to focus on consolidation. Work must be done on getting executing agencies – government and NGOs who like the project and the OER idea – to support the project through budgetary provisions and institutional arrangements. The signs are good, but as ASb have found, while organisations may like the idea they may be less keen to pay for it.

## DISCUSSION

Relevance (and relevant design), and organisational efficiency and effectiveness, are necessary conditions for long-term impact and sustainability, but each on their own is not sufficient. In addition, sustainability requires that other conditions are met, like community buy-in (acceptance), systemic integration (in action and policy), and some measure of economic viability.

Some of the issues discussed in this chapter overlap with evaluation issues tackled earlier, in the discussions of the four outcomes. The lens through which they will be discussed, however, will be **longer-term sustainability**.

### 1. The ASb's relevance is clear

ASb conceive of relevance as having to do with providing access to their target audiences in a manner **appropriate** to the contexts in which they have chosen to work. They also regard relevance as having to do with breaking new ground, and **being recognised** as doing so. Finally, part of relevance for the ASb is **adaptability**; they aimed to make changes where necessary, and make sure they were appropriate.

#### IS ACCESS GROWING AND APPROPRIATE?

Access to ASb documentation is laced with acknowledgments of local context, the “severe” limitations in terms of access to technology and education *and* the power of local people to innovate and engage given the appropriate incentives.

ASb have clearly begun addressing the “need for **affordable access** ... to enjoyable storybooks in the languages of Africa” among educators and librarians working in early literacy development. The numbers provided in Outcome 1 attest to this:

- The number of storybooks made available on their website in the 30 month of this evaluation is truly impressive
- The increasing numbers of African visitors to, and users of, the site suggest that it addresses a need
- The number of organisations partnering with ASb are indicators of the utility of what they offer.

Relevance is also indicated by the degree to which a project is generative, rather than simply being “consumed”.

The ASb's work in pilot sites, through partners, and through spontaneous take-up suggest that the idea of “creating early reading materials that are culturally and linguistically **appropriate**” has struck a chord in many parts of Africa. Again, this is evident in the remarkable number of stories created, adapted and translated in a short period of time. It is also clear in the passion of people who have found the site through

online dabbling, and then approached ASb with offers to expand the project in their jurisdictions, or suggested ways in which storybooks could be printed or used, often in situations where “access to technology and education ... is severely limited”.

This ability to make the storybooks accessible within contexts where electricity and internet connectivity are non-existent or fragile speaks to ASb’s **design appropriacy** strengths:

- They evaluated how users found their website, and responded through a thoughtful re-design.
- They noted trends within Africa and developed a mobile phone reading app which this evaluation suggests will be an increasingly important means of accessing storybooks in Africa.
- ASb follow a rigorous website testing protocol, another dimension of their work that speaks to their sensitivity to making the initiative relevant to their target audience.

In addition, while using online technology in contexts that ASb knew lacked these, they also worked hard to find out what worked, or what combination of resourcing was necessary to move the project to ‘take-off’. There were problems with the use of solar to provide power, and with the lack of any technological literacy, and with internet connectivity. But the relevance – and resilience – of this initiative was evident in how thoughtfully and pro-actively ASb responded to these challenges, and to how creatively many in pilot sites responded. As Baker says: “Two years ago cell phones were a small part of this...and now they have a phone app! They really do fast turnarounds...”<sup>197</sup>

## DOES THE INITIATIVE HAVE SUPPORT?

Relevance is most typically about people buying in; about important target groups recognizing the value the project brings. Weak acceptability has the risk of compromising long term sustainability.

### *The community*

A common quantitative measure of community support is measuring beneficiaries. By this measure ASb have demonstrated acceptance at pilot sites, but also in the “global local” (local initiatives globally building off the ASb resources). (Chapters 1 and 2 discuss this in more detail). The mid-term evaluation and observations and interviews that were part of this evaluation also showed a high level of appreciation - the community did consider the project beneficial.

In addition, ASb have worked carefully to consult with and get formal agreement from local and nationally elected representatives. In Tororo, even where this is frustrating and slow, the ASb co-ordinator Owino Ogot says, “I talk to them (referring to the chief district inspector) ... probably nothing will happen. But if I don’t talk to them nothing will definitely happen.”<sup>198</sup>

At provincial and national levels ASb put in similar amounts of hard work to get political and bureaucratic buy-in, and it was (according to a number of ASb staff) “slow, hard and frustrating.”<sup>199</sup> However, ASb recognized that in the paradoxically weak and fractured bureaucracies in many pilot countries, leverage could be obtained less formally. So they worked their networks and in many instances links with individuals outside of formal power led to buy-in from formal power.

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<sup>197</sup> Interview, Judith Baker, October 2016

<sup>198</sup> Interview, Owino Ogot, October 2016

<sup>199</sup> Interview, Dorcas Wepukhulu, September 2016

ASb recognize fully that they have something that is useful to educational authorities, and that their job is to help authorities understand this.

### *Implementation partners*

ASb documentation and interviews revealed an organisation strongly committed to deep consultation with partners working towards getting formal agreements signed. Partners interviewed were uniformly supportive of ASb and even more so, of what ASb can offer them.

It is clear that there is buy-in; that ASb are recognized as important, useful and relevant. Sometimes this is due to shared values, aspirations and passions. In other cases, it is a recognition of mutual benefit. Both definitions of relevance of work when it comes to predicting sustainability.

## **IS THE ASB INITIATIVE BREAKING NEW GROUND AND BEING RECOGNIZED FOR DOING SO?**

### *Innovative and sound methodologically*

Relevance also has to do with solving tough problems and being recognized for doing so.

ASb have worked in ways that are grounded. While they are, in one sense, tilting at windmills by using technology to breathe life into mother tongue writing and reading in places seemingly devoid of technology, they have not been seduced by cute new ideas and have, instead, been guided (it seems) by a question like, “What mix of traditional and new technology works best in this context?”

None of their ideas are unique. What is new is the thoughtful manner in which they are combined, executed and monitored.

ASb recognized that resourcing was important, but decided against a full-technology option. Instead, they focused on “having people release the potential in local communities through an application of technology and real respect for the people.”<sup>200</sup> They understood the contextual problems and carefully monitored how their resource kits worked, and how local teachers and organisers were using storybooks and technology.

They also put enormous energy into making sure that storybooks met theoretically sound literacy standards, and in training people to use them well. This is evident in the impressive library of academic articles emerging from the project, the considered reflections in their Learnings Questions process, and their use of globally respected experts in the fields of literacy and open educational resources.

### *Recognised internationally and in Africa*

Finally, the initiative – and its core idea, using open educational resources to address early literacy development, is being “recognised and taken up” locally and internationally. This take-up has been through systemic integration in pilot countries, invitations to sit on globally influential think tanks, and through contracts to advise governments in the use of OER more broadly than simply in early literacy development.

All of these speak to a central question in relevance and sustainability, namely “is there consistency between the project’s objectives and that of public systems, nationally, sectorally, provincially or at district level?” In other words, if the project can attract support from these parties its ability to sustain itself, and go to scale is increased.

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<sup>200</sup> Interview, Judith Baker, October 2016

It is clear that the foundations are in place: they are addressing an expressed need, they are working with systems (government and the large shadow NGO systems), and they are developing into a size that makes people take notice.

The ASb's biggest challenge is at the heart of their "concept": reading for *pleasure*. No-one denies that this is important but, as ASb are finding, cash and time-strapped institutions in Africa argue that while the basics (ie basic graded readers that teachers can use to develop literacy, and a simple literacy development process) are not in place, "reading for pleasure" and "trans-linguaging" literacy approaches remain a "luxury".

## 2. Is the ASb initiative efficient and effective?

ASb have worked effectively and demonstrated real adaptability. Typically, efficiency and effectiveness assessed by examining an organisation's implementation and monitoring strategy, including questions like:

- Is the implementation period **realistic**?
- Is there an implementation plan with clearly **defined responsibilities**?
- Is there a **monitoring and evaluation** plan?
- Has the project developed **success indicators** (financial, physical and impact)?

The evidence suggests an exceptionally well run project. Implementation and monitoring and evaluation plans were put in place, seemed realistic (and where not, were adapted), and largely followed. These plans worked to execute and evaluate against a clear set of project indicators rigorous budget processes, and strong personnel management processes were implemented, both inherited from Saide and strengthened through the use of Prince2.

More impressively, these structures were not rigid. Instead, ASb permitted staff the freedom to explore, and through their reflection processes, to problem-solve and adapt to the changing contexts in which they worked. (See Chapter 4)

One concern did emerge. Although ASb have a strong team they do seem overly dependent – managerially – on its project leader. ASb have struggled to attract people with the mix of skills and knowledge necessary to co-ordinate different parts of the project. Attempts to find a partner development coordinator were "thwarted by South Africa's then chaotic work permit requirements"<sup>201</sup>. ASb did recruit two excellent in-country coordinators but, towards the end of 2016, the Ugandan co-ordinator died. They also have excellent staff co-ordinating story development and publishing. So the problem is not "bench strength" – the team's capabilities are exceptional. It is about who makes the leadership decisions; about who provides strategic direction.

In order to grow this project, it would seem this is a nut that needs to be cracked.

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<sup>201</sup> Email correspondence, Tessa Welch, February 2017



### 3. Has sustainability been *considered*? How sustainable is the ASb?

#### HAS THE ASb PAID ATTENTION TO SUSTAINABILITY?

ASb asked that sustainability be assessed not in terms of whether they have, or even are likely to, achieve sustainability but whether they were “paying sufficient attention to the sustainability of its results”. The short answer to this is a categorical, “Yes”: ASb documentation is laced with questions about how they can ensure that the initiative continues after central ASb support is removed.

In 2016, they said explicitly that the “focus in the project is no longer on pilot site work per se, but on systemic implementation in the pilot countries, expansion into other countries, as well as proofs of concept and plans for long term sustainability.”<sup>202</sup>

ASb have, since their inception, but especially in their plan for 2016/2017, highlighted the importance of systemic implementation; of having the ASb integrated into public systems, including schooling, teacher education and libraries ‘in a manner that enables scale.’

Their ‘Learnings Question 5’ addresses this issue in more detail, as does their collective impact research, and ASb have in the last year made significant efforts to find funding – both through grants, partners and fees – to secure the project in the longer-term. All of these point to a serious focus on maintaining – and growing – the project.

Moreover, ASb have from the start worked to develop deep and ongoing relationships with partner organisations and have formalized these in a variety of signed agreements.

#### IS SUSTAINABILITY LIKELY?

This evaluation is a little more ambitious and does, tentatively, explore whether they are – at this stage – likely to be sustainable in the longer-term. Making judgments about sustainability generally requires examining a project in one or more of its dimensions<sup>203</sup>:

- **Has the ASb secured continued funding?** This includes securing grant funding from more than one funder; negotiating joint funding partnerships; and developing an income stream.
- **Has the ASb been able to “operationalize” its ideas?** Are the ASb’s ‘big ideas’ beginning to be embodied in processes and organisations and thus taking on a life of their own?
- **Has the ASb built “deep” relationships with implementing organisations?** These are partnerships that move beyond one-off collaborations to longer-term jointly conceived and funded projects.
- **Has the ASb “codified” its initiative in policy or practice?** This ranges from strong support from communities, and/or policymakers, to ideas being enacted as policy.

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<sup>202</sup> *Terms of Reference for the Final External Evaluation of the African Storybook Initiative, Saide, 2016*

<sup>203</sup> *These sustainability ‘indicators’ come from two articles - Evaluation’s Role in Supporting Initiative Sustainability by Heather Weiss, Julia Coffman, and Marielle Bohan-Baker (of the Harvard Family Research Project, 2002) and Planning for and monitoring of project sustainability: a guideline on concepts, issues and tools by M. Adil Khan, (a UNDP evaluation advisor, 2000) <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/khan.htm>*

### *Longer-term funding prospects look good*

**Steady, predictable core funding is critical.** The initiative is succeeding, but needs to consolidate and to do so must fund at least the maintenance and improvement of the technology and ensure a steady supply of stories. This is an area of significant attention by ASb and funding (and income) looks promising:

- ASb note that Comic Relief funds are used to strengthen core functions and not on functions like the printing of storybooks. Instead, their funding strategy is “to ensure that various of our services are **paid** for, for example, by the three provinces in South Africa”<sup>204</sup>. They are, increasingly, getting partners to pay for or contribute to the costs of translating stories into local languages.
- An important component of continued funding is that it be broadly based to protect them from the damage that can be done by the withdrawal of an only funder. ASb are exploring a number of different funding sources, revenue-raising activities (through publishing, advice, etc), and formal partnerships for fund-raising:
  - They are partnering with organizations like iMlango and World Reader for them to distribute the stories to large numbers of children through websites, cloud servers and tablets.
  - ASb are pitching for new funding, individually and jointly. They have embarked on a number of joint-funding agreements for implementation in some South African jurisdictions.
  - Their partnerships – especially systemic partners – are already creating an income stream through orders for hard copies of storybooks, publishing advice, etc.
- Finally, they have behind them the experience of Saide’s ongoing fund-raising expertise and their networks.

### *The ASb initiative is “operationalizing” its ideas*

- In 2016 they began showing signs that **public systems** and partners were beginning to ‘buy’ into the idea of OER, and integrating the idea into their systems. Their OER ideas are being operationalized in a number of places, and on the verge of being operationalized elsewhere and integrated into state policies.
- Their ideas are being **taken up by influential global policy groups**, like the Global Book Alliance, which make it more likely that their ideas will take on a concrete form and be taken seriously by African governments. While difficult, ASb are having success in turning the attractiveness of free books into an appreciation of its core idea, namely the power of an open publishing model.
- They have also researched what levels of support are optimal for **‘take-off’ in pilot sites**, and moved towards larger and more strategically located implementation hubs. The pilot sites were minimally supported with subsidy, devices, as well as technical and some pedagogic input. Their reach was small but learning was big:
  - Began making breakthroughs with school system-wide implementation, and consequently large-scale use of their Storybooks
  - Received large orders of printing from education departments, which potentially provide ASb with an income stream
  - Began exploring the extent and potential of independent and spontaneous use.

- They are also moving ‘hubs’ – again strategically – into **new countries**.
- ASb have a strong **network of “implementing” partners** who are committed to continuing its work, sometimes simply because it is mutually beneficial (as with the online distributors and educational NGOs who need materials) and because they have a passion for mother tongue literature, or developing literacy in marginalized communities.
- And, of course, **their website** is a permanent repository of books that anyone can use, and a platform that anyone can use to develop new books. It will continue to be a repository of stories in often small African languages, and has the capacity to continue to grow without ASb’s assistance (although this will impact quality).

Operationalization is, however, nascent and fragile. While governments are unlikely to ever fund ASb’s core costs, a long-term sustainable project requires persuading governments increasingly recognize – in policy – the power of ASb’s open publishing model, and pay the market price for the services ASb provide.

### *The ASb initiative has built sustaining partnerships*

These include “higher-order” ways of working together (such as jointly conceived and funded projects), long-term rather than one-off collaborations, and collaborations that are “not initiative-driven” (in other words, are wider and deeper than the ASb):

- ASb have committed to jointly conceived and funded projects in their new strategy. But many already are in the sense that costs are shared (sometimes in kind rather than cash), and goals are mutually agreeable.
- Most partnerships, especially systemic partnerships but also with quasi-systemic partners like iMlango, are conceived of as long-term relationships.
- ASb have skillfully exploited Saide’s networks, and the networks of ‘friends’, to build relationships that go deeper than simply executing this initiative. In other instances, it is shared commitment to an ideal, like OER, that enables ASb to partner with organisations like Neil Butcher and Associates (who develop their website analytics) , the Commonwealth of Learning, or OLE Ghana.
- One issue to explore is that some partnerships, even where they seem to be strong, publicizing the partnership is uni-directional: ASb publicizes the partner, but the partner does not provide much publicity for ASb.

These structured and spontaneous relationships with individuals and organisations ‘contribute in terms of story and website use, research/documentation, and innovation’. But to make this sustainable they are also working to make sure users can access and use the stories and website with ‘minimal or no support from the ASb team’.

The revision of the website is key to achieving this. Currently there is a draft guide to making and using stories which is downloadable from the website. A technical guide to using the website is in process because the new website is not final yet. According to ASb they are currently producing two more guides: “one for the website processes to read, create, translate, adapt; and a second, to inform the pedagogical process of creating adapting translating and using African Storybooks”. (Tessa Welch, email correspondence, January 2017).

### *ASb ideas are being “codified” in policy or practice*

Examples of this include governments’ etching the idea into their policy, procedures, and legislation; or strong support/demand from the public or policymakers, etc. for the initiative’s outcomes; or continued involvement/commitment of people over time.

- There is certainly increasing support for ASb’s ideas from a growing body of people. This is clear in website numbers and the level of website engagement, from self-initiated pilot site actions, from expansion into new countries, and from the growth in spontaneous use of ASb.
- On more important measures – policy or policymaker support - there are the beginning signs of both: Global think tanks are drawing on and giving credit to ASb’s ideas, and state actors are increasingly calling ASb in to advise them on the use of OER within education systems.

ASb’s post-implementation operation and maintenance strategy is in place, both in terms of achieving some of the essential components during the first four years but also by developing a clear expansion strategy. This strategy lays out a clear process for sustainable expansion:

- Design an intervention in which people who form your target audience are prepared to ‘invest’;
- Test it in a representative set of sites;
- Learn from experience which are the best sites and what represents good practice;
- Based on what they do well, encourage the best site/s to become a ‘hub’ for the district/country;
- Support them through simultaneous engagement at county level and advocacy at national level.

They sum this up as “Let the local lead”<sup>205</sup>.

But the components which have begun to be set in place need to be consolidated too. In particular, will executing agencies – governments and NGOs – who like the project and the OER idea (although still not understood fully), support of the project through more permanent and sustainable institutional arrangements? The signs are good, but as ASb have found with the signing of the MoUs, there is a large gap between agreement and signature.

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<sup>205</sup> *Presentation to E-Learning Africa, Digital storytelling for early readings in marginalised African communities - The African Storybook experience in Kenya, 2016*

# Appendix A: Documentation consulted

## EVALUATION REPORTS

- Case Study Reports:
  - African Storybook’s Systemic Implementation through Libraries: A Case Study of Saulsville Community Library, Tshwane, October 2016, Hilary Janks.
  - Systemic implementation through Teacher Education: The case of Siyabuswa education campus, Mpumalanga University, October 2016, Ken Harley.
  - Extension of pilot site work into broader systemic implementation: the Lolupe hub, October 2016, Ken Harley.
  - Publishing services for large-scale printing and distribution, October 2016, Ken Harley.
  - Review of ASb support materials for independent story creation, translation and use, October 2016, Hilary Janks.
- Concluding Overview of Six Case Studies (*Draft report*) October 2016 (followed by a Skype conference led by authors, Ken Karley and Hilary Janks, December 2016).
- Mid-term Review of the African Storybook Project, May 2015, Hilary Janks and Ken Harley.

## REPORTS TO COMIC RELIEF

- Grant start-up Report – International special initiative: February 2013 (Revised, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013).
- Project Plan, African Storybook Project, November 2012 – December 2016 (29 November 2013).
- Annual reports to Comic Relief (narrative and data): 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 (usually dated February of the following year).
- Comic Relief ASP revised Annual Data Form 27 April 2016.
- Feedback for SAIDE Year 3 report JG summary 27 April 2016.

## WEBSITE ANALYTICS

- Monthly statistics report: June 2014 to December 2016, Neil Butcher and Associates, powerpoint and excel sheets.
- Resource Monthly Downloads: 2015 and 2016.

## INTERNAL ASB DOCUMENTS

- ASb High Level Objectives: 1 Jan 2017 to 30 September 2017 (undated)
- ASb: Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Undated, but developed in 2016.
- Baseline study, 2013
- Building the sustainability of the African Storybook Initiative, Vis Naidoo, 2016.

- Checkpoint notes
  - Notes for month ending 11<sup>th</sup> November 2016
  - Notes 16 September 2016
- Collective impact and partner engagement: ASb as case study, 2016
- Funder feedback – Web analytics. The document is undated but seems like a reflection on Comic Relief feedback to an annual data report.
- iMlango – Content Partners Report – March 2016 and November 2016
- Learnings papers
  - Learnings Plan: 30 April 2013
  - Reflection on 2013 Learnings Framework, 2016
  - Learnings Papers TW Version 2 19 12 2016 Itg
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  - Proposal to streamline the proofs of concept answers to the learnings questions. Undated.
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- New country developments: Three internal ASb reports on Ethiopia, Ghana and Rwanda, 2016
- Notes towards an overall strategy beyond 2017 (undated)Prince2: Project Management Review Meeting (Revised, undated)
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  - Report of visit to Kabubbu Pilot site 22 July 2016
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## PRESENTATIONS, CONFERENCE PAPERS, PUBLICATIONS

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- Design for Interaction. Paper presented at the NADEOSA conference in Johannesburg, Alan Amory & Tessa Welch, 2016
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- Open Licensing and the African Storybook Project, Lorato\_Trok, Jenny Louw, Tessa Welch. 2015
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- Submission for State of the Commons report, October 2016
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- Using a digital multilingual story publishing model in enhancing reading skills and attitudes in a developing context: The case of Kenya. Paper presented at the African Language and Literatures conference at Kenyatta University, Ephraim Mhlanga, Dorcas Wepukhulu & A Mote, August 2013.
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- Using OER to Address a Fundamental Educational Challenge, Presentation to to the Pan Commonwealth Forum in Malaysia, Jenny Glennie and Tessa Welch, 2016

## E-MAIL CORRESPONDENCE

- Tessa Welch, November, December, January, February 2017
- Simon Kaniu (iMlango General Manager), January 2017

## NON-ASB DOCUMENTS

- DAC Principles for the Evaluation of Development Assistance, OECD, 1991 accessed on 13 September 2016 at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dacriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>
- Embracing emergence: How collective impact addresses complexity by John Kania and Mark Kramer, Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2013
- Evaluation's Role in Supporting Initiative Sustainability by Heather Weiss, Julia Coffman, and Marielle Bohan-Baker (of the Harvard Family Research Project, 2002)
- Global Book Fund Feasibility Study – Final Report, April 2016. Accessed at [http://www.r4d.org/sites/resultsfordevelopment.org/files/resources/R4D-IEP\\_GBF\\_Full%20Report\\_%20web.pdf](http://www.r4d.org/sites/resultsfordevelopment.org/files/resources/R4D-IEP_GBF_Full%20Report_%20web.pdf)
- How to read your Google analytics at <http://pnmg.com/read-google-analytics/> accessed on February 7, 2017.
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- Planning for and monitoring of project sustainability: a guideline on concepts, issues and tools by M. Adil Khan, (a UNDP evaluation advisor), 2000) <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/khan.htm>
- Seven website metrics that matter the most at <https://www.spinutech.com/blog/digital-marketing/7-website-analytics-that-matter-most/>, accessed on February 12, 2017.
- State of the Commons, from Creative Commons website, <https://stateof.creativecommons.org/2015/>, accessed on the 20 February 2017



## Appendix B: Interviews & observations

**26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> September 2016 Interviews with ASb and Saide staff**

### **SOUTH AFRICA**

- Jenny Glennie & Tessa Welch: Funding, strategy, and governance focus
- Jenny Louw & Tessa Welch: Project management and knowledge management
- Alan Amory: Website and learning design
- Lorato Trok: Overview of SA partners

#### **Other interviews**

- Monge Tlaka at Neil Butcher and Associates: Web analytics

#### **Observation & visit**

- Saulsville library (a pilot site)
- ASb story-writing prize-giving ceremony in Atteridgeville

**29<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 Visit Oloosirkon Primary School, Kajiado district, Kenya**

### **KENYA**

- Interview two CODE facilitators – Soila Murianka and Moses Tiiyia Nkaiseyie - and four teachers (Paul Maseri – Head, Alice Wapolondo - Librarian, Helen and Tsomi – both teachers.)

#### **Visit Kibera Public Library, Nairobi**

- Observe an hour-long session of teaching with about 70 pupils, using projected ASb stories
- Interview Mary Kinyanjui, Kibera chief librarian
- Interview two private community school teachers (Josephit Nalwenje and Judy Mtulah) from Kibera who regularly use the ASb storybook sessions for their pupils

#### **Visit iMLango offices, Nairobi**

- Interview fieldworker, Regina N, and general manager, Simon Kanui
- Speak informally with iMLango staff

#### **Visit Kibiko School, Ngong (a iMLango partnership school)**

- Observe a 45-minute ASb storybook lesson with about 40 pupils
- Observe about 20 pupils reading ASb storybooks on computers
- Interview school head, Mrs Josephine

#### **Other interviews in Kenya**

- Interview Ruth Odondi – CEO, National Book Development Council of Kenya

- Interview Dorcas Wepukhulu (ASb country co-ordinator, Kenya)
- Telephone interview with John Ngasike (Mt Kenya University and Turkana County pilot site)
- Telephone interview with Adelaide Bwire (Lecturer, Kenyatta University)

**3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> October 2016**  
**UGANDA**

#### **Visit community library at Busolwe**

- Interview Lunyole Language Association (Joel Mugoya, Charles Mubbalya, Beatrice Nabune, Christopher Bukheye, and Hirome Gershom)
- Interview Rose Alungho, Busolwe community librarian
- Interview Tuluta widow's group, Busolwe (interpreted by Charles Mubbalya)

#### **Visit Bubaali Primary**

- Observe two 30-minute ASb storybook lessons with about 60 pupils in each class
- Interview four Bubaali teachers (Olive Namisi, Aisha Thabingya, Monica Tulina and Wasike Hiire)

#### **Visit Mugulu Integrated School**

- Observe two lessons with about 50 pupils in one and close to 100 in another
- Interview 7 teachers: Mick Muhwana - Head (received a formal spoken and written report), Beatrice Nabune – the teacher observed, Mika, Deborah, Grace, Aramazan and Adah.

#### **Travel to Tororo, West Budamaa**

- Interview Ogot Owino, Pan education Net
- Conversation with the Chief District Inspector of the school district
- Observe two hour-long ASb storybook lessons – using A3 laminated books - with about 100 pupils in each class at St Benedicts Korobudi Primary
- Interview with Head and teachers (Jessica Achieng – Head, and Gertrude Athieno and Catherine Akumu – the observed teachers)

#### **Travel to Kabubbu library and school (22 km north of Kampala)**

- Interview Kabubbu teachers (Annet Sebaggala, John Emongot, Ritah Katetemera and Milly Kacuta)
- Visit library

#### **Other interviews in Uganda**

**9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> October 2016**  
**SOUTH AFRICA**

- Interview Juliet Tembe (Uganda country co-ordinator)

**Visit Family Literacy Project and two community libraries in Underberg area**

- Interview Pierre Horn, FLP director
- Observe small group of children being told stories using ASb storybook at a community library in Ndodeni
- Interview Zimbili Dlamini (FLP Coordinator)
- Interview library assistants, Zwakalile Dlamini and Bonisiwe Nzimande (Zimbili Dlamini interpreted)

**Interview Saide and ASb staff**

- Lisa Treffry-Goatley: Story publishing issues
- Ephraim Mhlanga: Learnings questions, and learnings papers
- Fatima Rahiman: ASb's M&E framework and beneficiaries table.
- Najma Agherdien: Collective impact research

**Other interviews in South Africa**

- Interview Ken Harley (mid-term and case study evaluator)
- Interview Sheila Drew (ASb site co-ordinator)
- Telephone interview with Pumla Mdontswa and Keitumetse Modiba of the Department of Basic Education
- Telephone interview with Hilary Janks (external evaluator)
- Telephone interview with Judith Baker (Literacy Advisor, based in Boston)