The Importance of First-language Children's Book Publishing: Utilizing the African Storybook Initiative

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Abstract

Research has shown that children who master the fundamentals of their mother tongue fare better in the development of other languages, especially those common languages necessary for primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Unfortunately, in many cases, there are few books available for young children in their mother tongue. The authors will present their shared and separate experiences in promoting children's book publishing, including their work together with African Storybook (ASb). ASb is a unique platform that allows original materials to be published and then further translated into any other African language as well as English, French, and Portuguese, using a Creative Commons license and attribution to the source material. Individual books can be read online, printed, or downloaded to a device such as a phone or computer, expanding the availability to those who may not have access to the internet, printers, and computers, as the case may be. Further, the authors will describe how these books were utilized in school and community libraries and embraced by librarians and children alike.

Introduction

About the African Storybook

UNESCO's 2015 *Educational for All Global Monitoring Report* notes that despite attending up to four years of primary school, 130 million children globally still did not achieve the minimum benchmarks in literacy and numeracy. The USAID-funded *Global Book Fund Feasibility Study 2016* reports that a significant contributing factor to this crisis is the lack of reading material available in languages familiar to children (2016). The African Storybook, ASb, which started in 2013, is a literacy initiative of the South African Institute for Distance Education, Saide, a not-for profit organization whose headquarters are in Johannesburg, South Africa. Saide, whose overarching aim: *Enabling successful open learning for all,* works across Sub-Saharan Africa. The ASb addresses the severe dearth of local language literacy resources for children through the development of openly-licensed literacy materials. The ASb's publishing model has proved to be a powerful digital innovation that provides open access to over 5000 locally created children's picture storybooks and to more than 170 of the languages spoken in Africa. Storybooks are available at https://www.africanstorybook.org/One of ASb expected outcomes is that: *There is growing support for the use of open licence digital publishing to address early literacy challenges in sub-Saharan Africa.* Technology and an open licence, offer communities, individuals and other literacy organisations, the opportunity to download, copy, adapt or translate books in the languages they need them for free to use with diverse audiences according to their needs without the need to ask permission. The only requirement is that when users adapt, translate or copy/print the books for use, they acknowledge writers, illustrators, translators of the books and the people who hold copyright. And they must also acknowledge the source of the storybooks, i.e. African Storybook.

Users can also create their own books and use them immediately by uploading own pictures, using open source images or by selecting from the website. One can also print books straight from the website and distribute them as A5 booklets. There is also the ASb Reader App that is freely downloadable from Google Play or the iStore. Between 2014 and 2017, ASb reached 43 820 educators and 940 226 children, and in 2018, over 40 000 storybooks were downloaded by users per month.

When it started in 2013, the ASb was piloted in Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and Lesotho. Pilot sites comprised of public primary schools as well as community libraries. The impact was so remarkable that since 2017, it has expanded to Ethiopia, Rwanda, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Namibia. ASb books are also used independent of Saide's direct support in Niger, Ghana, Congo, and Zambia as well as by communities in diaspora who wish their children to learn to speak their African languages as well as read in them.

Quality of reading resources is extremely important for purposes of accountability and use. On the ASb website, there are three categories of storybooks: community storybooks (not checked); ASb approved storybooks (either published by the African Storybook office, or checked by a second translator); and government approved or quality assured (checked by government officials in a particular country for use in that country).

Literature review

Librarians and educators alike understand the importance of literacy. After all, it was achieving literacy that enabled them to be what they are today. The paths to literacy took many twists and turns, peaks and valleys; it was not necessarily a straight, smooth trail. Some were fortunate to have books at home and parents that read and encouraged reading. Others may have had a library in their school and a trained librarian who inspired them to reach for the stars. Still others may have been fortunate to be within easy reach of a public or community library with books and a myriad of programs. A few may have had access to a bookstore that sold both new and used books. Churches and mosques instructed young scholars using holy texts. Elders may have told stories under great community trees because literacy comes in many forms.

General literacy: Language and brain development

Dana Suskind, a pediatric cochlear implant surgeon, was concerned about the differences between literacy skills with the hearing and deaf communities and discovered a study by Betty Hart and Todd Risley, child psychologists at the University of Kansas, who studied the exposure to words and found that children from more affluent families were exposed to more words than the children from less affluent families. In one hour, the highest SES (socioeconomic status) heard an average of two thousand words, while children of welfare families heard about six hundred. Differences in parental responses to children were also striking. Highest SES parents responded to their children about 250 times per hour; lowest SES parents responded to their children fewer than 50 times in the same period. The most significant and most concerning difference? Verbal approval. Children in the highest SES heard about forty expressions of verbal approval per hour. Children in welfare homes, about four. The importance of the study's findings is that the greatest impact on language, school performance, and IQ was not economic…but was the difference in early language exposure (Suskind 34).

Multi-lingual abilities

Suskind also addresses language and brain development exploring the pros of speaking more than one language and found that children who speak a second language have enhanced self-regulation and executive function. (Suskind 120). Further, studies found that being bilingual indicated both a verbal and a non-verbal advantage over those who spoke only one language and rather than having to search for the right language at the right time, those who are bilingual always have both languages at hand, their brains constantly monitoring which one to use (Suskind 121). Researchers believe that the bilingual brain is always ready to be active in both languages….the bilingual brain is continuously monitoring the appropriate response to input (Suskind 121). Suskind further explains, that while being bilingual may mean that early vocabulary size in both languages will be somewhat smaller, it is offset by the fact that the child is learning two languages, each of which, as the child gets older, can be enhanced (Suskind 121).

Asselin and Doiron note that research has established that learning to read is most successful with mother tongue texts. Having access to relevant, mother tongue reading resources is critical to reading development and the library's efforts to build a reading culture. There is a growing awareness of the importance of the production of indigenous language and knowledge/content materials, which in turn promotes the transition to a written culture by supporting new local authors, illustrators and publishers (Asselin 11) Thus there is a shift toward supporting local publishing such as African Storybook (http://africanstorybook.org) and Midako Publishing (http://midakobooks.com). Midako Publishing has developed a series of decodable books that uses phonetics rather than strict memorization of the Amharic (Ethiopian) language. For this it won the African Union's All African Public Sector Innovation Award in 2018 (Facebook graphic).

Kathy Escamilla concurs and suggests transitions in bilingual and dual language programs should emphasize transitions to biliteracy rather than the more typical transitions to English or the dominant language. Unfortunately, there are few such programs in the world and educators are ill-prepared to teach in this manner (Escamilla vii).

Academics Elizabeth Grassi and Heidi Barker advise in their instruction to educators that both dual language and bilingual maintenance programs have been proven effective (Grassi 15) and that the use of students' native language for content instruction increases measures of students' academic achievement. The strongest indicator of academic achievement in the second language is the amount of formal instruction in the first language. Furthermore, they teach that academic skills, in particular literacy skills, learned in the first language can directly transfer to the learning of academic skills in the second language; when students have a strong base in their first language, they can acquire higher levels of proficiency in their second language (Grassi 67).

Grace Bunyi, Nairobi, Kenya, has provided an excellent historical perspective of the place of African indigenous languages in African education. Although primarily focusing on Kenya and Kenyan languages, it can be generalized to most other African countries, and particularly to those that were formerly under British colonial rule. As a multilingual country, Kenya provided non-school education prior to the arrival of the British in local languages. Even upon the arrival of western missionaries, students were taught in indigenous languages because it suited the needs of the missionaries to proselytise. Initially, first language instruction also served the early settlers well because it suited their need for cheap manual labour. Later the colonial government expanded the teaching of English as a way of passing on its values and standards to the incoming African elite (Bunyi 341). As of the writing of this article, local languages were the media of instruction from Standard 1 to 3 in most schools although there are few to no textbooks in the local languages (p 342). Despite the drawbacks of costs, local language development, perceived loss of development in western languages such as English, Bunyi advocates that indigenous Kenyan languages should be given a more central role in the education of Kenyan children.

In nearby Uganda, Juliet Tembe and Bonny Norton echo a similar theme. They advocate for the promotion of the use of mother-tongue education in the years of schooling, acknowledging that knowledge and skills gained in the mother tongue can transfer across languages and that multilingual children perform well at school when the school teaches the mother tongue effectively. In fact, they found the level of proficiency in the first language has a direct influence on the development of proficiency in the second language (Tembe 34). However, they acknowledge that there are many detractors to the use of mother tongue, which is why it is important to involve the community and parents in the process (pg. 37). This is especially important in the rural areas where the schools are more likely to be under-resourced. They also advocate for consistency in all aspects of language instruction, including testing in the language of instruction rather than in English or a language of wider communication (Tembe 47).

African Storybook collaborative strategy

Saide adopted a collaborative strategy to implement the ASb with the aim of building the capacities of partners to independently use and contribute to the website. This approach also enables Saide to achieve its objective of building the capacities of various communities to choose the kinds of stories they want to write and use in the languages they know and to take responsibility for the quality of those stories. The approach fundamentally puts the publishing tools into the hands of communities and educators and gives them the power to respond to their own literacy needs. This strategy also facilitates collection of data on use and provides feedback from users.

In Kenya, ASb actively partners with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, KICD, Kenya National Library Services, Kibera branch and the Mathare Youth Sports Association libraries, eKitabu, Kytabu and iMlango. ASb also partners with Turkana, a county whose indigenous population comprise of nomadic pastoralists who are most in need of stories that give voice to their lifestyle, aspirations and survival instincts and which are better expressed in their own language, Ng'aturkana.

In Ethiopia, ASb partners with Ras Abebe Library and Book Store, one of its kind in the Amhara region founded and managed by Mezemir Girma, a lecturer at Debre Birhan University. Located 130 kilometres north of Addis Ababa, the library acts as a centre for outreach for the schools around.

ASb also partners with Uganda Community Libraries Association, UgCLA, through which local language storybooks are generated, translated and used. ASb encourages educators and other literacy promotors to link creating, translating and adapting storybooks to practical use of them with children. Of what use is having beautifully illustrated storybooks siting on shelves or on a device if nobody enjoys reading them? And what good is it pontificating about the importance of children reading if there are no enjoyable storybooks in children's familiar languages for them to read. For this reason, Dr Cornelius Wambi Gulere of Uganda Christian University, UCU, mobilizes and stimulates language lecturers and students at the university, representatives of UgCLA, parents and children to create, translate, read and talk about their storybooks.

On a more global level, ASb collaborates with the Global Digital Library, GDL, which was launched in Addis Ababa in April 2018. As part of the Global Book Alliance, GBA, the GDL "is working to provide children everywhere with the books and learning materials they need to learn to read and read to learn." It "is collecting existing, high-quality, open educational reading resources, and making them available on digital platforms" so they can be accessed online and in print format with the long term goal of facilitating translation and localization of these resources to more than 300 languages. During the launch, the GDL platform had resources in 15 languages, seven of which were Ethiopian. The ASb was one of its main sources contributing 85 storybooks in Amharic, Afaan Oromo and Tigrigna. The GDL is working with another digital platform, Kolibri, (https://learningequality.org/kolibri/) to avail all stories on its site offline.

Another global partner is Global Storybooks (https://globalstorybooks.net/), which has taken 40 storybooks from the ASb site, and created country-specific sites. For example, Storybooks Rwanda, Storybooks Kenya, Storybooks Tanzania, Storybooks South Africa, etc. These specific sites help to make the larger ASb site more visible therefore making it easier for educators (teachers/librarians) to use the storybooks more effectively. Also, all storybooks in the local languages used in those particular countries are available with space for accompanying videos and audio. The benefits of these sites is that there is easy swapping between the languages at a page level, so there can be language learning across the languages. These sites host storybooks that have been quality assured or approved by departments of education in those countries. Any storybooks developed in partnership with a partner for literacy purposes in that country, would also be found as a collection on these sites. In this way, what ASb does not have the capacity and resources to accomplish, other partners take it forward.

This makes the work of governments in countries easier where use of home language in early grades is a major policy on language in education. ASb provides a digital library with ready content and tools to use to generate more books according to their needs. It also offers a wonderful opportunity for countries that are embracing technology in education. It is a platform that teacher education institutions can make use of to build the capacity of pre-service as well as in-service teachers in the use of technology as a tool for teaching and learning. It would also give teachers an opportunity to participate in writing local language children's literature and to learn to teach literacy in local languages. Whereas efforts to involve teacher training institutions in other countries has not been very successful, UCU is working towards successfully making ASb part of the institution's curriculum. They believe that, "It will not be a one off project but a programme that will hopefully continue through the Creative Writing Course which is one of the popular courses at UCU. We are also proposing to revise the syllabus to include translation studies in the course."

ASb open licence digital publishing model: story creation, translation and adaptation
To achieve a critical mass of storybooks and in the many languages of Africa, ASb invests in creating unique stories as well as in translations and adaptations. By the end of 2018, ASb was gradually realising its outcome of growing recognition of and support for the use of open licence digital publishing in answer to early literacy needs in sub-Saharan Africa. There was a regular stream of quality storybooks from other literacy organisations and from story development workshops (re) published on the ASb website. This further promotes the ideals of OERs and allows more African children to access storybooks in the languages they are most familiar with. Two types of these storybooks (re)published on ASb website are grouped as storybooks published from East Africa and storybooks published from West Africa.

Storybooks published from East Africa
Abebech, the female bajaj driver: (www.africanstorybook.org/reader.php?id=23862&d=0&a=1) is a storybook that challenges popular cultural belief about gender and work. The text was developed in Amharic at a one-day workshop at Ras Abebe Library and Bookstore, Debre Birhan, Ethiopia, owned and operated by Mezemir Girma, with the support of Janet Lee, a Fulbright Scholar from Regis University, USA.

Fifteen educators, librarians, and students participated in a full agenda that included the role of children's books in literacy training, an introduction of African Storybook, a session on assessing ASb stories in Amharic and in English (what makes them good, how can they be improved), an overview of children's reading in libraries in Debre Birhan, a story telling exercise, the use of technology in promoting children's stories, and a brainstorming session that would develop into a publishable book. During the brainstorming session, the group broke up into teams or worked individually. The only charge was to write about a female bajaj driver, something that was relatively unique to Debre Birhan. Several stories were written and a vote on the best story taken. Out of this came "Abebech, the female bajaj driver."

Customary tea breaks and lunch gave the participants an opportunity to network. At the end of the day, Mezemir distributed a flash drive complete with all of the downloadable Amharic storybooks that were available on the ASb platform.

Later, Ms Lee engaged a local artist to draw pictures for it after which it was donated to ASb. Funding was provided by a small grant from the Colorado (US) Association of Libraries International Library and Cultural Exchange Interest Group. The story can be read in two Ethiopian languages, namely, Amharic, Tigrigna as well as in Kiswahili.

In two other workshops held in Ethiopia, six more storybooks were created and published on the ASb website in Amharic, Afaan Oromo and Tigrigna. Two of them were also published in Wolaitic, the first in that language to be published on the website. Some of the storybooks are about schooling and

possible opportunities that come with successful completion of the process. Others are about the use of common sense and family obligations.

With the support of Dr Gulere of UCU, students from the university and from Kyambogo University, Uganda, used the ASb website to create and translate hundreds of storybooks into several Ugandan languages such as Lusoga, Luganda, Rukiga, Runyankore, Rutooro and Runyoro.

Storybooks published from West Africa
The *Story Making West Africa,* as it was called, was held jointly by ASb and the British Council, Nigeria in March 2018. It brought together writers comprising of people working with children, schools and universities and artists all drawn from Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone. The participants represented 11 West African languages. The British Council hoped that the workshop would be a pilot of promoting education and language policy in education with the key question being: *How do we get more reading materials into the public domain, so we can be seen to be providing materials for Mother-tongue-based multilingual education?* This then would form part of the ongoing dialogue on language policy.

That workshop was a great success. The goal of the workshop was to get at least 15 publishable stories but in the end, all 20 manuscripts were published on the ASb website in 11 West African languages as well as in English and French. Some have already been translated and adapted into other languages such as Kiswahili and Lusoga.

From this workshop there emerged two champions in Nigeria who are flying the flag and advocating for literacy in languages spoken in West Africa. They have continued to use the ASb website to publish unique stories, translate and or adapt. One of them has lined up a number of manuscripts that she and her family plan to publish following their first story, *Time* (www.africanstorybook.org/reader.php?id=31995&d=0&a=1) originally written in Tiv, a Nigerian language.

The ASb website offers educators a chance to translate and adapt storybooks with specific use in mind. One of the West African ASb champions adapted *A Tiny seed: The story of Wanderimam Danasbe* from the original *A Tiny Seed: the story of Wangari Maathai,* to use it to advocate for environmental conservation. He has also translated and adapted and quality assured stories in Tiv language to make the stories more relevant to the Tiv speakers and to promote the language and encourage literacy in it.

Story development and publishing
   a) **Storybooks by adults**
The ASb is concerned about providing multilingual, context-appropriate children's storybooks on which children can practice reading and love to read. In this regard, diversity, quantity, accessibility and effective use of these storybooks matter.

As already mentioned, the ASb gets it stories through organised workshops with participants comprising of teachers, university students and school children as well as library users, literacy organisations and individuals who support open licensing publishing. Between 2016 and 2018, the ASb held over 10 workshops on story creation in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda. During the workshops, writers are guided to respond to the key question*: what kinds of stories do children enjoy?* Before participants develop their own stories, they are encouraged to read some storybooks to get them to ask themselves what makes a good story for children. They are asked to think about these questions: *What are the ages and interests of the children? Must a story have a moral lesson? Do we want to teach particular values in the stories we write for children? Does a story have to have a beginning, middle and end? What is the role of illustrations in a story for children?*

Facilitators emphasise that pictures are a very important part of any storybook. As writers develop their stories, they are encouraged to think of how the characters, the activities and the emotions in their stories could be shown in pictures. Where possible, the ASb invites artists to participate in the workshop to foster communication between the writer, the ASb publisher and artist during the publishing process.

There are different ways of developing stories. In a workshop setting, participants work in pairs, in language groups or even as individuals. They are also urged to develop their story idea in the language they are most comfortable in. Some participants have found the use of drama and role-play helpful. This method encourages them to imagine the characters in the story and it is often easier to work from a story that is oral before writing it down. Other ideas include developing stories from childhood experiences; developing stories from pictures; and developing stories that relate to most primary school curricula based on themes such as a child's life, health, family, games, environment and school. Other ideas include reconstructing community stories such as folktales and using connected and unconnected words to come up with funny and interesting stories.

With the above ideas, participants write the first draft of their story, which they read out to the rest for feedback and improvement. They also get feedback from the facilitators. At that stage, writers think about the theme of their story, the characters, what happens in the story, where, why and how it happens. Feedback helps writers to move from the first draft to the next stage which is turning the story to a storybook with pages. Generally, the ASb storybooks are 8, 12, 16, 20 or 24 pages. The page numbers must be a multiple of four to make printing easier. The writers also think of the reading level. On the ASb website there are five levels of storybooks. Each level has a character and word limit. Also, the size of the letters (font) is largest for Level 1 and Level 2, and smaller for the higher levels. The website sets the size of the letters when one selects the level of the story they are publishing.

The story writing process, therefore, includes

    i.   Developing a story idea and writing the story based on that idea;
   ii.   Reading out loud to get feedback and to make changes;
  iii.   Deciding on the level of the story and dividing it into pages;
  iv.   Editing the story and checking the number of words per page;
   v.   Reading it aloud again to get more feedback; and
  vi.   Typing the final version of the story and writing some ideas of the pictures for each page, if the writer wishes to do so.

Each story manuscript is prepared in two languages, a local language and English. Artists are commissioned to illustrate the stories using the English versions and once the artwork is ready, the storybooks are published in the two languages using the same set of pictures.

b) Storybooks by children

ASb strives to include in the storybook development, children who are the target users. Children are encouraged to write their stories in the language they feel most confident in. Children's own stories are captured and improved so they can be read by other children. There have been examples of story development workshops for children in Ethiopia, Kenya and South Africa. In Ethiopia, such workshops yielded stories in Amharic such as

Petros and his dog www.africanstorybook.org/reader.php?id=20444&d=0&a=false

Abel and his sister's doll www.africanstorybook.org/reader.php?id=21583&d=0&a=false

Shepherd and his best friend www.africanstorybook.org/reader.php?id=20444&d=0&a=false

In Kenya, children who use the Kenya National Library Services, Kibera, participated in writing and produced some stories that are among the most liked at the library. They include

Kidnapped www.africanstorybook.org/reader.php?id=15934&d=0&a=false

Cunning Madola www.africanstorybook.org/reader.php?id=19586&d=0&a=false

Sofia escapes www.africanstorybook.org/reader.php?id=19587&d=0&a=1

During the story writing competition dubbed 'Writing in your mother tongue' held at the Saulsville Library, South Africa, children participated in creating their own stories in their home languages. One of the winning stories is

My friend, my enemy www.africanstorybook.org/reader.php?id=21785&d=0&a=false

Story translation and adaptation
There are three main ways in which storybooks are translated into other languages. Based on a specific need, ASb commissions consultants to translate a selection of stories from English quality assured and ASb-approved versions. Usually, there is a second local language expert who would be consulted to carry out the quality assurance and submit a brief report of the issues they came across. This helps to know who to keep in the ASb database for future consultation. This process is best done on the website, particularly, for languages that have special characters and fonts. The website also guides translators to keep within the story levels in terms of word and character count.

Experience shows that most translators do light adaptations as well when they translate stories. Often times, they adapt names, titles and activities depending on the images in the original story. The adaptation could also be in terms of changing the level of the story from a higher one to a lower one or vice versa. Sometimes, one adapts a story by including questions at the end of the story to stimulate a classroom discussion. Adaptation can also include changing the storybook into a Math story to help incorporate some form of simple Maths concepts in literacy.

The second way is through partner organisations that might want storybooks in a particular language and so they invest in the translation and quality assurance work.

The third way is by individuals who want storybooks in their own language and so they independently translate on the website. ASb monitors and encourages independent contributors and acknowledges their efforts by quality assuring the storybooks.

Quality assurance process
The quality of the ASb books is considered central and contributes to quality reading, consistent advocacy and acceptability by communities that invest themselves in using them. As such, it is taken very seriously. There are several layers built into the quality assurance process by ASb and its partners. For local language storybooks, ASb depends on its partners and literacy champions as well as local language experts to oversee the quality of stories in the various languages. This is done during story development or at the translation stage.

Dr Gulere says, "The issue of quality translation is paramount and along with this is acceptability of the books by the targeted community. If the little known student translator is backed by an experienced writer, translator and Course Instructor and a University with a big local following with a track record interest in local languages, the readership or audience will receive the books as home grown."

At UCU, the students translate storybooks into their local languages. Language lecturers quality assure them and where there are no lecturers who can do that in a language, students peer review each other's translations to ensure quality. It takes a committed champion in a learning institution to link story development to the teaching and learning process in through designing a class assignment that fits that process. Dr Gulere is one such champion. He says,

> The students made print outs of their stories. Gave them to native language users mostly in the University community. Got feedback mostly on grammar. The student brought the work to me for check-up before entering the suggested changes. The student then notifies me after entering the changes. I check and award marks. This applies only to the stories done by UCU student.

To give this wonderful process recognition, legitimacy, and assert the authenticity of the books, Dr Gulere says there is

> The need to have my name and UCU name and logo on the books which serves on one hand to authenticate the students' course work and on the other give confidence to the local readership that might get sceptical about books written and published outside their communities.

Overall, ASb books are checked for language that encompasses both text and illustrations. ASb endeavours to use inclusive language that is suitable for the target level. For books that are developed in a particular community or context, ASb also tries to ensure they are culturally appropriate. To ensure the quality of visual format, illustrators are commissioned who follow international standards of doing artwork for children guaranteeing that pictures are relevant for the text. Appropriate content is very important. We ensure that titles are a good mix of entertaining and engaging content for children, fair racial and gender representation, and unbiased gender roles – through both text and illustrations. Content celebrating people with disabilities is also included.

Options for accessing and using storybook books
There are three major options to access and use the ASb storybooks. Libraries, schools and teachers can go directly to the ASb website and access online. If schools have tablet programmes, the ASb Reader will be useful to them. The App is updated regularly as new ASb approved content becomes available.

There is also the online delivery (mediated by departments of education). This provides PDFs of approved content for uploading on the departments' websites, or websites of partner programmes. Schools with computer labs can then download and use this content.

The third option is to print a selection of titles for large scale distribution. The fact that the books are openly licensed brings the cost down dramatically if printed in sufficient quantities

Support for educators - schools and librarians and other literacy organisations
Under *Help and Notes* section of the website, users can find help on how to use the website, its storybooks and tools. One can also request for help and receive it from a member of the ASb team. There are also video guides *on Reading offline, Downloading and printing, and Registering and publishing.* Also available under *Indepth guides* are three documents that are downloadable to save or print for use. They are: *Developing and translating African Storybooks; Preparing to use African Storybooks with children* and *Using African Storybooks with children.*

Feedback from educators
Feedback from users was very positive and encouraging. Suggestions made were incorporated into the planning to make the website and its storybooks more accessible and usable. Reports of how different people used the storybooks were turned into *Stories of use* and made available on the website as a way of sharing good practices. That also helped to showcase what different people were doing that others could learn from and improve their own pedagogical approaches. The story development processes also improved due to the feedback received from participants. It helped to strengthen the quality assurance process.

Conclusions and recommendations
One of the lessons learned is that it is important to have a diverse body of storybooks in languages that children are familiar with and about topics that they can respond to. Language alone is not enough, there is need to be mindful of the content that is suitable for the level of the children. Adaptation helped in this regard so that a storybook that was written in Ethiopia and spoke about *teff,*

could be adapted and speak about wheat for a child in Kenya. Names of traditional children's games that are similar across cultures, can also be adapted in ways that children from different backgrounds can relate to.

We recommend multilingual storybooks for children because they provide a rare opportunity for children to learn to read from one language to another. Where teachers and librarians use these storybooks, they see the effect they have on children's confidence and fluency levels. They ignite children's curiosity and desire to want to read more. Some children see their language in writing for the first time and it boosts their self-esteem.

Open digital licensing has the potential for achieving quantity through sharing of openly licensed images. This offers a chance for communities to develop their own literacy materials and include indigenous knowledge for future generations. We therefore recommend a community approach to the development and use of children's storybooks.

Educators need to participate in writing storybooks for children because they are the ones who deal with their literacy in systematic ways.

Public libraries are special places where communities gather and generate storybooks, use them and encourage the act of sharing. As such, greater investments should be made towards them and communities around them encouraged to use them.

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