

# Saide's African Storybook in 2016



A teacher in West Budama, Uganda, records a story told by a community member

Saide's African Storybook Initiative

P O Box 31822, Braamfontein, 2017

Tel: +27 11 403 2813

Fax: +27 11 403 2814

E-mail: [info@saide.org.za](mailto:info@saide.org.za)

Website: <http://www.saide.org.za>



## **Background to the African Storybook Initiative**

The reading literacy levels of African children after the first three years of schooling are far from adequate, both in providing the basic ability to read, as well as the literacy to proceed to the next level of schooling. It is generally acknowledged that one of the key reasons for these low literacy levels is the shortage of appropriate storybooks for early reading in languages familiar to the young African child. 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. The purpose of the ASb is not only to provide storybooks in the range of languages needed by young African children as they are learning to read. It is also to do so through a publishing model that ensures 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.

Our vision is *Open access to children's picture storybooks in the languages of Africa, for children's literacy, enjoyment and imagination*. Our website provides and encourages the development of levelled storybooks to encourage reading for pleasure and practice. We work with partners in our pilot countries and elsewhere who will use the stories and contribute to the website by creating, translating, adapting and commenting on stories.



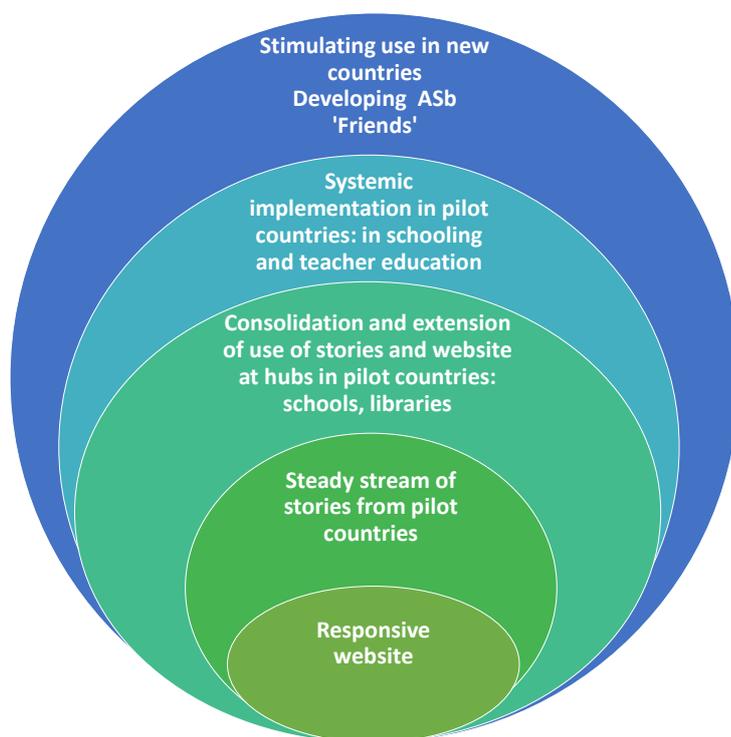
We mourn the loss of our Country Coordinator for Uganda, Dr Juliet Tembe, who died in December 2016.

May her soul rest in peace.

---

## Overview of 2016

The diagram below summarises our approach in 2016.



In 2016, we implemented the reading function of our new responsive site, together with a Reading app to facilitate offline reading on mobile devices. We re-designed our storybook template with brighter colours and font more suitable for early reading. Users can now print cost effective story booklets on simple printers for use with children.

Our registered users (those wishing to create or translate) have increased from 1402 to 2000, of whom 85% come from Africa. Our monthly visitors have increased from an average of 4840 to an average of 5357 per month with 62% of them being from Africa. Over 559,000 storybooks have been downloaded to date, mostly in African languages.

We have 3837 storybooks in 100 languages, not only from our pilot countries, but also from the new countries in which we are stimulating use - Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda and Zambia. We have worked hard at quality assurance – 61% of our storybooks are ASb approved – up from 37% in 2015.

Our school-based hubs are demonstrating innovative ways of using the storybooks in schools; and our library-based hubs are showing how hundreds of children can enjoy our stories each day, even in very poor communities.

We have 50 titles in three languages on the Kenya Education Cloud, and 30 titles in six African languages and English delivered for uploading on the DBE Cloud, South Africa's school portal.

Independent use of the website and storybooks increased dramatically. Storybooks in 38 of the languages were contributed independently by users – from countries like Tunisia and

Cameroon that we have never visited. Through following up independent users, we discovered that our storybooks have reached 3189 educators and over 100,000 children – with very little or no effort on our part.

In 2016, through active work with our partners as well as through independent use of the website and storybooks, we reached 21,131 educators and 362,684 children.

A more detailed description of the major outputs for 2016 follows.

## Releases of the project website

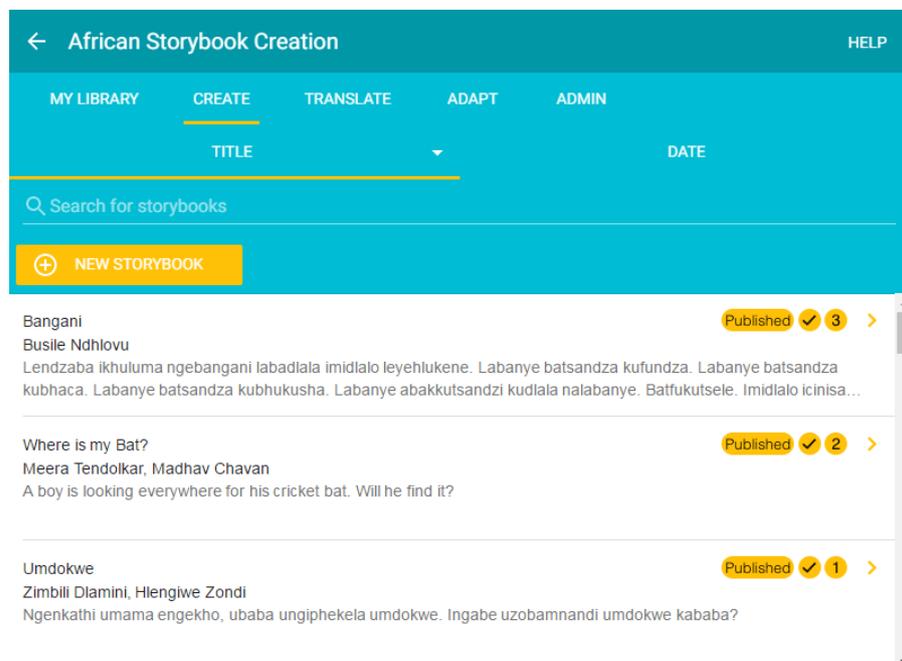
The major achievements in 2016 were the release of the Reading component of our new responsive design, as well as of our free Reading App in both Apple and Google Play stores. The App has been sent to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa, and is on their list of recommended Apps in the new DBE cloud. An Ethiopian specific version is deployed on tablets in 25 libraries in Ethiopia through partnership with Beyond Access and CODE-Ethiopia.



Secondly, we implemented a new fresher design for our storybooks, with a font more suited to early reading.

Thirdly, we re-designed PDF download and printing, so that there are two options for users – A4 landscape format (for offline projection), and A5 booklet. This has enabled cost effective printing of the stories by individual schools and literacy development organizations.

Finally, an entirely new and simplified creation and translation process was built and is being tested in order to go live in the first quarter of 2017.



## Stories and website use

During 2016, the average number of visitors increased to an average of 5357, up from 4840 per month in 2015. African visitors are now 62% of the total visitors, up from 57% in 2015. We remain a website in Africa for Africans primarily. Among the African countries, South Africa and Kenya have the most visitors, but Tanzania and Nigeria have even more visitors than Uganda. This is interesting in view of the fact that we did not visit either Tanzania or Nigeria in 2016.

We are up to 2000 registered users (from 1402 at the end of 2015), and the increase is steady – this signals that there are increasing numbers of people taking the trouble to register to create, translate, or adapt storybooks. 85% of those registered are from African countries. In 2016, we started using downloads as a proxy for reading books accessed directly from our website<sup>1</sup>, on the understanding that if a user downloads a PDF version of a storybook on a device, they are likely to have read it and want others to read it. Since inception, we have had 559,413 downloads. Particularly pleasing is the trend in 2016 to downloads of African language rather than English titles. In November only 18% of the downloaded titles were in English.

There has also been an increase in the numbers of visitors accessing the site from mobile devices since inception. 20% of visitors accessed the site via mobile phones in July 2014, compared to 45% in December 2016. With regard to our Reading App, launched in January 2016 on [Android](#) and on [Apple](#), there have been 1667 installations on Android mobile phones, and 226 on Apple.

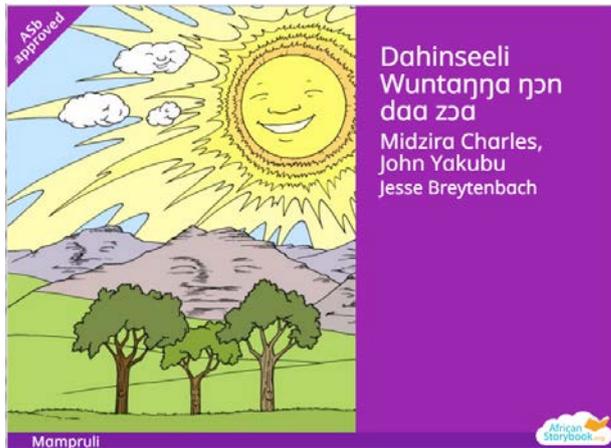
In terms of storybooks, the following table shows the steady growth, since the launch of the website in June 2014, of stories, translations and languages, as well as images in the image bank from which users can select when they create storybooks.

	Unique stories	Translations/adaptations	Languages	Images
3 Jun 2014	120	617	20	2608
31 July 2015	421	1505	55	4385
31 Dec 2015	559	1884	66	5192
31 July 2016	662	2437	78	6535
31 Dec 2016	772	3065	100	8188

The number of translations has grown by 62% in the last year, and the number of languages by 52%. Clearly, our efforts to move into new countries through stimulating translation into the languages of those countries has borne fruit.

---

<sup>1</sup> This does not, of course, cover reads of our material where others such as World Reader or iMlango have downloaded our storybooks and put them on their own platforms reaching thousands more children.



With some languages, we are making history, as Michael Stark of Educators International pointed out in respect of one of the Ghanaian languages:

This is an historic moment: after at least 100 years of being treated as a subset of Dagbani, the Mampruli language (spoken by three quarters of a million people) is recognised in its own right!

We have realised that it is important to invest in continued expansion of the image bank through commissioned high quality illustrations – from other countries, not only South Africa. Although 15 of the 27 artists we work with are South African, we use two Kenyan artists, eight Ugandan artists, one artist resident in Lesotho, and one Ethiopian artist.

We aimed to start off with 50 storybooks in the main languages of our pilot sites, and also to translate sufficient storybooks into French and Portuguese in order to make the storybooks accessible in Francophone and Lusophone Africa. Below are the numbers of the top twenty languages:

English	721	Sepedi	91
Kiswahili	208	Lugbarati	90
isiZulu	179	Oluwanga	76
Lunyole	152	Lumasaaba	69
Portuguese	148	Maa	63
French	130	Sesotho (Lesotho)	62
isiXhosa	129	siSwati	58
Ng’aturkana	122	Kikamba	52
Luganda	117	Lugbarati (Official)	50
Setswana	105	isiNdebele	50

In the course of 2016, the Global Book Alliance set down ambitious minimum standards for provision of books to schools (ambitious, because not yet achieved in official provision of African language readers even in a relatively well resourced country like South Africa). The reports recommend 42 book titles per school year per pupil. (p. 14, *Feasibility Study for a Global Book Fund, Results for Development, 2016*). We are aiming to achieve or exceed the minimum target of 126 quality assured titles in those languages which are being used with large numbers of children: in Kenya, Kiswahili and Ng’aturkana storybooks for our work with KICD and in Turkana; in Uganda, Lunyole storybooks for implementation across the Butaleja district; and in South Africa, isiZulu storybooks for our work with the KwaZulu-Natal

Department of Education. We are gradually building our collection to meet the needs of future systemic implementation – Maa books for Kajiado County in Kenya, and Sepedi, Tshivenda, Xitsonga and Setswana books for work in North West and Limpopo provinces in South Africa. It is also instructive that the numbers on our website come largely from translated/adapted stories.

	<b>Unique stories</b>	<b>Translations</b>	<b>Total stories</b>	<b>% of total translated</b>
03-Jun-14	120	617	737	83.7
31-Dec-15	559	1884	2443	77.1
31-Dec-16	772	3065	3837	79.9

One of the emphases in our work in 2016 was quality assuring titles either for printing or for uploading onto government departmental websites. We aimed to have 50% of the stories on the website quality assured by the end of 2016. The following is the picture in December 2016:

<b>Total Stories</b>	<b>Total ASb Approved</b>	<b>Percentage ASb approved</b>
3 837	2 354	61%

### **Hubs in pilot countries**

Work in our pilot sites came to an end in 2015. However, in the interests of sustaining our work in the pilot countries, we supported selected existing sites to extend their ASb work beyond the individual site into the district or region. We reached 431 educators and 15,492 children through activities at the hubs in 2016.

The Lunyole Language Association aimed to impact on the Butaleja District in Eastern Uganda and increase the number of quality assured Lunyole storybooks. It extended ASb storybook use from two to six primary schools and established two women’s groups for story development and use. It also undertook broader advocacy through events such as the DEAR day (Drop Everything and Read). Busolwe Community Library manages a collection of printed ASb books which are lent out to the schools and women’s groups.



In West Budama in Eastern Uganda, we worked in partnership with a local NGO, Pan Education Network Uganda, to develop a collection of storybooks (mostly translated but some developed) in the local Dhopadhola language, and to support teachers to use these storybooks effectively with children in a local primary school.

Lolupe Primary School is having an effect on the whole of the Turkana County in North Western Kenya, and steadily increasing the number and quality of storybooks available in Ng'aturkana.

The teachers have continued their ASb related work in the school, but extended this to the Early Childhood Development (ECD) section.



The school also has a library of ASb storybooks which it lends out to teachers in surrounding schools to use with their classes.

In addition, teachers from five schools near Lodwar are engaged in local storybook development and use under the guidance of Dr John Ngasike, an ECD specialist attached to the Mount Kenya University. The ECD department in the County government supports all this work, and has expressed the intention to print and distribute English, Kiswahili and Ng'aturkana ASb titles.

Paleng library in Lesotho used the support from African Storybook in 2016 in order to establish a further library an hour's walk from Paleng, as well as support local schools and an ECD to use the African Storybook resources. They also conducted two advocacy workshops for a wider audience at a community ICT centre as well as an orphanage. Gradually the numbers and quality of the Sesotho storybooks is increasing. They have a model library lending system which they are capturing on video for us.

Saulsville Community Library became a hub for schools in Atteridgeville (outside Pretoria) including our pilot schools. Children from the community attended multilingual story reading sessions using the website and a digital projector. Under the auspices of the City of Tshwane Library Services they held a story writing competition for children from these schools – a very good advocacy event.



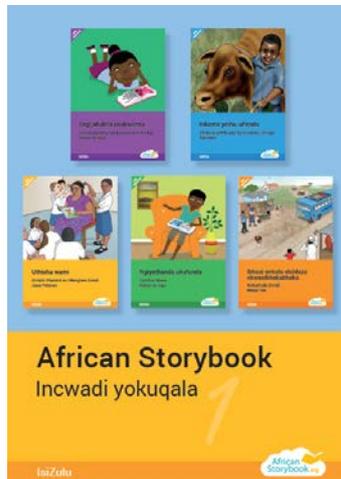
Although not a pilot site originally, Kibera public library in Nairobi is a hub - for thousands of school children in the surrounding informal settlement. According to the chief librarian, 14,000 children were reached through the digitally projected story reading sessions at Kibera in the course of the year. Teachers from the surrounding 70 schools bring their children for the library period each week, and the children also come to the library over weekends and in holidays.

We had hoped that Munanga Primary School in Western Kenya would become a hub, but both the principal and the ASb pilot site coordinator were transferred to different schools. The principal is continuing work on ASb in her new school, and we are looking to support her in 2017.

It is heartening that most of the pilot sites which we are no longer supporting have continued their ASb work. Family Literacy Project in KwaZulu-Natal has found funding to print 200 ASb books for use in a new home visiting project in 2017 with an extended number of community libraries. Kabubbu Development Project near Kampala likewise has self-funded the printing of ASb books for their library, and is hoping to have books that the teachers themselves have created printed professionally and distributed by their major funder, the Quicken Trust. In Arua Hill Primary School, involvement as a pilot site encouraged teachers to participate in computer courses at the school. In addition, the school has printed copies of ASb storybooks which children borrow to read at school or at home and which pre-service teachers use on teaching practice supported by their tutor at the Arua Core Primary Teacher College. It is only in two of the original pilot sites (Oloosirkon Primary in Kenya and Arua Core PTC) that ASb has not taken root.

### **Systemic implementation in pilot countries**

We had expected to position ourselves for systemic implementation in schooling in one or more of our pilot countries. By the end of 2016, however, we had already achieved a presence with 150 of our storybooks in the e-learning section on the Kenya Education Cloud. We also delivered 30 titles in 6 African languages for uploading onto the South African DBE Cloud.



In KwaZulu-Natal, the library services of the Department of Education purchased 5000 ASb teachers' anthologies, 166,000 learners' books, and with the help of a provincial programme supporting schools in two districts of KwaZulu-Natal, distributed these to all early grade reading teachers teaching isiZulu home language. Old Mutual separately funded the purchase of 5000 flash drives loaded with over 100 ASb storybooks for the teachers. The Department requested the development of an anthology of isiZulu storybooks for children, and these will be printed and distributed in 2017.

In terms of systemic implementation in teacher education, we have worked consistently in three teacher education institutions over two years, reaching two cohorts of students in each institution. The major contribution has been to increase the number of created and translation storybooks on the site.

## Story development in new and pilot countries

We ran six story development workshops in 2016 from which we expected to get publishable storybooks for the ASb website: three in the Northern Cape (one with children, one with teachers, and one with aspiring writers, library volunteers and young people who are active in community work), one in the Free State (with unemployed residents who have been selected to join the Community Work Programme as ECD facilitators), one in KwaZulu-



Natal (with departmental library subject advisors), and one in Uganda (with writers with whom we had an existing relationship).

Typically the workshops are 1 to 2 days in length, and the greatest success is with people who have story writing as a goal in their lives.

The following was the yield:

- Northern Cape: five manuscripts from teachers (but only one or two usable ones), and nine promising manuscripts from the third Northern Cape workshop.
- Free State: two quite good manuscripts in two languages (with a struggle)
- KwaZulu-Natal: seven manuscripts, four of which are promising.
- Uganda: three good story manuscripts in two languages.



Manuscript development workshops can be a good and steady way of acquiring interesting, diverse and locally grounded manuscripts, but the workshop does need to be prepared for, facilitated and driven with the objective of generating publishable manuscripts in two languages. Secondly, story development must be distinguished from advocacy or capacity building as the main purpose of the engagement. Thirdly, if the production of quality published storybooks is the main purpose, then the participants have to be selected with this in mind. Fourthly, there needs to be an organisation or individual that holds the story development beyond the single engagement, and gets to the final product.



One of the strategies we used in 2016 to generate new storybooks was running story writing competitions *for children* in Saulsville (see above), Debre Berhan in Ethiopia, and Kibera.

However, though the process is hugely motivational for children and their teachers, the adjudication is time-intensive, and few of the products are usable, probably because the children were not adequately guided by the teachers.

In some instances, children wrote from memory stories which were familiar to adjudicators as commercially published stories and/or as familiar stories from other media. In other instances, they wrote essays rather than stories. However, one of the stories produced in a competition (*Kidnapped* - from Kibera Community Library) has been published, and another four manuscripts (from the Debre Berhan English story writing competition in 2016) will be edited, illustrated and published on the website as part of the ASb internal publishing programme.

## **New countries**

Our strategy for stimulating use of the website and storybooks in new countries is to establish a network of partners in that country, and then ensure that there is a representative collection of our storybooks translated into the languages of that country. However, we recognise that this needs to be followed up with local story development workshops, because people need to generate their own storybooks and see themselves and their concerns on the website.

In Ethiopia we have established a solid partner network, with a large school-based NGO (Imagine1Day), university people (from Addis Ababa university in particular), an individual involved in cultural promotion in schools and community (Mezemir Girma from Debre

Berhan University), a book development organisation (CODE Ethiopia), and an international technology in education organisation (Beyond Access). This has enabled us to ensure not only that our books are used, but also that storybooks in Amharic (37) and Afaan Oromo (22) and other Ethiopian languages in due course can be published.



In Ghana, we decided to commission translation of 10 titles into 11 of the government recognised local languages, in addition to relying on volunteer translation of stories into 3 further Ghanaian languages. We followed this up with a visit to two of our partners, Open Learning Exchange Ghana (Accra) and Educators International (Northern Region) to develop ideas for joint funding proposals, as well as plan for a local story development workshop in 2017.

In Zambia, there was a visit to establish relationships with a wide range of partners, but it is proving difficult to organise collaborative activities. Fortunately, however, Saide has a separate project working on video based professional development for untrained community school teachers. Since the teachers will get tablets, we thought it was worth commissioning our partner, CAPOLSA (Centre for Promotion of Literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa at the University of Zambia), to undertake translation of 30 ASb titles into four of the main Zambian languages. In 2017, these are being uploaded onto the tablets for use in the 500 pilot schools.

### **Advocacy and partner development**

As reported in 2015, we are participating actively in meetings and research for the USAID/Norad initiative, the Global Book Fund, now called the Global Book Alliance. We participate actively in the meetings of the Global Book Alliance, and were invited to showcase our story creation and translation tools at the International Literacy Day celebrations in Washington. We have also engaged extensively and critically with the [Feasibility Study for the Global Book Fund](#) released in 2016, in particular to point out the lack of attention given to local story production and digital solutions to the broken links in the book chain. The following paragraphs from our comment on the report are worth quoting in full:

The study also raises the crucial issue of ‘charity’ [donor funded book chain improvements] vs. sustainability [making governments do their jobs and helping them do better]. However, it almost completely ignores the potential of local communities to write, produce, improve and own their own books in their own

languages for their own needs. This is the main way in which the African Storybook Initiative hopes to contribute to the joint enterprise of a Global Partnership for Education. Our experience is that it is entirely possible that even quite remote communities whose languages are the most marginalized and where literacy is low can be essential actors in the entire book and literacy chain when given access to basic tools and support.

The data on production, delivery and use of digital books and digital tools to produce books may be somewhat outdated and is certainly incomplete. Not studied are at least 6 very promising technologies [and their side-effects] that may be part of a cost-effective strategy:

- The use of projection for whole class and small group reading
- The use of low end printers and laminators in school and other libraries, in HOD or other offices or by small organizations, to print a few copies of books as needed –
- The use of mobile phones
- The use of digital tools for local story and materials creation
- The use of ‘cloud libraries’ by Ministries for entire national systems.

In terms of advocacy events, key international events aside from the Global Book Alliance were participation in two panels in the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) conference in Vancouver, and presentations at the International Literacy Association (ILA) conference in Boston, UNESCO’s Mobile Learning Week in Paris, the African Language Teachers Association conference in Boston, the eLearning Africa in Cairo, the Mobiles for Education Alliance colloquium in Washington, and the Pan Commonwealth Forum conference in Malaysia. We also advocated for ASb in a number of regional events including the Reading Association of Uganda conference, Puku Story Festival, Teachers’ Peer Learning Fairs in KwaZulu-Natal, the KZN Reading Round Table, and a workshop on mobile learning for librarians organised by the Goethe Institute. Through these efforts we reached over 1500 people. At these events we maintain our existing relationships, and are able to forge new ones. We also discover interesting ways in which people are using the website and storybooks. For example, at the ILA conference, we connected with the American University in Nigeria who are using our storybooks as the core of their digital storybook collection reaching 20 000 beneficiaries.

The following table shows the 165 contacts or partners listed on our partner grid per country (up from 124 in 2015). We have MoUs/draft MoUs/letters of agreement with 28 partners (8 more than in 2015).

South Africa	61	Canada	04
Uganda	23	UK	04
Kenya	18	Nigeria	03
United States	18	Tanzania	02
Ethiopia	09	Senegal	02

Zambia	07	India	01
Ghana	06	Niger	01
Rwanda	05	Cameroon	01

The African Storybook mailing list is now up to just over 1200 members (up from 809 last year) who received five themed story newsflashes and one newsletter during 2016. Our Facebook page has 856 likes and our weekly story reaches between 300 and 600 people, with our initial post on our series on Ethiopian stories receiving 1300 reads. We have 479 followers on Twitter, since we joined Twitter we have posted 666 tweets and had 143 likes. By October 2016 we picked up 46 mentions of the project through a Google search (1st 12 pages of Google). One of our Pretoria workshops on writing in mother tongue was covered in the Pretoria Daily Sun.

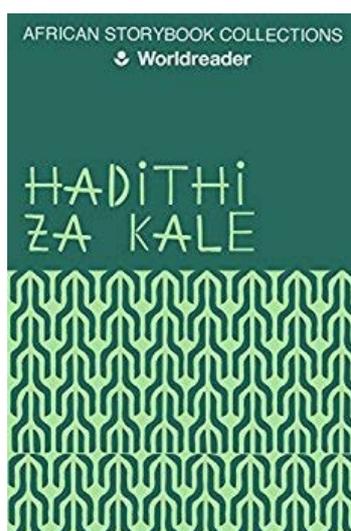
African Storybook was a case study in the Global Open Policy Report that was published in December 2016 by Creative Commons.

### Independent uptake and use

Independent users fall into the following categories: individuals (such as a Tunisian father translating storybooks into Tunisian for his child to read), people with pedagogic research interest involved in small scale projects (14 examples tracked), people interested in technological innovation (3 examples), app developers wanting content for apps (6 instances), large scale government linked literacy programmes needing local language material (4 programmes), and organisations collecting and re-publishing reading material (11 organisations).

Two of the most interesting examples of independent uptake are the following.

TELA ([www.auntela.org](http://www.auntela.org)), a USAID funded programme managed by the American University of Nigeria, runs reading camps with 20,000 beneficiaries in Nigeria. 22 of the 28 bilingual storybooks on their site are adaptations of ASb storybooks.



World Reader is using 51 of our titles on mobile as well as in the reading projects. They report that they have pushed 42,968 individual ASb storybooks to their projects with the majority (12,000+) going to Nigeria. In a blog entitled Top Books that Made People Readers in 2016 (<https://www.worldreader.org/blog/top-books-made-people-readers-2016/>), two ASb titles were first on the list of top books in school and library projects in sub-Saharan Africa. During 2016, they created three anthologies of ASb storybooks (with versions in English, French and Kiswahili), and released them both on their free app, and for sale on Amazon. Their most popular Anthology on mobile (with over 27,000 opens since it was published in the middle of the year) is the ASb Folktales Anthology.

## Evaluation and learnings

Our external evaluators, Professor Hilary Janks and Professor Ken Harley, wrote up five case studies on aspects of the implementation of the African Storybook initiative in the course of 2016:

1. Building on the external mid term review, a case study on our work in Saulsville Community Library, one on our work in Lolupe Primary and Turkana, and one on our work in teacher education;
2. Based on the strategy for 2016, a case study on publishing services for systemic implementation, and a review of ASb support materials for independent story creation, translation and use.

In 2016, Lisa Treffry-Goatley was awarded a distinction for her Masters in English Education, with a dissertation entitled: A critical literacy and narrative analysis of African Storybook folktales for early reading.

*The following two papers were accepted by international journals for publication:*

- Stranger-Johannessen, E., & Norton, B. (In press). The African Storybook and language teacher identity in digital times. *Modern Language Journal*, 101.
- Norton, B., & Tembe, J. (In press). The African Storybook, multilingual literacy, and social change in Ugandan classrooms. *Applied Linguistics Review*.

*These were the papers presented at conferences:*

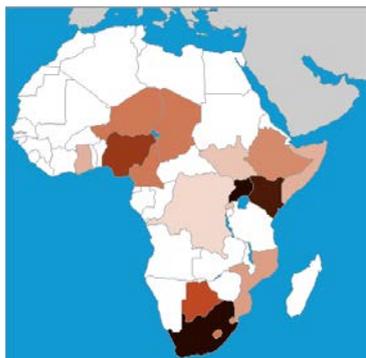
- Reed, Y. (2016). Something New out of Africa: The African Storybook Initiative as a Catalyst For Curriculum Making. Paper presented at International Conference on Education and New Developments
- Amory, A. & Welch, T. (2016). Design for Interaction. Paper presented at the NADEOSA conference in Johannesburg.
- Welch, T. (2016). Digital storytelling for early reading in marginalised African communities: the African Storybook experience in Kenya. Presentation at the eLearning Africa conference in Cairo.
- Welch, T., Tembe, J., & Mubbalya, C, Emongot, J, and Ogot, O. (2016). The role of ICT in Putting Reading within Reach: the Case of the African Storybook Initiative. Presentation at the Reading Association of Uganda conference in Kampala.
- Glennie, J. and Welch, T. (2016). Using OER to Address a Fundamental Educational Challenge. Presentation at the Pan Commonwealth Forum conference in Malaysia.

All of the above are available on request.

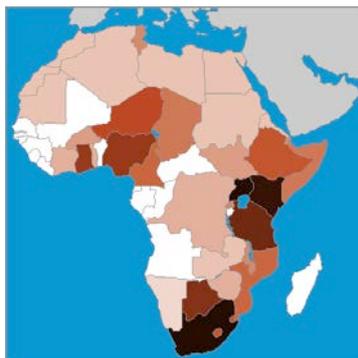
## Conclusion

As a result of our implementation strategy in 2016, we have increased our footprint in Sub-Saharan Africa. The two maps overleaf show the number of stories available through our website in the languages of African countries – in September 2015 and in October 2016 respectively. The intensity of the colour shows the number of ASb storybooks in the languages of the countries.

September 2015



October 2016



As pointed out in 2015, in terms of the Sustainable Developments agreed internationally in 2015, we are aligned with Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The project addresses the fundamentals of lifelong learning, namely the ability to read. By targeting the indigenous languages of Africa, as well as the most used languages of wider communication in Africa, we are making a contribution to equitable quality education, because it is the marginalised 80% in African societies who need reading materials in their own languages, as well as local materials in colonial languages that afford access to better work and educational opportunities. Because our stories are available also in English (and increasingly in French and Portuguese as well), ‘trans-linguaging’ between dominant and less powerful languages is facilitated, i.e. the use of different languages to support comprehension.

2016 saw a number of efforts at systemic implementation bearing fruit. For example, we inserted African Storybook into a successful proposal for improved provision of learning and teaching support materials for all schools in two provinces of South Africa for a programme to be run between 2017 to 2020). This is important for two reasons: first because it recognises the role of local language storybooks in literacy development, and second because there will be both print and digital methods of delivery of these storybooks – resulting in larger numbers of titles being available than if print only were used.

In Kenya and Uganda, we are making it possible for speakers of non-official and marginalised languages such as Ng’aturkana and Lunyole, to have access to the sufficient local language storybooks in their own languages: thus enabling local language literacy instruction, alongside Kiswahili and English. By mid 2017 we will have 126 storybooks (one per week for the first three years of schooling) in Lunyole and Ng’aturkana, alongside over 200 in Kiswahili and nearly 800 in English. In this way, we are assisting the ministries to implement their stated policy of local language literacy instruction that they are unable to resource through their large national programmes.

However, while schools may be responsible for teaching children to read, development of a culture of reading that is critical for lifelong learning, cannot rest on the schools alone. We have seen in our 2016 focus on community libraries, how availability of contextually relevant local language storybooks through story reading sessions in community libraries is beginning to address what Lea Shaver calls ‘book hunger’.