The African Storybook Project

Digital storytelling for multilingual literacy development
Why the African Storybook Project?

Over the last decade, African Governments have made dramatic progress in pursuing the goal of Education for All. However, 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 necessary to proceed to the next level of schooling.

There are many reasons for this. A key obstacle to learning to read is the shortage of appropriate stories for early reading in languages familiar young African children.

Since young Africans have very little to read in familiar languages, they often do not learn to read well or enjoy reading. This in turns means that there is not a market for African language books and publishers cannot afford to produce many such books. So young Africans end up with very little to read and the cycle continues.

Our vision

Our vision is for all African children to have enough stories in a language familiar to them to practise reading and learn to love reading. We believe that literacy practices on the continent can be transformed by providing sufficient enjoyable stories in a familiar language, and encouraging caregivers and teachers to read them with children.

But we cannot possibly create sufficient stories in the thousands of languages spoken on the African continent unless we share the stories we have, and enable users to translate/version stories into their own languages.

To do this, we need three things:

1. A website – a place to share and create the stories
2. Openly licensed stories – which allow free use, as well as adaptation and translation
3. Partners – people who contribute to and use the website and the stories.
Our website

On www.africanstorybook.org - under construction, ready early 2014, you will be able to:

- find enjoyable stories for children to read,
- translate/version them into a local language or variety/dialect,
- adapt the stories for your context and the reading level you need,
- create and your own stories in one of the templates provided,
- upload them onto the website for others to engage with and use,
- download and print the stories, or read them on a variety of devices.

When the website is up and running and populated in 2014, users will be able to create their own stories using one of the templates.

Here is an example of how the website will facilitate translation/versioning of a story.

**The process flow for “Translate Story”**

![Diagram of the process flow for Translate Story]

Web diagrams: Clivix Standards Edition (Tartan University)
Our partners

Everyone who contributes to and uses our website and our stories will be our partner. But in order to encourage use, we are talking to organisations mainly in our pilot countries to discuss ways of using and contributing to the digital library. We are exploring possible partnerships with the following organisations:

- Friends of African Village Libraries (FAVL), and the association of community libraries in Uganda (UgCLA), as well as the Multilingual Education Network in Uganda.
- The RTI SHARP project in Uganda, developing local language reading resources and teacher training in 16 of the 36 Ugandan languages.
- The Aga Khan Foundation – working in early literacy in both Kenya and Uganda.
- The National Book Development Council of Kenya
- PRAESA (Project for Alternative Education in South Africa), and in particular their Nal’ibali reading campaign.
- Puku Books – a website dedicated to information about and advocacy for children’s literature in local languages in Southern Africa and beyond.
- The Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy based in Johannesburg.
- CODE – supporting literacy and book development in Canada and around the world, including a number of African countries.
- The TESSA programme: particularly their project to develop openly licensed teacher education resources to support the teaching of reading in the early grades in Sub Saharan Africa.
- The Centre for the Promotion of Literacy in SubSaharan Africa (CAPOLSA) based at the University of Zambia.
- SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) an NPO that build capacity for sustainable language development and produces dictionaries and systems of orthography in African languages.
- Yellobric, a UK based charity facilitating the delivery and use of e-content to support educational development in SubSaharan Africa.

We are linking up in the various countries with key universities and teacher training institutions such as Kenyatta University in Kenya, Kyambogo and Makerere Universities in Uganda, and Durban University of Technology and several other universities in South Africa, and the University of Education Winneba in Ghana.

In each of our pilot countries, we are meeting with officials from relevant government departments to discuss ways of working with them.

Our pilot sites

To encourage and learn from use, we are working with teachers and librarians and community workers in twelve pilot sites across Kenya, Uganda and South Africa. The
sites are community libraries, ECD centres, primary schools, located in both rural and urban contexts; some with few local languages, and others with many; some with grid electricity, some with solar power, and some without power; some very remote, and some quite near urban centres. Their location is plotted below.

https://maps.google.co.za/?mid=1373963018

Our stories
Our main interest is stories that children can read on their own when they are in the first stages of reading. READ ALONE stories will be picture books where illustrations support first words or first sentences. Some may be paragraph stories and have fewer illustrations.

There will also be READ ALOUD stories (some with MP3 audio for listening), for teachers or parents to read to (or tell) the children. But even these can have read alone versions. With some of our stories we are providing up to four versions of the story for different reading levels.

From Children of Wax, versioned by Lorato Trok and Tessa Welch, and illustrated by Wiehan de Jager
We are acquiring the stories in a variety of ways:

- Openly licensed stories on the Internet
- Out of print books
- Donations from literacy development organisations or individual authors
- Stories collected from individuals in the pilot sites
- Story development workshops and processes.

For example, Cornelius Gulere of the Ugandan Community Libraries Association (UgCLA) is running a series of workshops in the Jinja area to facilitate the development of stories in a range of local Ugandan languages.

We have created a Masterlist of all stories collected and considered for publishing.

**Extract from our Master List of over 400 possible stories collected Jan to July 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>License</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fruit (The) Ekibala</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Shakira Bodio</td>
<td>Uganda Site</td>
<td>Donated with CC license</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to buy a Book</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Rukmini Banerji</td>
<td><a href="http://www.scribd.com/collections/2347007/Pratham-Books">http://www.scribd.com/collections/2347007/Pratham-Books</a></td>
<td>CC BY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goso the Teacher</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>George W Bateman</td>
<td><a href="http://www.storiestogrowby.com/">http://www.storiestogrowby.com/</a></td>
<td>Permission required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandma's Bananas Ndizi za Nyanya</td>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
<td>Nafula, Ursula</td>
<td>Kenya Site</td>
<td>Donated with CC license</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greedy Hyena Ata Ka Lio</td>
<td>English Turkana</td>
<td>Nga'sike, John</td>
<td>Kenya Site</td>
<td>Donated with CC license</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Izinwele</td>
<td>isiZulu</td>
<td>Clare Verbeek, Thembani Diada, Zanele Buthelezi</td>
<td>Centre for Adult Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal</td>
<td>Donated with CC license</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of these (for example, Goso the Teacher) we illustrate and adapt as read alone stories, and then place in one of our templates. If authors are willing to share their story through the website, but not willing for others to adapt their story, we will post the story as a PDF on the website.

All the stories have an English version in order to facilitate re-versioning into a variety of languages (for example, Izinwele has the English words on the page under the isiZulu words).

We believe that stories are very important – stories with characters and happenings and problems to solve. But we are also interested in songs, and riddles and games,
wherever possible with audio clips so that we can learn how to sing the songs or play the games. For example, see this Venda game song, Tshihwilili, which we obtained from *My Drum* (Abecedarius Books, 1988):

![Image of a Venda game song](image)

To provide exemplars of the kinds of stories we need, we are engaging in a range of story development activities, such as:

- versioning and illustrating folktales and translating them into the languages of our pilot sites;
- using stories that have been given to us, putting them into our templates, and translating them into the languages of our pilot sites;
- creating an image bank to assist our users to illustrate the stories they create themselves;

![Example of images for our image bank](image)

Illustration by Jemma Kahn

We are aiming to have stories ready for piloting in 2014 in the following main languages spoken at our pilot sites.

**Ugandan**: Mainly Lunyole, Luganda, Lugbarati, but also Lusoga, Sabiny, Aringa, Alur, Rutooro/Runyoro, Lebacholi, Lumasaba

**Kenyan**: Wanga and Khayo (and other Luhya dialects), Maasai, Kikuyu, Kamba, Ng’at Turkana, Kiswahili
South African: isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, but also the other South African official languages.

The stories to be versioned/translated include:

- 23 openly licensed isiZulu stories produced by the Centre for Adult Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (the SEED books).
- A collection of 20 illustrated and retold folktales from a variety of sources.
- 20 stories collected in each of Uganda and Kenya – mainly from the oral tradition but also about contemporary experiences.

Some books already exist in South African languages, but the copyright holders are giving us permission to use the illustrations and version the stories for the Ugandan and Kenyan languages:

- Up to 16 books in the Little Hands series (PRAESA/Little Hands Trust)
- Up to 10 books from the Vula Bula Grade 1 series (Molteno Institute for Language and Literacy).

Frequently Asked Questions

**Question 1: Is the African Storybook Project (ASP) a non-profit?**
ASP is a non-profit project funded currently by the UK based funder, Comic Relief. It is an initiative of Saide, which is a registered Non-Profit Organisation, governed by a Trust.

**Question 2: Will the digital books created by ASP be provided for free?**
The ASP books will be freely available. There is no fee, and the books will not be password protected.

**Question 3: Who will own the rights to the new versions of books that are created by people on the ASP website?**
Authors/illustrators will own the copyright in their own work, but will be asked to license the work openly, using one of the Creative Commons open licences. All stories commissioned by the ASP editorial team will be copyrighted to the African Storybook Initiative.
Question 4: How are you tackling the challenge of low bandwidth?

Firstly, users will not have to be online to read the stories. They will be able to download them onto their own device, or even print them. Similarly, it will be possible to create/version/adapt a story offline, and then upload it when internet is available.

Secondly, we are paying attention to the size of each of the story files, in particular the audio files. We will not be using either video or flash – although we will provide links to relevant YouTube videos for those able to access them.

For more information

Project Leader
Tessa Welch – tessaw@saide.org.za  tel +27 11 403 2813

In-country co-ordinators
Kenya: Dorcas Wepukhulu Nafula – dnweppy@gmail.com
South Africa: Sheila Drew – sheilad@saide.org.za; Lorato Trok – loratot@saide.org.za
Uganda:
Juliet Tembe – tembehirome02@gmail.com