

# Publishing Futures

A study of the publishing  
landscapes in Ghana, Kenya,  
Nigeria, South Africa,  
Uganda and Zimbabwe

**October 2024**

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# Foreword

The arts and culture sector in Africa is essential not only for celebrating the diversity of the continent but the creativity and innovation that contributes to economic growth, promoting the cultural and creative industries across the region. In this research the focus on the publishing sector was in response to the changes that have taken place especially after the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequences for the sector. While this research does not provide statistical data, it reveals a narrative of the interconnectedness and resilience of publishing and the literature ecosystem at large.

The findings of this research are a representation of voices in the publishing sector in the selected countries – sharing their own experiences, challenges, and successes. We focussed on six countries where British Council has a presence, representing East, Southern, and West Africa to achieve a geographical spread and a range of market sizes. As publishing continues to evolve and respond to contemporary opportunities and challenges it remains a vibrant expression of the continent's creativity and resilience of its young people.

There is growing global interest in African literature, as evidenced by the success of contemporary African authors and establishment of innovative and digital publishing organisations across Africa and the globe. The Spotlights in this research highlight some of the many African organizations and initiatives who have responded to the challenges they face and creating new models that challenge established ways of working and support publishing more diverse voices and growing more diverse audiences through the representation of African languages.

As an Arts team in SSA, we have been intentional about supporting research in the cultural and creative industries to generate new and actionable data to support evidence-based programming in the sector. The findings from this research will provide guidance on what we need to be thinking about as an organization, and I do hope other businesses and organisations working in this space will find this research just as useful in framing how they design and implement work and collaborating to developing a stronger ecosystem to support growth and resilience in the creative and cultural industries.

We look forward to further collaborations and engagements. Enjoy the read.

**Farai Ncube**

Regional Director Arts, Sub-Saharan Africa,  
British Council





At the British Council, we've been connecting people across the globe for 90 years. We take the long view, and know the best relationships are based on a deep knowledge of one another, which builds trust over time. This is of course true in publishing where personal connections can spark ideas and develop into career-defining opportunities. International working goes beyond the success of a person, their business or organisation; it is about how participating in the global community brings growth and sustainability to our industry in the long term. It enables us to tackle the large-scale challenges we face together and brings new perspectives and ideas which enable us to look to the future.

This research has been designed and led by experts across the African continent in consultation with industry leaders, who have generously shared their insights and experience.

It is a unique opportunity to take a deep dive into the publishing industries in six African countries; to see the fast pace of development of new and creative routes to market, digital innovation and where the possibilities for commercial and cultural collaboration lie. It is clear that publishing models are evolving, attracting new kinds of leadership and investment. Our challenge is to both retain that talent, and understand what new roles and skills will be required in the future.

The intention behind the research is to draw attention to this diverse, innovative and fast-developing market, and create an environment where new relationships, based on better knowledge and shared understanding can flourish, contributing to a more equitable and resilient global publishing community from which we will all benefit.

**Rachel Stevens**

Director Literature, British Council





# Introduction

This report is an in-depth study of the trade publishing and literature sectors in the following Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries: Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe. It offers an up-to-date overview of the sectors in each country, with a particular focus on recent developments and the creative individuals working within these fields.

The research identifies innovative practices, opportunities for collaboration and challenges faced by publishers working in each country. Research on African literatures – especially relating to creative writing – is frequently covered in the academic press, but studies on the trade publishing and literature sectors in Sub-Saharan Africa are much less available.

This study aims to bring forward new knowledge on the development of publishing in fiction and non-fiction for adult leisure readers, providing market insights, highlights of innovative practices and the economic impact of the sector. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the publishing landscape?
2. How has publishing driven innovation?
3. How has publishing provided space and capacity for connections?
4. How does publishing contribute to the creative economy?

## Scope of research

This study cuts across the book publishing ecosystem, which has historically included printing, bookselling, distribution and in more recent times has expanded to cover digital platforms and channels. It also includes the literature and broader creative sectors, including festivals, prizes and libraries.

The scope of the study also includes a few entrepreneurs who live outside of Africa due to the increasing global connections with publishing on the continent.

The research was conducted between January and June 2024.



# Methodology

A mixed methods approach has been adopted for this study comprising document analysis and in-depth interviews.

Combining two methods yielded deep insights into the research phenomenon that were not possible to completely understand using only a single method.

Multiple data sources were also integrated with the help of a mixed methods approach. The application of mixed methods enabled researchers to observe a phenomenon from a variety of perspectives and gain a broader understanding.

## Document analysis

In this research, document analysis involved critically examining various sources such as event agendas, brochures, publishers' catalogues, press releases, social media posts, proposals, application forms, letters and organisational reports to gather insightful data for more in-depth analysis.

These documents were found in libraries, newspaper archives and organisational or institutional websites. Since these documents were often created for purposes other than research, they offered unobtrusive insight into the publishing and literature sectors without the potential biases introduced by direct observation or interviews. Furthermore, document analysis was used to validate data from other sources such as in-depth interviews.



## In-depth interviews

For this research, in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in each country. These professionals provided insider perspectives, including accounts of their individual journeys and how their output continues to sustain the sectors. See Appendix 1 for details of organisations which participated in the in-depth interviews.

The research team collated information on variables of interest, in an established systematic fashion that answered the stated research questions. Participants were primarily recruited via purposive sampling.

A total of 66 respondents across the sample population took part in this study. Selected based on their experience in the publishing and literature sectors, they include founders and chief executives of some of the most innovative organisations in the countries under study, from publishing houses, bookshops, libraries, festivals/fairs, book clubs, literary agencies, literary journals and publishing consultancies.

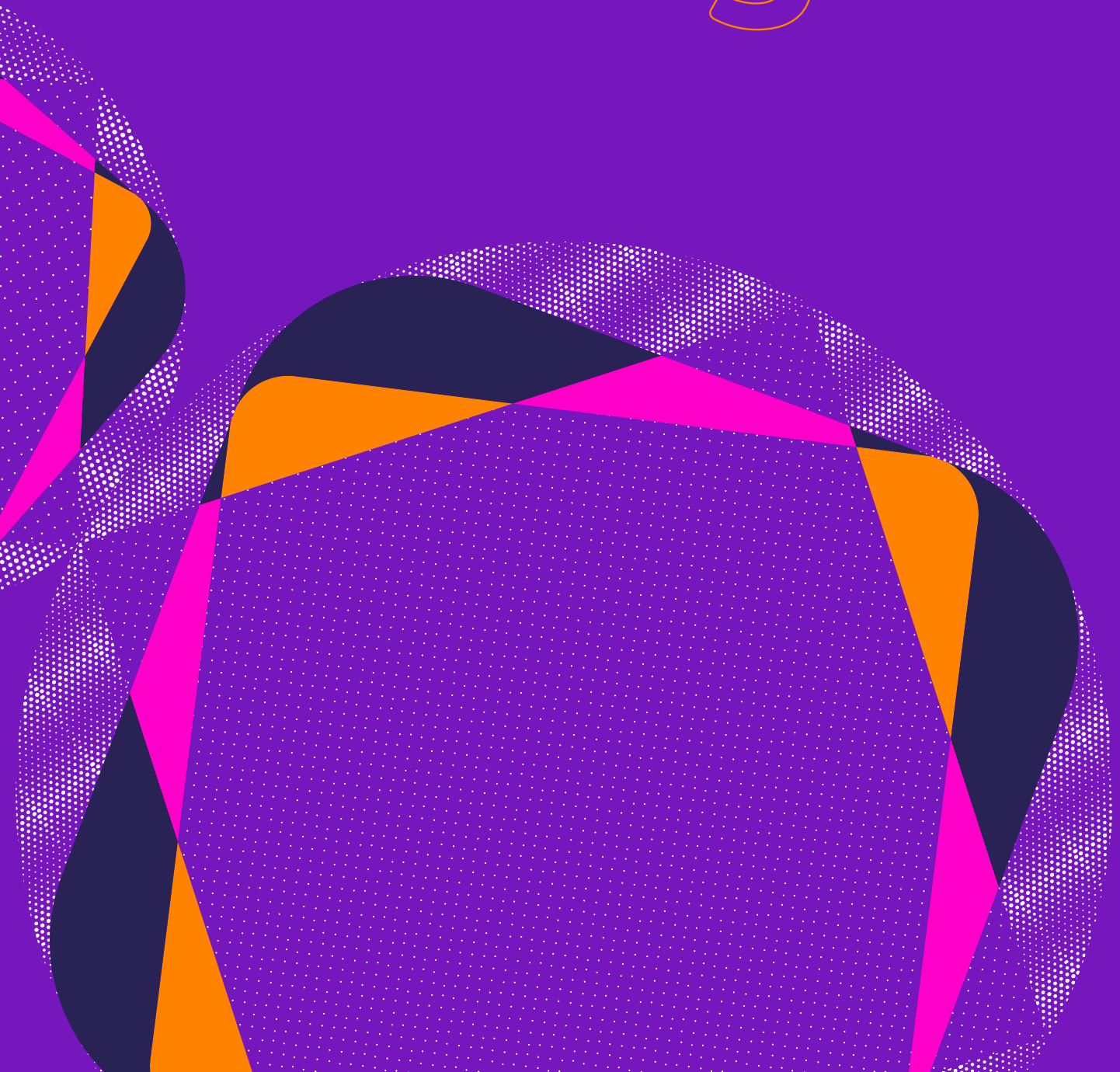
## Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. It would not be possible to draw sweeping conclusions on the publishing and literature sectors in Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, based on the number of respondents from only six countries.

The research team also encountered substantial gaps in publishing statistics, particularly book sales figures. These gaps are significant constraints to attracting investment to the sector.

Every effort was made to interview a wide range of publishing entrepreneurs in the six countries. However, given the project timeline, it was impractical to feature a larger sample size. Furthermore, the list of events and initiatives included in this report is by no means exhaustive.

# Summary of key findings



# Publishing Landscape

The trade publishing sector thrives on a variety of models, which this study classifies into two broad categories: traditional and non-traditional publishing.

Traditional publishers focus primarily on producing hardback and paperback print editions of books, which are distributed using established networks and distribution channels like bookstores and fairs. In traditional publishing, the publishers tend to control every aspect of the process, from commissioning or selecting work for publication, to editorial, book design and marketing.

Non-traditional publishing – the many ways in which individuals and businesses are circumventing conventional processes – typically using new and emerging technologies to get content into the hands of readers. In this study, some of the non-traditional publishing practices include self-publishing and digital publishing using audio channels, mobile phones and social media platforms.

Sub-Saharan Africa supports a healthy mix of both categories. The region boasts vibrant literary communities, a growing professional workforce and, with a median age of 19, the youngest population in the world. This report highlights both the intrinsic structure of each model, as well as the strong connections and overlaps between them.

Due to unavailability of book industry data in many countries in SSA, researchers must look at various indicators such as legal deposits. Publishers in some SSA countries are required by authorities to deposit a specific number of copies of their published work at a repository such as a library. This requirement is known as legal deposit. National legal requirements often call for the submission of two copies or more, but specific regulations will vary by country and territory. Legal deposit serves the function of gathering, preserving and making available to current and future users the books that comprise a nation's intellectual and cultural heritage. While the deposits in SSA do not give a full picture of

the publishing sector, the data themselves are reliable and include both traditional and non-traditional publishing. 'The Global Publishing Industry in 2022' report published in 2023 by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), highlighted the number of legal deposits in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda. Data on Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe were not presented.

Country	Print books	e-books	Total
Ghana	1137	252	1389
Kenya	2188	-	2188
Uganda	1523	-	1523

**Figure 1: Number of books deposited at recognized repositories in 2022. (Source: WIPO, 2023)**

As shown above, Kenya recorded the highest number of books among the three countries. In 2023, Nielsen Book Data and the International Publishers Association (IPA) published a study on the global publishing industry. The IPA acknowledged the difficulty of obtaining publishing data in Africa. As with the WIPO report, the IPA report used data on International Standard Book Numbers (ISBNs) to quantify the publishing market in SSA. The report also estimated the number of publishers in these countries.

Country	ISBNs registered	Number of publishers
Ghana	2,000	100
Kenya	854	122
Nigeria	14,392	290
South Africa	N/A	200

**Figure 2: ISBNs registered and number of publishers in 2023. (Source: IPA, 2024)**

As shown above, Nigeria has the greatest number of ISBNs registered and the highest number of publishers. This is a fair reflection of the country's publishing sector. However, the majority of book publishers operate mainly within the education sector.



Multinational publishing corporations have been an intrinsic part of the traditional publishing scene in SSA for decades. They became the dominant players in the region in the 1960s, when many countries started gaining their independence from colonial powers, and remained so until the 1990s. UK publisher Heinemann founded the African Writers Series (AWS) in 1962 to provide opportunities for authors from across Africa to publish, mostly in fiction.

For about 40 years, the series supported the growth of the publishing sector on the African continent through Heinemann subsidiary offices in Kenya and Nigeria. The introduction of the AWS was seen as a significant shift in modern African literature, a publishing initiative that enabled the production of books written by Africans for Africans (Achebe, 2003).

From 1977 until the end of the 1980s, UK publishing company Macmillan published the popular, low-cost Pacesetter series which printed paperback fiction by African writers, most of them Nigerians.

A number of these publishing companies that started out as offices or subsidiaries of multinationals have since closed shop, while others have transitioned into indigenous ownership/control. For instance, Moran Publishers was founded in Kenya in 2010 when David Muita bought the firm from its UK parent company Macmillan Publishers, where he was managing director for many years. Also in Kenya, East African Educational Publishers is a locally-owned company whose origins lie in what used to be UK publisher Heinemann's Kenyan subsidiary.

At the same time, local publishers have existed for decades, with a surge in activity since the turn of the century. Our research shows that in each of the six countries, several post-independence, African-owned/managed publishing houses are in operation. Narrative Landscape Press and Ouida, both founded in 2016, are two of Nigeria's active independent trade publishers. African publishers are also

becoming more visible in the UK. Cassava Republic started in Nigeria in 2006 and now operates in the UK as well. amaBooks was established in Zimbabwe in 2001 and later relocated to the UK. Carnelian Heart Publishing, established in 2020 to publish works by Zimbabwean authors, is also based in the UK.

Our research also identified some resurgent interest from UK publishing companies in the African market. In 2023, Head of Zeus, a part of Bloomsbury Publishing, in collaboration with Black Star Books and Pearson Education Ltd, launched the Apollo Africa series – the new home for 100 titles from the original Heinemann African Writers Series.

There is a growing market for non-traditional publishing, including digital books and self-publishing in SSA. Self-publishing in particular has become a rapidly expanding and accessible option for many writers. While self-publishing used to require significant funds, today the e-publishing route is cheaply and easily explored with access to a computer and an internet connection. Mobile devices such as the Kindle or iPad have not had much success in SSA where digital reading is moving towards mobile phones.

Across the six countries studied, the opportunities for authors seeking to invest in publishing their work without the involvement of an established and external publishing house have grown tremendously as publishing consultants enter the market. ZAAZ Press is an East African based creative and general writing business offering writing, editorial and publishing consultancy services to authors and businesses. It is registered in Uganda and in Kenya.

In Zimbabwe, Ngano Hub Consultants also helps authors looking to self-publish their books, by providing personalised services to help them achieve their book-publishing goals. In South Africa, Boutique Books also facilitates self-publishing for new and established authors.

## Rights and representation

Most traditional publishers typically agree to take on a work through a publishing agreement that generally covers defined areas, such as those pertaining to morality, options and subsidiary rights. Subsidiary rights in publishing refer to the right to convert a product or material into a form or format different from the original, for example, translating into a different language, creating an audiobook, graphic novel or film adaptation.

The utilisation of subsidiary rights is becoming a growing source of income for the sector in SSA. Some African authors first published in the UK or the US are no longer giving their Western publishers the world rights to their works. The authors believe that a local publisher would have more impact, opting to sell the rights to an African publisher so the books can be printed and sold at a reasonable cost for local readers. In 2023, Bloomsbury Children acquired Chibundu Onuzo's young adult novel *Mayowa and the Sea of Words*. Although the publisher acquired world rights to the book, it excluded some African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria.

Literary agents, who often act as advocates for writers, play only a minimal role in rights management in SSA. Unlike the UK publishing market, most traditional publishers in SSA accept un-agented manuscripts. Across the six countries studied, only South Africa has an operational agency, The Lennon-Ritchie Agency, which is a literary and rights agency based in Cape Town. It also sells international, subsidiary and film/television rights for Penguin Random House South Africa.

Accord Literary agency is UK-based, though it mentors, develops and encourages writers based in Africa who are writing books for young readers. The African Literary Agency based outside the continent but works with several African authors and publishers. Its focus is on speculative fiction, mainly science fiction, fantasy and horror. The UK-based Laxfield Literary Associates works closely with authors in Africa by providing a complete agency service, with a focus on reserving African rights for books first published in Western markets. The agency subsequently sells the acquired rights to publishers in the authors' countries of origin.

Our research shows that in the absence of a thriving agency scene, debut authors first-

published in Sub-Saharan Africa tend to grant their publishers world rights in the hope that these publishers will then sell the various regional and subsidiary rights. This way, the publishers operate as agents, taking on the task of selling the work in other territories. Many of these publishers, including Masobe Books, Jacana Media and Modjaji – in Nigeria and in South Africa – have been successful in selling rights to typically small, independent publishers around the world, in various languages. This is how African authors living and working on the continent have been able to get their works translated into Japanese, Dutch, German, French, Swedish and Norwegian and other languages.

More recently, SSA publishers have started trading rights among themselves. For instance, Mukoma wa Ngũgĩ's novel *Unbury Our Dead with Song*, originally published by Cassava Republic Press in Nigeria, was published in Kenya by Jahazi Press.

## Business models

Our findings show that many owners of small SSA publishing firms in Sub-Saharan Africa straddle two worlds: first, a risk-taking world, with its systems for publishing works that don't fit into set commercial genres; and second, a risk-averse world that only supports commercially-viable work, or work that is being funded for publication. South African publisher, Jacana Media publishes a lot of books funded through institutions and foundations. Other publishers in Nigeria, including Comic Republic, Ouida and Narrative Landscape have also embraced alternative funding sources.

According to our findings, most established entrepreneurs fund their business through retained earnings, such as past profits. New business owners often use personal funds and savings to kickstart their publishing ventures. Only a few publishers take out bank loans. This is largely due to an inability to meet strict lending conditions, such as having sufficient income and cash flow. Additionally, loan application procedures are usually cumbersome. Our report also suggests that some entrepreneurs receive grants from international organisations. A small number have shareholders that provide financial backing.

## Publishing in indigenous languages

Previous research suggested that a growing reliance on foreign languages, particularly English, together with a perceived lack of readership in indigenous languages, made many publishers reluctant to publish in indigenous African languages (Motsaathebe, 2011). The Kenyan novelist and scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argued that to make the required room for African languages, it was necessary to seek the cooperation of publishers, writers and the state. According to Thiong'o, the Kenyan state had failed to provide enabling support, instead favouring policies designed to enrich European languages at the expense of African languages (Dyssou, 2017).

Findings from this study suggests that there is a significant demand for children's books in indigenous languages, but less so for adult titles. Respondents argue that political will and generous funding are required to support publishers focused on publishing in African languages.

Currently, there are several very small publishers doing this with limited support. However, there are signs this is changing. Jacana Media's new imprint, Vela Books has received funding from the Department of Sports, Art and Culture and the Academic and Non-Fiction Authors' Association of South Africa to publish books in South African languages. During the 2019 Sharjah International Book Fair Publishers Conference, Cassava Republic was awarded the Africa Publishing Innovation Fund to support the translation of 10 children's books into three Nigerian languages.

In addition to funding, the desired growth of the markets for SSA indigenous language publications would require the sales of translation rights, greater visibility of indigenous language literatures abroad and more marketing awareness targeted at readers (Miller, 2021).

## General challenges

Each of the six countries face similar challenges in the publishing and literature sectors. These include distribution infrastructure, copyright infringement, rising costs, poor reading culture and low investment.

In 2023, the Zimbabwe-based independent publisher Weaver Press shut down after 25 years of publishing, citing various challenges including poor reading culture. Indeed, the economic constraints in SSA are such that many people can only afford to read in academic or educational contexts, rather than for pleasure.

Our findings show that there is also a lack of proper distribution channels for moving books between African countries. By contrast, pathways for distribution into the UK and the US are much more tried-and-tested.

Rising costs of printing and raw materials are also a major challenge across the six countries studied. Piracy continues to be a problem, even with the presence of copyright laws in the respective countries.

Finally, the sector suffers from a lack of adequate investment such as subsidies, grants and other types of financial support.



# How Publishing Drives Innovation

Publishing has been able to survive decades of change thanks to constant innovation. Our review of several developments in the SSA publishing sector reveals a wealth of innovative practices, taking advantage of evolving technologies to tackle issues such as accessibility and affordability. Research suggests that mobile internet access and use is increasing across SSA (GSMA, 2023) enabling publishers to take advantage of new ways of connecting with their audiences and increasing market access.

Innovation often takes place to varied degrees in different organisations. Independent publishers who are in close contact with their audiences are often willing to take risks and try new things. Innovation is also contingent on the availability of resources. Publishing entrepreneurs continue to seek innovation that can create economic value and overcome the barriers that stand in the way of their market penetration.

According to our findings, publishers advance the cause of publishing innovation in the following ways: creating demand for audiobooks and e-books, leveraging WhatsApp and Facebook as distribution channels and launching online magazines.

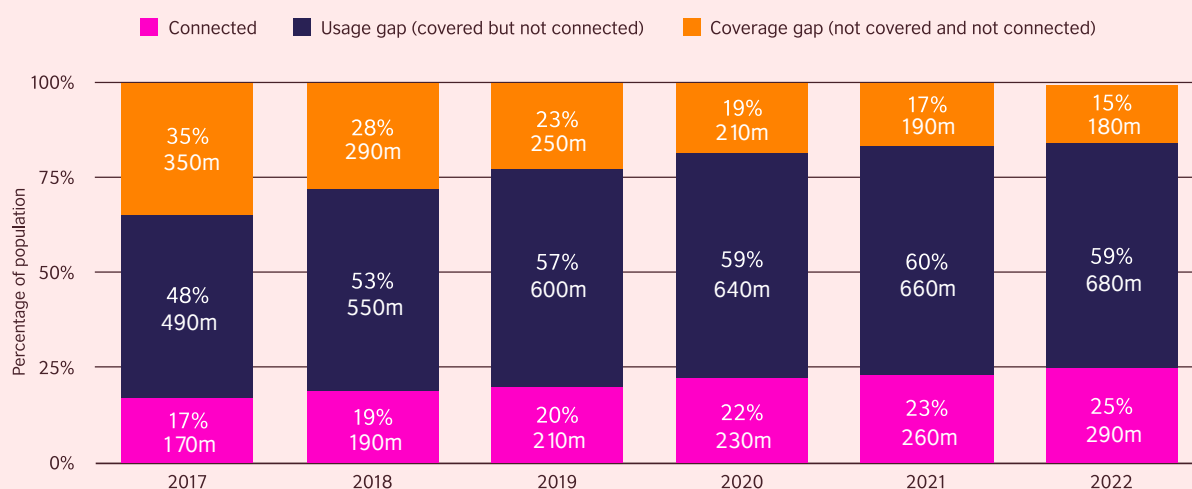
## Audiobooks and e-books

Our analysis shows that several publishers often release a book concurrently in print, e-book and audiobook formats to guarantee that customers have access to their preferred format – this is the norm in major publishing markets. The creation of a single digital file – and the capacity to sell access to that file across the world – enables publishers to reach people that would not otherwise be reached with print books.

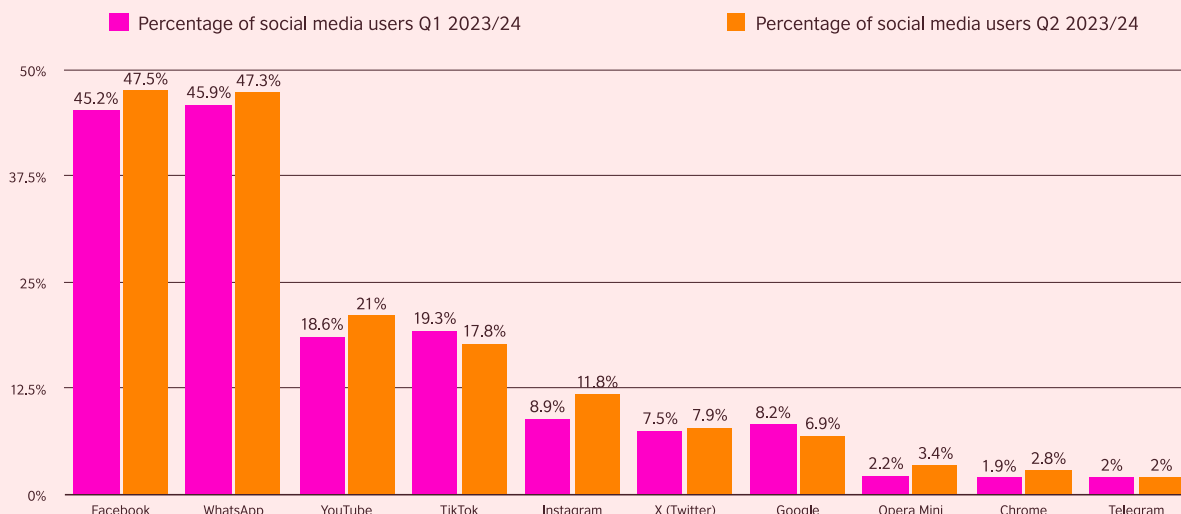
In a sign of the growing market for digital content in Sub-Saharan Africa, leading reading retailer and publisher Rakuten Kobo launched the Kobo Plus in South Africa in 2024. The Kobo Plus subscription enables booklovers to read multiple e-books for a monthly fee. The launch of Amazon in South Africa in 2024 is also expected to provide independent sellers with a platform to rapidly launch, grow and scale their businesses.

Recent data by the Publishers Association of South Africa shows that the sales of digital books products increased significantly from 2021/22 to 2022/23 financial years increasing by 92 per cent for local titles (PASA, 2024).

Indigenous digital-only publishers have also emerged in SSA. Genti is an audio media platform dedicated to showcasing audio stories, dramas, educational materials and more in African languages and voices. The platform hosts audio content in several indigenous languages, voiced by talented actors from the continent. AkooBooks is another digital audio platform that focuses on African audiobooks and spoken-



**Figure 3: Mobile internet connectivity in Sub-Saharan Africa. (Source: GSMA Intelligence, 2023)**



**Figure 4: Popular social media platforms in Kenya. (Source: Communications Authority of Kenya, 2024)**

word, providing engaging books that reach new audiences on mobile devices. Their digital library is accessible on a wide variety of mobile devices at affordable subscription plans.

The publishers and booksellers selling digital versions of books are not completely abandoning traditional print. Book buyers are often still presented with the option to purchase physical books that will be delivered to their addresses, in addition to the digital versions on offer as e-books or audiobooks.

In Kenya, eKitabu distributes books through an online shop, taking and delivering orders for print books and digital content for online and offline use, including in the open standard accessible EPUB 3.2 format. Run from Kampala, Uganda, the digital store AfricanBooks.com provides writers and publishers with a platform to share their digital books with a global reading audience. The widespread use of online platforms has made it possible for people to buy books regularly – in a variety of ways and among various online communities.

## Online magazines

Online magazines have become a vital component of literary culture in Sub-Saharan Africa. Along with fostering a strong reading culture, these magazines offer an easily accessible platform for fresh and sometimes experimental work.

These publications differ in terms of length, content, frequency and focus. *Brittle Paper* has built a reputation for publishing innovative fiction, poetry, insightful essays and reviews of new literary books. Its annual 100 Notable African Books list continues to spotlight the most impactful African literature being published.

Other online magazines such as *Isele*, *Lolwe*, *Doek!*, *Omenana*, *Open Country*, *Johannesburg Review of Books*, *Agbowó*, *Ibua Journal* and *Afreada* are also platforms for new writers to be published and win awards. Their contributors are for the most part authors at the beginning of their writing careers. The journals are mostly free to read but only a small number of these publications pay writers for their contributions.

## Social media distribution

WhatsApp is one of the most popular instant messaging platforms in Sub-Saharan Africa and is fast becoming a central part of the new literary economy. In fact, the platform has proven to be an incredibly helpful tool for digital marketing and distribution channels for publishers. For example, a group of African publishers came together to set up a WhatsApp group that serves as a ‘book farm’, which helps them to share information about newly-available books and sell books to one another. In Zimbabwe, many self-published authors are using WhatsApp groups to market and sell their books.



According to the report, 'Audience measurement and industry trends report Quarter 2 FY 2023–2024' produced by the Communications Authority of Kenya, Facebook and WhatsApp also stand out as the top social media platforms in the country. It is a similar scenario in the other countries studied.

## Alternative practices

Our findings show that innovation is not limited to the creation of new digital products. The publishing and literature sectors have also innovated by reviving long-standing traditions, like branded merchandise and the trading of used books.

In Kenya, Half Priced Books mainly deals in used books that are sold at discounted prices. The sale of used books has allowed more people to be able to acquire books they would not normally be able to afford. Half Priced Books also gives back to the community and have so far donated more than 50,000 books to 127 institutions across Kenya's 47 counties including NGOs, school libraries and community libraries.

In Nigeria, online magazine *Agbowo* sells branded merchandise themed after their issues. Comic Republic offers consultancy services to corporate clients who want to do narrative storytelling. In Kenya, the Soma Nami bookstore also sells coffee and wine, curates a book box subscription service and runs a book club.

Trade bodies are also encouraging innovation in the sector. In 2019, the International Publishers Association (IPA) and Dubai Cares, a development non-profit based in the United Arab Emirates, partnered to create the Africa Publishing Innovation Fund. The fund provided US\$800,000 over a four-year period to promote book access, literacy, indigenous publishing and library restoration in Africa. Book Bunk, a project to renovate Nairobi's McMillan Memorial Library, received a US\$50,000 grant for work on the library's Kaloleni branch as part of the inaugural award.

Prize culture plays an important role in rewarding innovative storytelling. The UK-based Caine Prize for African Writing was established in 2000 to reward a published short story by an African writer based in any part of the world. The winner of this prize is usually awarded GB£10,000. Similarly, the Miles Morland Writing Scholarships – also founded in the UK – have been awarded to African authors since 2013 with the aim of allowing each scholar the time to produce the first draft of a completed book. The scholars writing fiction usually receive a grant of GB£18,000. The Safal-Cornell Kiswahili Prize for African Literature was founded in 2014 to recognize writing in African languages and encourage translation from, between and into African languages. It has a total prize fund of US\$15,000. Additional literary prizes exist in the six countries that are the focus of this report. However, such prizes are often restricted to citizens of these countries.

In 2024, Afreximbank (African Export–Import Bank) announced the launch of the CANEX Prize for Publishing in Africa, a partnership between the CANEX Book Factory and Nigeria's Narrative Landscape Press. According to organisers, US\$20,000 will be awarded to the publisher of the best trade book in Africa, while four finalists will each receive US\$2,000. Prizes will be awarded based on the quality of writing, editing and production, with priority given to books printed in Africa as well as books published in indigenous African languages. The CANEX Prize for Publishing is similar to the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa which ran from 1980–2009 to reward outstanding African writers and publishers on the continent. Winners of this annual prize received US\$10,000.

# How Publishing Creates Connections

Our findings indicate that publishing and literature sectors have three main ways of creating connections: book events, trade associations and social media.

Across the six countries studied, these connections help open doors to new opportunities, provide access to resources and build strong networks of support. With the right relationships in place, publishing businesses are better positioned for profitability and longevity. Connecting with other like-minded entrepreneurs fosters a sense of support that can help see struggling businesses through difficult times.

## Book events

One of the ways of establishing connections in the publishing industry is through events such as literary festivals and book fairs. These events bring together a diverse range of industry participants including publishers, writers, literary agencies, readers, printers and policymakers.

This research notes that book fairs in and outside of Africa continue to attract a wide variety of stakeholders in the publishing ecosystem. By exhibiting at a book fair, publishers can draw attention to their books and authors. Importantly, these fairs enable players to explore business opportunities and keep up with changing trends in the book industry.

The Nigeria Book Fair Trust brings together players in the production of print, audio and digital books from across the country at its annual Nigeria International Book Fair (NIBF). Similarly, the Ghana and Nairobi International Book Fairs are annual events that bring together local and international book industry stakeholders.

In 2023, the Nairobi International Book Fair introduced the first-ever 'Rights Café', attracting participants from Kenya and other countries with the goal of creating a 'content market' for African writing. One of the main takeaways from the 'Rights Café' was that more publishers

in Africa need to expand their literary fiction and nonfiction lists as the first step towards generating more business-to-business deals among authors, publishers and booksellers in Africa and worldwide.

The growth of SSA's book festivals has been extraordinary, especially in the last decade. These literary festivals have created connections in fresh and unexpected ways. For instance, the 2022 the Aké Arts and Book Festival in Nigeria hosted the Global Association of Literary Festivals conference. It was an opportunity for literary festival directors from across the world to gather in SSA for networking and discussion.

In Ghana, Pa Gya! A Literary Festival in Accra engages all literary forms – fiction, poetry, spoken-word, comic and graphic novels, creative nonfiction, literary blogging – while offering booksellers, publishers and independent authors space to showcase their works. In South Africa, Time of the Writer Festival, Poetry Africa Festival and Open Book Festival are some of the literary festivals that are connecting writers and readers.

Some festivals have also been established to foster connections in the African diaspora. In 2023, the inaugural Zimbabwean Book Festival was held in the UK. Africa Writes festival, organised by the Royal African Society and the British Library, is another annual UK event that celebrates literature from Africa and the diaspora.

## Trade associations

Many publishing entrepreneurs build strong connections with the sector through trade associations/bodies. All the countries in the study sample have a specialist association that brings businesses together to find solutions to their common problems, serving as a united front for lobbying and advocacy. However, very few trade publishers are usually members of these associations. The Nigerian Publishers Association (NPA), established in 1965, serves as the collective voice of publishers in Nigeria. The Kenyan equivalent is the Kenyan Publishers Association (KPA), which also organises the Nairobi International Book Fair.

Some pan-African associations have also emerged to help publishing entrepreneurs forge connections among themselves. African Publishers Network (APNET) is an Accra-based nonprofit that was established in 1992 to bring

together national publishers' associations and publishing communities to strengthen indigenous publishing throughout Africa. In 2023, APNET partnered with the Ghana Publishers Association to host the African Publishers Symposium on the sidelines of the Ghana International Book Fair on the theme, 'Understanding Publishing Agreements'. The same year, APNET hosted a collective stand in collaboration with the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair to represent African publishers with a group display of African publications.

## Social media

In SSA, the growing power and reach of social media now make it possible for online communities to be formed regardless of physical location. Our research suggests that active communication between publishers and readers is very important for building brand loyalty to the writer. Social media platforms enable the various stakeholders to connect with each other, discover new players and engage in collaborative work – from writing and publishing to marketing.

A younger generation of African book enthusiasts is becoming more visible on social media. Known as 'bookstagrammers' on Instagram, they are a part of a literary community that posts reading challenges, new titles and reviews. Initiatives such as the Kenya Readathon also establish a connection with their audience by sharing a love of books on social media. In Nigeria, literary organisation Book O' Clock has hosted a number of book chats with award-winning authors on social media.

During the Covid-19 lockdowns, social media became a lifeline for publishing professionals and others in the creative sectors to connect with one another. For example, South African author Zukiswa Wanner created the #TogetherAtHome series featuring African writers. The series led to the birth of @AfrolitSansFrontières, a virtual festival that took place on Instagram and Facebook Live featuring 16 writers from across SSA, including Leye Adenle, Rémy Ngamije, Maaza Mengiste, Mukoma wa Ngũgĩ, Nozizwe Cynthia Jele and Abubakar Adam Ibrahim.



# How Publishing Contributes to the Creative Economy

The creative economy has become a sector of growing social and economic significance across SSA, with policymakers spurring investment in several ways.

In Zimbabwe, the government launched the country's Culture and Creative Industries Strategy to guide the development and growth of the cultural and creative industries sector from 2020 to 2030.

The South African Cultural and Creative Industry Awards (CCIA) is a new award that honours the creative community with the aim of inspiring and creating a vibrant nation. It specifically has a Literary Works Category that celebrates outstanding writers and publishers.

In Nigeria, the government has partnered with the African Development Bank (AfDB), Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and Agence Française de Développement (AFD) to launch the US\$617 million Investment in Digital and Creative Enterprises (IDICE) fund, set to commence disbursements in 2024 (Anyanwu, 2024). The Nigerian government is also revamping the National Theatre in Lagos, turning it into the central hub of a new Lagos Creative & Entertainment Centre with dedicated spaces for film, fashion, music and IT.

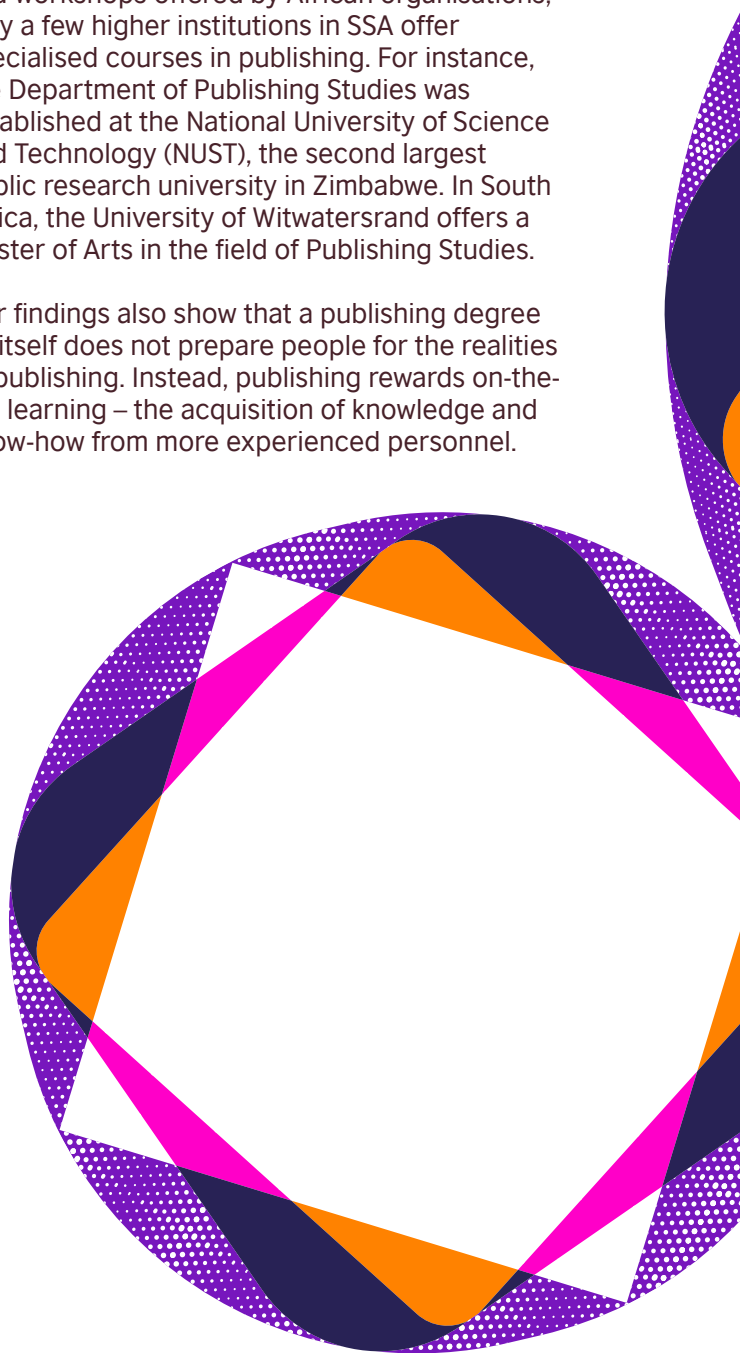
The Creative Economy is a growing source of employment in many Sub-Saharan African countries. According to a report by Jobberman and Mastercard Foundation, Nigeria's creative industry has the potential to produce 2.7 million jobs by 2025. The report also suggests that the creative industry is set to become the country's second-largest employer, contributing five trillion Naira to the country's GDP. Publishing contributes an estimated 29.8 billion Naira to the nation (Jobberman Nigeria, 2021).

## Skills development

Publishing attracts people from other industries who often bring their unique skills with them. However, our research highlights the skilling difficulties faced by publishing entrepreneurs in SSA and the solutions they are deploying to address workforce development in a time of accelerating change.

While creative writing courses are more accessible than ever, with diverse programmes and workshops offered by African organisations, only a few higher institutions in SSA offer specialised courses in publishing. For instance, the Department of Publishing Studies was established at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), the second largest public research university in Zimbabwe. In South Africa, the University of Witwatersrand offers a Master of Arts in the field of Publishing Studies.

Our findings also show that a publishing degree by itself does not prepare people for the realities of publishing. Instead, publishing rewards on-the-job learning – the acquisition of knowledge and know-how from more experienced personnel.









# GHANA



# Publishing Landscape

In September 2021 UNESCO announced the selection of Accra, Ghana as UNESCO World Book Capital for 2023, citing the city's 'strong focus on young people and their potential to contribute to the culture and wealth of Ghana' (UNESCO, 2023). UNESCO was also evidently impressed by the fact that the proposal submitted by the city sought to 'use the power of books to engage these young people, as an effective way of skilling up the next generation.' (UNESCO, 2023).

Accra became the 23rd city to hold the title since the World Book Capital programme was established in 2001. The programme aims to promote the culture of reading and spread the Network's principles throughout all age groups and demographics, both domestically and internationally. Cities selected as UNESCO World Book Capitals engage in various cultural initiatives (UNESCO, 2023).

According to Ghana's President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, Accra's successful bid for the 2023 designation was a recognition of the outstanding efforts being made by Ghana and Africa to grow the book and creative industries (UNESCO, 2023).

Unfortunately, 2023 also happened to be the year of the passing of Ama Ata Aidoo, one of the most important writers to come out of Ghana and Africa and the first published female African dramatist (her play *The Dilemma of a Ghost* was published in 1965 by UK publisher Longman). Ama Ata Aidoo's death provoked an outpouring of grief on traditional and social media across Africa and the world. In a tribute published in the *Guardian*, Lyn Innes – Emeritus Professor of Postcolonial Literatures at the University of Kent – noted that Aidoo's 'plays, short stories, novels

and essays explored the experiences of women in contemporary Africa, both rural and urban – women who are remarkable for their spirit, humour, and resilience.' (Innes, 2023).

From 1990 and 2002, when the imprint closed, Heinemann's African and Caribbean Writers Series was edited by Nana Ayebia-Clarke, a Ghanaian based in the UK. In 2003 she founded Ayebia Publishing, which in 2006 published *African Love Stories: An Anthology* edited by Ama Ata Aidoo.

There is a growing interest in Ghanaian fiction in the UK and the West in general. In 2023 Bloomsbury republished *This Earth, My Brother*, by renowned Ghanaian writer, Kofi Awoonor. Younger British-Ghanaian authors like Caleb Azumah Nelson, Derek Owusu, Maame Blue, Nii Ayikwei Parkes, Victoria Adukwei Bulley and Michael Donkor have emerged onto the international scene, exploring Ghanaian culture in works primarily published outside Ghana.

According to the International Publishers Association, Ghana registered a total of 2,000 ISBNs in 2023 (International Publishing Data, 2023). The country also recorded a total of 1389 legal deposits – of these, 1137 were books and 252 e-books (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2023).

Few literary awards exist in Ghana. The Ghana Association of Writers (GAW) Literary Awards were first held in August 1987. The awards were created to honour, celebrate, inspire and promote outstanding Ghanaian literary talent. Since their establishment, the GAW Literary Awards have grown to become the largest literary awards in the country.

The Abena Korantemaa Oral History Prize is a unique award given to a woman 65 years of age or older who narrates an oral history. The competition accepts submissions of 15–25 minute recordings of an oral history narration. The recording may be done using a voice

Name	Year founded	Genre	Frequency
Ghana Association of Writers Literary Awards	1987	Various	Annually
Kofi Awoonor Literary Prize	2016	Various	Biennially
Abena Korantemaa Prize for Oral History	2021	Oral literature	Annually

**Figure 5: Notable literary awards in Ghana**

recorder, a mobile phone, a computer or other recording device. The story may be in English or a Ghanaian language.

The Kofi Awoonor Literary Prize was created in memory of Professor Kofi Awoonor, a Ghanaian poet, writer and scholar. The prize alternates between poetry, prose and essays.

## Some key players

In 1975, the government of Ghana approved the establishment of the Ghana Book Development Council (GBDC) as an operating agency under the Ministry of Education and Culture. The members of this Council are drawn from the Ministry of Education and Culture, University of Ghana, Ghana Publishers Association, Ghana Booksellers Association, Representative of Ghana Library Services, Representative of Ministry of Information, Representative of Ghana National Commission for UNESCO, Representative of Ministry of Trade and Tourism, and Representative of Ministry of Industries.

On its website, the GBDC lists a total of 119 publishers operating in Ghana – slightly more than figures quoted by the International Publishers Association report. More than 90 per cent of these publishers are focused on the education market. The GBDC list is not however a comprehensive one as it does not include some of the country's newer publishers. Established publishers listed include Adwinsa Publications (founded in 1977 and specialising in textbooks, novels and children's supplementary readers for schools) and Afram Publications, one of the largest indigenous publishing houses in the country.

Tampered Press is an independent publisher which publishes the work of emerging and practicing writers and visual artists. The organisation came out of a conversation about giving writers and visual artists in Ghana and Africa a dedicated forum for publishing.

The Contemporary Ghanaian Writers Series (CGWS) aims to support literary development and talent discovery through the publication of works by emerging writers, especially those of Ghanaian heritage. CGWS' first anthology, *To Grow in Two Bodies* was released in 2019 (Akadi Magazine, 2020). Since then, three additional anthologies have been published. CGWS' mission statement is 'Growing Ghana's Literary Space.'

The Ghana Association of Writers (GAW) – founded in 1957, the year Ghana gained independence from Britain – hosts the Ghana Association of Writers Book Festival (GAWBOFEST), bringing together various stakeholders in the book industry to celebrate books, reading, writing, storytelling and creativity (Venitsanopoulos, 2020).

GAW also organises the Ghana Association of Writers Literary Awards, first held in 1987, to honour Ghanaian literary excellence across various genres, including fiction (novel and short stories), spoken-word, poetry, writing for children, creative nonfiction and Ghanaian language work (Venitsanopoulos, 2020).

The Pan African Writers Association (PAWA) based in Accra works across 45 countries on the continent, supporting writers and collaborating with entities such as the World Organisation of Writers (WOW). Similar collaborative endeavours are in the pipeline with other stakeholders such as the Association of African Universities and the Arabic Writers Union, to support book translations. An agreement was reached at the African Union for African countries to pay annual contributions to support the activities of PAWA (Pan-African Writers' Association, 2020). PAWA was established in 1989, during the presidency of Jerry Rawlings. Upon agreeing to host the Association, Ghana donated a secretariat to the association, located in Accra. The Ghanaian government has also been assisting with the payment of some of the staff salaries.

Larajah is an Accra-based publisher that works with authors to ensure that their writing travels beyond the pages of their books and connects with audiences in communities around the world. Larajah sees itself as a cultural institution that serves society not only with the books it publishes, but also through initiatives to boost reading, literacy and creativity.

Wordplayce is a bookshop that also organises reading clubs for adults and children. It is known for its extensive stock of African romance novels, written by authors across Africa.

Based in Accra, Booksie is an online bookstore that describes itself as 'a love letter to African children on the continent and in the diaspora.' It hosts books clubs, public speaking and creative writing courses.

The Library of Africa and The African Diaspora (LOATAD) was established in Accra in 2017. The cultural institution is committed to gathering, conserving and promoting literature by authors of African ancestry. LOATAD is home to almost 4,000 books. The library also features areas for live music performances, film screenings, workshops and writing residencies (Hamel, 2024).

The comics market in Ghana is enjoying rapid growth, fuelled by the proliferation of digital platforms and evolving storytelling techniques. Leti Arts was founded to bring an authentic Africa to a worldwide audience, through games and digital comics. The organisation celebrates the continent's vast histories, folklore and cultures, reimagining them against a contemporary backdrop to prove that African-created content has an essential place on the global stage.

## Rights and representation

As with most of Africa, literary agents are a rarity in Ghana. Respondents acknowledge that the absence of agents in the country has had a limiting impact on rights sales and that greater access to international markets is needed to grow the sector.

However, some Africa-focused agencies based in Europe continue to serve authors from Ghana, particularly those writing for young readers. UK-based Accord Literary is one example, working through writing workshops/retreats, school outreach and open submissions to discover and develop a new generation writing for children and young adults between the ages of 8 and 16. The organisation draws on a wide network of publishing industry contacts across the world. Its goal is to help selected writers develop their work for sale to international publishers. Also based in Europe, the Africa Literary Agency works with authors in the country to sell their books abroad.

With the rise of digital content, navigating the management of digital rights can be a complex and daunting task for publishers in Ghana. There are many legal and technical issues to consider, including copyright infringement, licensing agreements and digital piracy. Leti Arts has built capacity in this space and is able to ensure that agreements with creators and partners are mutually beneficial.

Depending on the project, rights may be held by the creators or by the publishing house. Leti Arts handles transactions directly or through agents, especially for international collaborations. The goal is to strike a delicate balance between giving creators control over their work and making their creations accessible to a wider audience.

## Distribution, marketing and sales

In terms of marketing, social media is a popular choice for the study's respondents, with WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram regularly used to promote new titles. Such channels are the most effective in targeting their key audiences. More traditional forms of marketing such as exhibitions and radio jingles are still used by some respondents, but social media is now the most common marketing channel.

## Funding

Many respondents disclosed that revenue from content sales is their primary source of income. A few also actively pursue grants from funding organisations that align with their mission to promote diverse storytelling and creativity. Crowdfunding is another avenue that has been explored.

.....

We sometimes turn to crowdfunding to finance specific projects or expansions. This multi-pronged approach helps us maintain financial stability while remaining true to our values and mission. A publisher

.....

Ghana has a long-standing tradition of funding community projects with support from the public, much like commercial crowdfunding services. Contributions to crowdfunding initiatives in the country can be made via mobile money wallets as well as on websites. Boateng (2023) suggests that when used within the proper innovative and regulatory framework, crowdfunding has immense potential as a substitute finance option to solve local financial shortfalls. The private sector crowdfunding



providers in Ghana have tested new financing methods to support small businesses, thanks to funding and technical assistance provided by international bodies such as the United Nations (Boateng, 2023).

## Publishing in indigenous languages

The Bureau of Ghana Languages is a Ghanaian government agency with the mandate to preserve and support writing and publishing in – and usage of – all of Ghana’s indigenous languages including: Akuapem-Twi, Mfantse, Asante-Twi, Nzema, Ga, Ewe, Dagbani, Gonja, Dangme, Dagaare and Kasem (Bureau of Ghana Languages, 2022). While most of the support is focused on academic texts, there is some backing for literature.

The Adzawutor Enterprise specialises in publishing poetry in the Ewe language. The Ghana-based PAWA, which represents 45 African countries, encourages the publishing of literature in indigenous languages. Even with the official support for promoting and preserving native languages, most of Ghana’s literature is still published in English.

There’s a lot of publishing in local languages, in indigenous languages. It tends to be at the very youngest level. It doesn’t tend to go into longer novels so much, but [is focused on] shorter stories, often folktales and folklore. An agent

”

## General challenges

Adapting to changing consumer preferences is a constant struggle for some respondents in Ghana. In today’s fast-paced market, readers have a wide range of options for entertainment and information and preferences can shift rapidly. This means that publishers must stay in tune with trends and be flexible with their business models.

Other challenges identified by respondents are linked to economic constraints such as the costs of living and doing business, including high taxation, especially on the imported materials needed for book production. Publishers and other stakeholders often have limited access to finance. The Covid-19 pandemic complicated these fiscal difficulties.

Human resource problems such as limited professional skills and management capabilities were also cited by respondents. Women-owned businesses tend to be impacted by these challenges to an even greater degree. Asante (2023) argues that the social, cultural, economic, political, demographic and institutional constraints that face female entrepreneurs in Ghana prevent them from being equipped for the world of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneur, Sylvia Arthur, who founded the Library of Africa and the African Diaspora (LOATAD), said people were waiting for her to fail, ‘not necessarily because they’re bad people but because they thought it’s a library and what crazy person would open a library in Ghana and expect it to succeed?’ (Hamel, 2024). Sylvia Arthur has since established three school and community libraries in various regions of Ghana, including an eco-library, with support from an Austrian architectural organisation. LOATAD now runs a West African Writers Residency Programme, supported by the European Union (Hamel, 2024). With the right support, many female entrepreneurs in Ghana can thrive.

It was widely noted by respondents that the cost of producing books limits readers’ ability to access literature and makes it difficult for publishers to remain profitable. Also, due to the limited capacity of local printers to keep up with the demands of local publishers, printing is sometimes outsourced abroad which adds to costs.

The range of publishers supporting literary works in Ghana is limited, which means reduced availability of fiction. The idea that the public is not interested in reading for leisure is frequently referenced as the reason why academic publishing dominates compared to literary publishing.



.....

Most people would rather spend money on anything but books, except where needed for academic purposes. A bookseller

.....

The availability of book shops is higher in Accra, the seat of government and the country's commercial hub, than other cities. In the capital, shops offer wider selections of domestic and international titles that are not available in rural areas.

*There are about three or four really wonderful bookshops in Accra – and they know how to get books. They buy books internationally, from the UK and US and they're good booksellers, but outside of that fairly tight circuit, there isn't that much flexibility.* An agent

## How Publishing Creates Connections

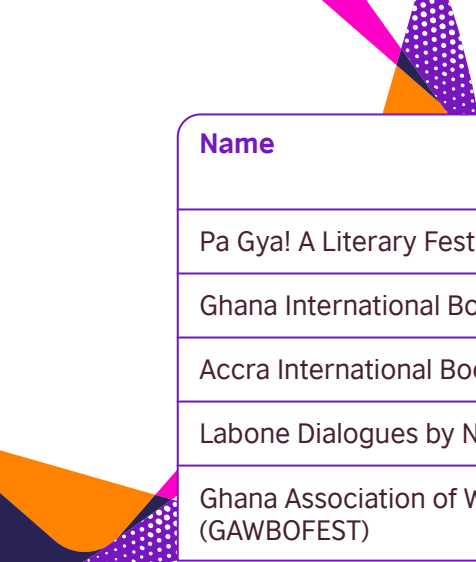
Book events in Ghana provide an opportunity for entrepreneurs to engage and connect with one another. Most of these events occur in Accra. Respondents also acknowledge that attending book fairs and literary festivals is an important part of their work and can bring many benefits, including increased sales, expanded networks and new audiences.

The connections made at festivals also help entrepreneurs stay up-to-date on the latest trends and developments in the global publishing industry. These collaborations lead to increased understanding and appreciation of diverse literary works, as well as greater recognition and visibility for African stories on the international stage.

.....

“ We believe that by working with other markets in Africa and the UK, we not only gain valuable insights into their cultural and literary traditions, but also create a richer and more diverse body of work for our readers. Joint projects allow us to exchange ideas, learn from each other's experiences, and create stories that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. Industry conferences and cultural exchanges are fantastic opportunities for us to network with other professionals in the industry and build relationships that lead to meaningful collaborations. A publisher

.....



Name	Frequency	Duration	Attendance (estimated)
Pa Gya! A Literary Festival in Accra	Annually	Three days	Over 1500
Ghana International Book Fair	Annually	Four days	16,000
Accra International Book Festival	Annually	Four days	Over 1000
Labone Dialogues by NYU Accra	Annually	Four days	Over 1000
Ghana Association of Writers Book Festival (GAWBOFEST)	Annually	Two days	Over 1000

**Figure 6: Notable literary events in Ghana**

Labone Dialogues by NYU Accra was conceived and curated by Chike Frankie Edozien, for the New York University (NYU) campus in Labone, Accra. Designed to promote important conversations on politics, society, business, the environment, education and other topics, the event brings together professionals from a range of backgrounds, with audiences drawn from NYU Accra students and the general public (Sam, 2023). The 11th edition of the Labone Dialogues took place in October 2023 and ‘saw many African authors reclaiming the narrative, challenging stereotypes and, more crucially, placing the African continent at the centre of their stories’ (Sam, 2023).

One of the most important annual publishing gatherings in Ghana is the Ghana International Book Fair (GIBF). Its 20th edition coincided with Accra’s designation as 2023 World Book Capital. The 20th GIBF was held with the theme, ‘Reading to connect minds for social transformation.’ A total of 96 exhibitors – 83 local and 13 foreign – attended the fair (Oppong, 2023). Overseas attendees came from Guinea, Spain, India, the

United Arab Emirates, Ireland, Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria. Organisers recorded a total of around 16,000 participants during the four-day period (Oppong, 2023).

Other notable publishing-related events in Ghana include the Ghana Association of Writers Book Festival, the Ghana International Book Fair and Pa Gya! A Literary Festival in Accra. Many respondents report connections made at these fairs and festivals have resulted in a variety of collaborations.

*We have collaborated with some NGOs abroad, but it’s usually through their offices in Ghana. We have worked with some children publishers in the UK and an award-winning children’s EdTech and media company from London. A bookseller*

Some respondents disclosed being members of the Ghana Publishing Association and attending meetings with the Association, the GBDC and other stakeholders, to discuss matters relating to the book industry and publishing.

# How Publishing Drives Innovation

In 2023, Bookmate, a subscription-based e-book service, launched in Ghana in partnership with telecommunications multinational MTN. The collaboration ensures that MTN's mobile phone customers can pay for their Bookmate subscriptions using their mobile credit. Bookmate CEO Andrew Baev said, 'The growing popularity of e-books makes this partnership [with MTN] timely.' (Williams, 2023). Given the increasing ease with which transactions can be completed via a mobile device, fintech solutions such as 'mobile money' have the potential to greatly benefit publishers.

A Ghana Digital Innovation Week was hosted in Accra in 2023 with the support of the Digital Transformation Centre Ghana. At the event, Ghana's Deputy Minister of Communications and Digitalisation said she was greatly inspired by the growing culture of innovation in the country. 'Our commitment to harnessing the power of technology for the betterment of our society is unwavering.' (The Ministry of Communications and Digitalisation, 2023).

The publishing sector in Ghana has been exploring innovation in digital publishing through collaboration. One highlight at the 20th edition of the Ghana International Book Fair was a workshop focused on e-book publishing. Facilitated by the GBDC with the support of the Ghana International Book Fair, it was organised specifically for authors, publishers, self-publishers, designers and marketers. The session focused on the e-book publishing process, key features of e-books and considerations before producing an e-book (Oppong, 2023).

Respondents to this study have enthusiastically embraced the opportunities that new

technologies offer, such as the ability to experiment with different storytelling formats. Respondents also suggest that feedback from readers has been overwhelmingly positive about new formats. Overall, many believe that the future of publishing in Africa lies, to a significant extent, in embracing digital platforms and immersive and interactive storytelling. Immersive storytelling uses new technologies like virtual reality and 360-degree videos to 'immerse' audiences into the world of the story, making them part of the narrative in a way that feels very real.

Driven by a passion for pushing the boundaries of traditional storytelling, Leti Arts creates online comics and mobile games inspired by African folklore. Their first game, Africa's Legends, is available for free download and is popular with audiences in Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and some parts of the US and the UK. By embracing digital platforms and interactive storytelling techniques (drawing on animation, sound effects, etc.) it offers readers a unique and engaging experience that goes beyond reading comics.

A 2022, Pan African Writers conference organised by PAWA focused on the role of technology in African literature, with experts invited from around the world to speak. PAWA has also collaborated with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to organise a workshop on technology and copyright issues.

Many publishing entrepreneurs appreciate the benefits of innovation, which help them to reach new customers, find new revenue sources, and stay ahead of competition. Booksie introduced theatre productions where drama books are performed for young audiences. In its online store, books are available in various African languages. The store offers worldwide shipping of titles and delivers within three to seven days. Titles are sourced from publishers, as well as self-published authors.

# How Publishing Supports the Creative Economy

The social and economic benefits of creativity are becoming widely recognised in Ghana, where it's evident that publishing enterprises are an engine for economic growth and employment. President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo has pledged his government's support for the country's creative industry. According to the president: 'The creative arts industry is not just a cultural asset, it is an economic powerhouse with far-reaching societal impacts.' (Ekufful and Sambou, 2023).

Respondents to this study also identified their contributions to job creation.

Our team of over 25 full-time employees and interns is dedicated to not only creating engaging content but also contributing to the economic and creative growth of our community. A publisher

*We have four full-time staff and eight part-time. A Bookseller*

Accra's designation by UNESCO as World Book Capital for 2023 delivered some significant benefits to the country, including:

- A new project to promote Ghanaian books across the country, supported by the Mmofra Foundation. This initiative involves publicising notable quotations and excerpts from books by distinguished Ghanaian authors, through mobile billboards in various communities in Accra (Accra World Book Capital, 2024).
- According to the Resident Representative of UNFPA, Dr Wilfred Ochan in a statement presented on behalf of UNESCO, 'being

designated as World Book Capital 2023 by UNESCO has enabled Accra, and more broadly Ghana, to gain visibility across the globe for its efforts to improve the lives of its citizens through the power of books and reading', (United Nations Ghana, 2024).

- Over 10,000 books were distributed through the Books-to-Go Projects and the African Story Box Project to increase access to stories and ignite the passion for reading (United Nations Ghana, 2024).
- The Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) allocated five acres of land for the proposed Accra World Book Capital Legacy Project. According to the mayor of AMA, 'This project is expected to provide space for utilisation by book writers and other related professionals to promote writing, and reading'. (United Nations Ghana, 2024).
- A Metadata in Book Publishing workshop organised by the GBDC in collaboration with Frankfurter Buchmesse, Germany. The workshop introduced participants – drawn from diverse fields, including librarians, publishers and authors – to the fundamentals of metadata and its practical use in Ghana, showing how it can be used to improve book sales (Ghana Book Development Council, 2023). The rising popularity of e-books has amplified the need for publishers and self-published authors to learn how to generate high-quality metadata that will increase the visibility of their works online.

Fiona Green, Senior Metadata Manager at Bloomsbury, explains that metadata stimulates the discovery and purchase of e-books by booksellers, online retailers, librarians, academics, students and general readers. 'From the price, publication date, format and extent to the author biography, description, table of contents and jacket cover, each item of data has a specific field in Bloomsbury's own database, which in turn feeds the databases of the vendors we sell through and furnishes their virtual shop windows.' (Green, 2023). Increasing skills and capacity in metadata will help Ghanaian publishers to sell more books, and ultimately increase the publishing sector's contributions to the creative economy.

## Skills publishing entrepreneurs need to succeed

Certain skills are crucial in unlocking the potential of the publishing and literature sectors in Ghana. Respondents identified some of those skills as ranging from publishing expertise to general business, administration and logistics skills, and soft skills such as storytelling. There is also a view that knowledge of rights buying and selling, as well as of intellectual property (IP), needs to be broadened and deepened if the sector is to reach its full potential.

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To thrive in the publishing industry, “one must balance a range of skills and competencies. On one hand, you need creativity and storytelling abilities to develop compelling content. On the other hand, you must also possess business skills, such as marketing, content curation, and rights management, to make that content discoverable and profitable. In the digital age, skills in digital marketing and content distribution are particularly crucial for reaching audiences and expanding your reach. A publisher

.....

*It is important to have logistics skills so you know how to do shipping to customers. You need to understand inventory management. You need to know how many copies of books to buy. When you buy books from abroad, you need to understand how many to stock. You need marketing skills. You also need finance skills – money management.*

*If you start bootstrapping like myself, and you don't have a lot of money, it may stall your growth a while. A Publisher*

As founder of LOATAD Sylvia Arthur argues, many books in Ghana's libraries are sourced from Western donors. Unfortunately, such books are not relevant to many people in the country (Hamel, 2024). Similarly, Elizabeth Johnson (a writer and literary producer) believes that Ghana is struggling to build a trade publishing industry. She points out that 'Ghana lacks a healthy number of literary agents, editors, translators and publishers who are interested in literary work rather than just textbooks for schools.' (Johnson, 2022). To help change the narrative, Johnson coordinates projects and communications for The Writers Project of Ghana and oversees their yearly literary festival Pa Gya! She also produced the inaugural Womanfest Ghana festival, which is organised by LOATAD.

Ghana has a few institutions offering courses in publishing and creative writing that could help support the sector. The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology offers both a BA and an MA in publishing, run by the department of Publishing Studies. Publishing Law, Editorial Production, and New Title Development Project are some of the modules taught in the BA Publishing Studies programme. The department of Publishing also offers short courses in book production, book marketing and publishing management. Publishing company Larajah has a yearly internship scheme with this institution, where students are given the opportunity to learn and develop their skills. 2024 marks 40 years since the publishing studies programme was established. The University of Ghana also offers an Introduction to Creative Writing course for undergraduate students.

Aside from higher education institutions, some private entities also run publishing-related programmes. The Creative Writing Academy in Accra offers courses such as How to Sell Your Script, How to Publish Your Script or Manuscript, and Legal Issues in Writing.



# GHANA

## SPOTLIGHT Writers Project of Ghana

Founded in 2009, Writers Project of Ghana (WPG) is one of the key players in the literary and publishing landscape of Ghana with a range of initiatives that support the growth of the publishing sector.. Given that most of the publishers in Ghana focus on textbooks, WPG is dedicated to helping new writers find their way into the literary publishing community. The organisation has also created new opportunities for emerging illustrators, editors and publishers. Johnson (2022) acknowledges that Ghana's literary sector is not funded locally. Over the past years, WPG has partnered with various international organisations including the British Council, the Goethe Institute, the EU and the Los Angeles Public Library to help grow the literary community in the country.

*Writers Project of Ghana is run through its programmes. The idea was really for each program to have somebody running it. However, because we do not have funding that covers everything, it's still the very same small team, made up of three directors and others who work on project management and administration. The three directors also take on additional duties as required.*

Martin Egblewogbe, Co-founder, WPG

WPG runs the Journal of the Writers Project of Ghana, the Ghana Voices Series and Pa Gya! A Literary Festival in Accra.

### Journal of the Writers Project of Ghana

The Journal of the Writers Project of Ghana (JWPG) publishes original work – poetry, prose, interviews and drama – by emerging and established Ghanaian and African writers. Johnson (2022) suggests the scarcity of publishing houses in Ghana limits access to books. JWPG was created to give a platform for new authors to be heard. The publication champions new art in many forms and shares it with the world.

*[With our] most recent anthology, for example, what we wanted to do was to get a certain type of story. But then, we wanted writers who were just in their early careers and didn't have a firm grasp of writing. We then connected them with editors who are well-established writers from across Africa, and then we let them work with these [early career] writers. So, they spent about two months working on developing the submitted scripts. That's how we developed the most recent anthology. But previous anthologies have just been a straight-forward process: submission, editing, and then we go to press. Martin Egblewogbe, Co-founder, WPG*

## Writers Project on Citi FM

The Writers Project of Ghana (WPG) is one of the few literary organisations in SSA that uses radio to engage in dialogue on various literary developments. Every Sunday evening on the Accra-based Citi FM 97.3, a privately-owned radio station, WPG hosts an hour of literature readings, discussions and updates on literature-related events taking place in Accra and elsewhere. Listeners can access the programme at [citifmonline.com](http://citifmonline.com), either live or via uploaded recordings.

*I think you can call it a Talk Show. We often feature writers doing readings. That's typically what we do. And then we use it as a platform to expose books, writers, and discuss topical items. We also keep an eye on events that are happening locally and outside the country. And then we make announcements as well. So, it's a kind of a magazine programme. But the focus is entirely on literature.* Martin Egblewogbe, Co-founder, Writers Project of Ghana WPG

## The Ghana Voices Series

The Ghana Voices Series is WPG's monthly public reading series which started in 2010. All events are free, open to the public and usually held in person. However, some special events have been held online. In July 2024, WPG and the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL) collaborated on a discussion with Ghanaian writers Elizabeth-Irene Baitie, Nii Ayikwei Parkes and Mamle Wolo. This event took place online and was livestreamed on the LAPL YouTube Channel. Previously, WPG featured UK-based author Caleb Azumah Nelson, who joined virtually to read from his novel, *Small Worlds*.

## Pa Gya! A Literary Festival in Accra

Pa Gya! A Literary Festival in Accra is a three-day literary arts festival in Accra, featuring readings, panel discussions, performances, book launches, literary prize awards, art talks, art and literary exhibitions, film screenings and much more. All literary forms are represented at the festival, including blogging, spoken-word, comic books and graphic novels. Booksellers, publishers and independent writers are also given space at the festival to display and market their works.

*Sometimes we ask them to come to the festival. [Other] times, it's the other way around; the writers and publishers ask us about featuring at the festival. What we also do is that about four months before the festival, each year, we place a call for proposals and people who have interesting ideas they want to share at the festival can submit. We go through [the submissions] and we select a number. So, that's how we get the people for the festival.* Martin Egblewogbe, Co-founder, WPG

In 2023 the British Council supported the festival with a grant to curate activities and sponsor a delegation from SSA and the UK. As well as financial support, the British Council also organised workshops for literary writers and publishers. The sponsorship aimed to enrich the festival experience and promote dialogue, idea-exchange and professional development.

# KENYA



# Publishing Landscape

Veteran Kenyan publisher Henry Chakava, often referred to as ‘the father of Kenyan publishing’ (Muchunguh 2024) in recognition of his immense contributions to literature in Africa, passed away in 2024, closing a central chapter in indigenous Kenyan publishing. There are few people who represent the Kenyan publishing industry as much as Chakava does.

He started out at Heinemann Kenya Limited, the local subsidiary of the UK publishing company, becoming the multinational’s first African editor in 1972. Four years later, he became Managing Director of the Kenyan business, publishing some of the continent’s leading authors, including Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Chinua Achebe, Grace Ogot, Cyprian Ekwensi, Taban Lo Liyong, Okot P’Bitek, and many others through the African Writers Series (Muchunguh, 2024). In 1992, the company transitioned into a wholly indigenous business, changing its name to East African Educational Publishers, where Chakava served as Chairman until his death.

In a tribute, Walter Bgoya, another influential East African publisher from Tanzania noted that, ‘Henry Chakava’s passing is, without a doubt, the end of an era of a protracted struggle by the first generation of post-independence African publishers to locate the African book industry at the centre of policymaking and practices shaping education and the broad domain of culture in our countries’ (Bgoya, 2024)

In 1996, Henry Chakava published *Publishing in Africa: One Man’s Perspective*, an account of his publishing work in Africa. The book noted many challenges facing the industry, while also insisting on the possibility of establishing successful publishing enterprises amid difficult conditions such as poor marketing, sales, and distribution arrangements.

The publishing business in Kenya has evolved over the past decades. The multinational publishers have since been supplanted by indigenous ones, with the major players concentrating on the academic (textbook) market. Only a few focus on publishing fiction, as it is not considered commercially viable.

Self-publishing has become one of the most active routes to publishing literary works in Kenya with writers funding the entire book production process – from editing to cover design – themselves (Mura, 2021). Bgoya (2024) also points out that self-publishers are ‘fostering marginalised fields of knowledge including local language publishing, poetry, and autobiographies.’ Upon publication of their books, self-published authors often organise book launches at various cultural venues across the country, including the Kenyan National Theatre. These launches serve as revenue generating and marketing opportunities. Wallis (2019) has described how publishers can use these events to create networks. Specifically, Wallis argued that book launches provide opportunities for instant connections with the literary community. As Murua (2021) also observes, many of these launches in Kenya take place in Nairobi, the country’s capital.

There are few literary prizes for Kenyan authors. The Text Book Centre Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature is a biennial literary award given by the Kenya Publishers’ Association. The first award ceremony took place in 1974. In 1990, the award was revived with sponsorship from the Text Book Centre, and the first prize was given in 1992. Since 2015, the award’s official name was known as Text Book Centre Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature. Kendeka Prize for African Literature was launched in 2020 by Andrew Maina Kariuki, a Kenyan author, in memory of his late mother Kendeka Nyambura. The Prize aims to support a new breed of writers from Kenya and across the continent.

Name	Year founded	Genre	Frequency
Text Book Centre Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature	1974	Various	Biennially
Kendeka Prize	2020	Various	Annually

**Figure 7: Notable literary awards in Kenya**



## Some key players

Most Kenyan traditional publishers are located in Nairobi, the country's administrative capital and commercial hub, and also home to a sizable expatriate population.

Chakava's East African Educational Publishers was the first multinational publishing firm to enjoy full local ownership. It is one of the leading educational publishers in the region, but also publishes books on culture, literature, drama, and poetry. Oxford University Press (OUP) East Africa Ltd, another renowned educational publisher in Kenya, was established as an editorial and sales office of the Oxford University Press in 1954. It published the now classic *Introduction to East African Poetry* in 1976 (Oxford University Press, n.d.). OUP East Africa also published a Kiswahili dictionary for schools and general use in 1981.

Storymoja is a creative company that publishes a wide range of books, including fiction and textbooks. The organisation has run many reading and writing initiatives for writers and schools. Between 2009 and 2013, in partnership with the Hay Festival (UK), Storymoja organised one of the largest international book festivals on the African continent: Storymoja Hay Festival.

Moran Publishers was established in 2010 after Macmillan Kenya divested from Africa. David Muita, who had been the Managing Director of Macmillan Kenya since 1990, bought the company from the UK parent company. When Moran was founded, the publishing sector in Kenya only had 15 active companies, including the government owned Kenyatta Foundation and Kenya Literature Bureau (Business Daily, 2021). These organisations focused mainly on textbooks due to the government's investment in learning materials for schools. Moran's main focus is educational books, but it also publishes books for leisure and general fiction. Autobiographies are also a specialist line of publishing for the company in Kenya, and in Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia.

In Kenya it is rare to find an entrepreneur performing only one role in the publishing supply chain. For instance, some publishers have been involved in organising literary festivals or book fairs. Some trade publishers also moonlight as booksellers. Soma Nami Books is a bookseller that operates in Nairobi. In addition to offering a well-stocked bookshop, the business also runs a book club and has recently started publishing books. Soma Nami Books was founded in 2021 by two women, Muthoni Muiruri and Wendy Njoroge. Soma Nami won *Brittle Paper's* 2021

Literary Platform of the Year. In 2024, Soma Nami called for short stories celebrating culture for its inaugural Kenyan anthology themed 'Kenya-ness'.

There is a growing interest in illustrative storytelling led by creative studios based in the country. Avandu Vosi, for instance, specializes in telling Kenyan stories through comic books, graphic novels and illustrative art. Founded in 2018 by Salim Busuru, Avandu focusses on turning African mythologies into comics and is reported to have sold more than 6,000 copies in English and Kiswahili (Schipani, 2023). Salim Busuru told the *Financial Times*, 'We started with mythological characters; we cannot really say they are superheroes. We want to tell stories that are from us, set in our culture,' (Schipani, 2023).

In addition to publishers, booksellers are also a key part of the Kenyan publishing landscape. Nuria Bookstore was founded by Abdullahi Bulle in 2015 and initially started as a Facebook page. The bookstore, which has become a haven for self-published authors, now offers a wide range of books in different languages, genres and formats. Other bookstores in the country include Prestige Books, Rafu Books and Text Book Centre, which has branches in many cities, apart from Nairobi.

The library sector is also receiving renewed interest. According to the Kenya National Library, there are 64 public libraries spread across the country. Some charitable organisations have stepped in to increase access to books in the country. Book Bunk was established as a Kenyan nonprofit in 2017, by a writer and publisher duo Wanjiru Koinange and Angela Wachuka, to reclaim and restore the city's public libraries. In 2018, the organisation reached an agreement with the Nairobi City County government to lead the restoration of three libraries: McMillan Memorial Library, Eastlands Library and Kaloleni Library. The objective was to transform these previously exclusive areas into welcoming places where Kenyans would have unlimited access to books, while also participating in artistic and civic endeavours. As of 2022, Book Bunk employed 56 people on full- or part-time basis, and over 8,676 books were acquired for the libraries (Book Bunk Annual Report, 2022).

## Rights and representation

Most publishers in Kenya accept manuscripts directly from local authors. Many respondents confirm that they do not use agents. Often, they deal with literary agencies only when foreign authors are involved.



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We usually contact the authors using our editors, who are given our requirements, and they then pick their preferred authors. We do not usually use agents in this market and it is an issue with getting local authors. However, for international authors we will get in touch with available agents.

### A publisher

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Regarding commissioned books, publishers share intellectual property (IP) rights with authors, but also award them full royalties. Engagements with rights holders sometimes take place during book exhibitions/book fairs, while in other instances negotiations are conducted via email and other virtual channels.

Given the absence of literary agencies in the country, some Kenyan authors have sought representation abroad. For instance, Kiprop Kimutai who won the 2023 Graywolf Press African Fiction Prize, is represented by Peters Fraser + Dunlop, one of the longest-established literary and talent agencies in London. The literary estate of the late Binyavanga Wainaina is represented by The Wylie Agency in New York.

## Distribution, marketing and sales

Nuria Bookstore took up the distribution of Kenyan books for megastore Naivas, in 2023. Naivas is the largest supermarket chain in Kenya, with over 80 outlets. The megastore had previously announced a new initiative to bring books by Kenyan writers to readers in the country. Customers place orders with Nuria by calling or messaging. Nairobi-based orders are eligible for same-day delivery, while the rest of the country gets next-day delivery. In addition, Nuria occasionally ships books outside the country.

Previously, older and more established bookstores rejected self-published books, which led to authors selling their books out of car boots. Since the advent of newer stores such as Nuria, there's been a wider acceptance of self-published titles. In fact, these new businesses have forced older firms to rethink their business models by stocking books by traditional and non-traditional publishers (Murua, 2021).

“ Other respondents in this study acknowledge working with distributors across the country who hold stock and collect payments on their behalf. Some of the publishers have sales agents and distributors in Uganda and in other countries.

E-books are typically distributed through specialist businesses like eKitabu, Snapplify and other online retailers. Headquartered in Kenya, eKitabu develops and publishes content, including accessible books, audio and video.

In terms of marketing, social media has emerged as a medium for the promotion of books in the country. Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) are the two most common social media tools used by publishers and authors (Murua, 2021).

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We largely depend on the digital space for advertising and interacting with our clients.

### A bookseller

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## Funding

There is a consensus among respondents that publishing rarely attracts funding from financial institutions such as banks. Unlike other commercial businesses, publishers haven't been given a chance to prove they can reliably generate revenue to make their loan repayments. Rejected by banks, many respondents turn to bootstrapping – the practice of funding businesses using personal finance. A publishing business that is bootstrapped is one that is created from the ground up with little or no outside funding sources. A major advantage is that bootstrapping does not dilute ownership; entrepreneurs remain sole owners until they decide otherwise.

In addition to the sale of books and merchandise, some of the respondents provide bespoke consulting services to clients. These include advising clients on the writing and publishing process. Many of the consultants work mostly with self-published authors.

Several small publishers are self-funded by a combination of sales revenues and investment from private investors. For the larger publishing firms, the seed capital comes from shareholders, who expect a return on their investment. Some other respondents depend on government contracts for funding.

*We also apply for and if successful, supply government tenders for textbooks. A publisher*

Many of the publishers operating in Kenya primarily serve the needs of the education sector. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) was established by the Kenyan government in 2013 to evaluate and approve the curriculum materials for schools in the country. KICD issues calls for publishers to submit bids for their books to be included in the curriculum. Storymoja, Moran Publishers and East African Educational Publishers are some of the publishers that have been awarded contracts to produce educational books – including literature texts – for schools in Kenya. The Ministry of Education has been involved in purchasing and supplying these books to schools.

The educational publishing sector is therefore directed by the government, who make decisions on the books that are consumed by Kenyan school children. As one respondent explains:

*We submit our manuscripts to the KICD including our prices which the government approves so it becomes very difficult to change prices. Also, the government will only approve and order one book, typically 1.5 million copies, forcing other publishers to try and make it in the market. A publisher*

As a result of the more secure financial footings provided by textbook contracts, many educational publishers are also able to publish books for the general public. These publishers typically commission manuscripts and work with the authors throughout the editorial and production process.

*Such manuscripts are in creative literature: storybooks for children, novellas and short plays for young adults, full-length novels and plays for adults, and poetry targeting the various age sets. A publisher*

## Publishing in indigenous languages

The Kenyan government has driven the growth of indigenous language publishing in the country, starting with making the national language as Kiswahili when the country gained its independence. Kiswahili's status as a national language was maintained by the 2010 Kenyan Constitution, which also made it an official language alongside English (Osore and Midika, 2016). The government is required under

the constitution to ensure that services and information are available to the general public in the two official languages. A major decision by the government to make Kiswahili a compulsory language in schools also led to a rise of Kiswahili literature in the 1990s (Waweru, 2013). Other regions in Kenya have also been allowed to use their local languages as a language of instruction in schools. Without this government endorsement, there would have been very little interest in indigenous language publishing.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Grace Ogot have had a significant and enduring impact on the evolution and establishment of Kenyan literature in indigenous languages. For many years, the two writers have advocated for the proper recognition of indigenous African languages in literature. Grace Ogot wrote short stories in Luo, her native language. In 1962, she attended the famous Conference of African Writers at Makerere University College in Uganda while she was studying nursing there. This literary event inspired Ogot and she accepted the challenge to write books about Kenya (Berrian, 1993). Ngũgĩ started writing in his native language in 1977 and *Devil on the Cross* was his first published novel in Gĩkũyũ. In 2021, his *The Perfect Nine: The Epic of Gikuyu and Mumbi*, became the first book written in an indigenous African language to be longlisted for the International Booker Prize. In 2023, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o published *The Language of Languages*, focused on his writings on translation and African languages.

Respondents in this study acknowledge the tremendous efforts that publishers in Kenya are putting into revitalizing indigenous languages. Indeed, many Kenyan publishers have continued to publish books in Kiswahili and other indigenous languages spoken in the country. In 1981, OUP East Africa published the first edition of *Kamusi ya Kiswahili* Sanifu, a Kiswahili dictionary for schools and general use. This was followed by *Kamusi ya Semi za Kiswahili* (a dictionary of Kiswahili sayings).

East African Educational Publishers (EAEP) has been championing indigenous publishing since its founding. EAEP has published over 360 titles in Kiswahili and more than 100 in other African languages. Indigenous languages publishing contributes 35 per cent of the company's total turnover (Nyariki, 2020).

Respondents to this study confirm that they continue to publish and sell books in indigenous languages.

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We do sell books in other languages, we stock almost all cultural books, we have [books in] Luo, Kamba, Kikuyu and Maasai, among others. A bookseller

We publish books in Kiswahili; We also publish in other African languages spoken in Kenya, Rwanda and Zambia. A publisher

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Indigenous language growth is further boosted by literary prizes that support the preservation and revitalisation of such languages. The Safal-Cornell Kiswahili Prize for African Literature is one of such awards. The prize, formerly known as The Mabati-Cornell Kiswahili Prize for African Literature was founded in 2014 by Dr Lizzy Attree and Dr Mukoma wa Ngũgĩ, with the express goal of recognizing writing in African languages, and encouraging translation from, between, and into African languages. Professor Kyallo Wamitila of the University of Nairobi served as the chair of the judging panel in 2023. Professor Wamitila noted that the entries were numerous and diverse, indicating the abundance of outstanding creative writers in East Africa who write in Kiswahili (Githethwa, 2024). He stated: 'This is something to be grateful about and augurs well regarding the future of Kiswahili literature. The idea to come up with this award, actualise and to sustain it is a major boon to young, aspiring, as well as accomplished authors since it gives them a very good platform to show what they can do' (Githethwa, 2024).

## General challenges

Several respondents describe having difficulty sustaining profit margins in the face of rising printing costs. Cost-of-living increases also affect the purchasing power of consumers, pushing them to prioritise food at the expense of books and other artistic and cultural content.

*Lack of (bank) financing to grow the industry leads to stunted growth. A publisher*

Also, the consumer market for trade publishing in Kenya is believed to be relatively small, discouraging potential investors. Respondents cite a poor reading culture, marked by an obsession with reading only for academic and examination purposes rather than for pleasure.

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Prize-winning Kenyan author and co-founder of the Macondo Literary Festival, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, disagrees with the poor reading culture argument. 'I wish they'd stop repeating tropes that are really untrue,' she said in a media interview. 'There is a deep hunger for reading and a profound reading culture. If you walk the streets of Nairobi, you're going to see people standing around [informal] booksellers where they can rent book time for KSh20 [US\$0.14] an hour. They'll read and perhaps come back the next day to read the next instalment' (Snaije, 2023).

Book piracy – in print and digital formats – is another challenge for publishing businesses. Social media is often awash with offers of free downloads of books, in brazen violation of copyright laws. The Kenya Publishers Association (KPA) has disclosed that publishers in the country are losing up to KSh200 million every year to piracy (Igadwah, 2023). According to the KPA, educational books are the worst hit. In response, the KPA, the Kenya Copyright Board, the Ministry of Education, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, the Anti-counterfeit Agency and the Kenya police launched a joint campaign to tackle the crime (Kenya News Agency, 2022).

Cyber threats to publishing businesses are also being recorded in Kenya. In 2024, Soma Nami Books suffered a targeted cyber-attack on its website, an incident that the business owners said was 'not only a breach of digital security but also a direct assault on the fundamental freedoms of expression, creativity and information' (Ghosh, 2024). Consequently, the business owners decided to make the services that were accessible online on the website unavailable while the authorities conducted their investigations into the attack. The impact of the cyber-attack was not disclosed. However, as previous incidents in the publishing industry have shown, such threats tend to be serious. Over 20,000 published authors in the UK were impacted by a cyberattack on the British Library in 2023. These authors were entitled to compensation under the Payment Lending Rights (PLR) program, which is managed by the Library (Scroxtton, 2024).

Respondents to this study also decried the minimal government support for the sector, especially in trade publishing. This is compounded by a prevailing belief that books should be free, available by donation.

We keep getting hundreds of requests for book donations, especially from politicians, instead of them buying the books to donate to their followers. This mentality has made the public believe that they should be given books free of charge. A publisher cannot sustain their business in a country with such a mentality.

A publisher

Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor suggests that the government's intervention is needed to reduce the cost of book production in the country, and the taxes levied on books. (Snaije, 2023). Several respondents support this view.

*Kenya is one of the few countries in the world that tax paper products, that has [Value Added Tax, VAT] on paper products. This is a big issue. That's why it's cheaper to print elsewhere and bring here. Even with all the import duties and all, it's still cheaper to print abroad. So, we really need to lobby as the publishing sector. We really need to lobby to explain this to policymakers and the legislative framework, so that we do not tax intellectual property, we do not tax knowledge, we do not tax our heritage, we do not tax our identity as a people. A publisher*

The Kenya Publishers Association has previously called on the government to scrap the 16 percent VAT on books. Ahead of the 2023 Nairobi International Book Fair, the chairperson of the Association, Kiarie Kamau said the tax had made books more expensive. He stated: 'even though publishers are benefitting from the government textbook tenders, sales of general reading materials through bookshops have diminished' (Muriuki, 2023).

## How Publishing Drives Innovation

Publishing in Kenya has helped advance various innovative practices, especially around digital formats. Kenya, East Africa's largest economy, is home to a thriving digital economy, and has long been a leader in technological innovation.

“E-commerce has been greatly accelerated by the country's 96 per cent internet penetration rate with 3G or 4G coverage, as well as cutting-edge mobile payment options like MPESA (UNCTAD, 2023).

In 2023, Kenya launched a national e-commerce strategy to strengthen its position as a digital leader in Africa. The country's Ministry of Information, Communications and The Digital Economy and the Ministry of Trade, Investments and Industry developed the strategy, supported by UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD). 'Kenya's e-commerce strategy lays the foundation for trust-building among businesses and consumers, making e-commerce more accessible and beneficial for all, including marginalised groups,' (UNCTAD, 2023).

Respondents to this study agree that several publishers in Kenya have taken advantage of their country's digital infrastructure to digitise their content.

We have a fully-fledged production studio, which we use for book production processes. Our editors and designers therefore use modern technology in the editorial and production processes of book development and packaging.

A publisher

*The e-book is the most popular publishing innovation that we have employed, and we have engaged organisations like e-Kitabu and Snapplify. A publisher*

The government of Kenya appears committed to expanding access to books through technology. In 2023, the Kenya National Library Service (KNLS) officially unveiled the country's inaugural virtual library, VTabu (Kirwa, 2023). More than 200,000 e-books spanning every subject area including fiction are available on VTabu. Additionally, government entities can utilise VTabu for cloud data storage and for digitising important records, images, and maps (Kirwa, 2023). In 2023, July 12 was announced as Kenya's inaugural annual National Reading Day, to promote a culture of reading across the country, ensuring that people, especially young people, do not just read to pass examinations.



Nuria Bookstore overcame mistrust of e-commerce transactions, as well as competition from bigger players in the promotion of local and self-published authors by offering audiobooks through a decentralised platform. On their website, the bookstore has an active book review section where readers provide feedback on the books they have read.

Nuria also runs a WhatsApp group for Kenyan authors. Many of those on the group chats are self-published. Not only does Nuria stock these self-published titles, but the store also enables the authors to monitor sales with their own log-in to the website. In early 2023, Nuria Bookstore announced its 'Top 100 Kenyan Books of 2022'. Unsurprisingly, very few of these titles were published by traditional publishers – a reflection of the state of publishing in the country.

The 2023 NBO Litfest – organised by Book Bunk – deployed several strategies, including developing a website to highlight the event's theme, authors, programme, and festival FAQs. All attendee registration was handled online via Eventbrite. This gave the organisers access to useful audience data, including demographics. There was also active social media engagement, with visual content, polls and teasers shared online ahead of and during the festival. The livestream videos were made available on YouTube for permanent viewing. Innovative practices like these are also being adopted at festivals and fairs across the continent. Importantly, festival directors and curators are ensuring that these events feature something for everyone while celebrating storytelling in all its forms.

The Kenya Readathon project, launched in 2020 by literary activist Lexa Lubanga to honour writing from the country, started as an online series to inspire readers to support bookstores and Kenyan authors. Once a year, fans of Kenyan literature were urged by the organisers to post about their encounters with the works on social media sites. In 2024, the project's organisers adopted a different approach, choosing not to limit the celebration to a single month, but to continue it throughout the year (Murua, 2024).

## How Publishing Creates Connections

Respondents regularly connect and collaborate with other publishers and stakeholders from other parts of Africa and the rest of the world, taking advantage of physical book fairs and publishing events in the region and internationally, as well as internet-enabled platforms, including social media. LinkedIn features quite prominently as a platform for online connection and referrals are common.

*We connect mostly during book festivals, book fairs and book launches. A bookseller*

Through the Nairobi International Book Fair (NIBF), publishers have been able to promote reading culture. The Fair offers stakeholders a platform where they can come together to share and deliberate on issues that affect the publishing industry.

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Through the Nairobi Book Fair, we've been able to show the industry, both here in Kenya and abroad, what is in our country, what we do, what kind of books we're publishing, and what our challenges are. And we're able to deliberate on the way forward.

A publisher

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Leading up to and during the 2023 Nairobi International Book Fair, eKitabu collaborated with the Kenya Publishers Association, the African Publishers Network, and Publishers Without Borders to explore growing business-to-business opportunities in African publishing. The initiative was created in response to the reality of the continent's negligible share of the global market for buying and selling publishing rights, in any language, despite the thriving cultures of reading and writing. For this reason, the fair created a dedicated space, the 'Rights Café,' where rights buyers and sellers met and



Name	Frequency	Duration	Attendance (estimated)
Macondo Literary Festival	Annually	Three days	Over 1000
Nairobi International Book Fair	Annually	Three days	Over 10,000
NBO Literature Festival	Annually	Three days	Over 1,000

**Figure 8: Notable literary events in Kenya**

built relationships. eKitabu invited to the Fair ‘ambassadors’ from across Africa – Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda – and the rest of the world – Argentina, France, Germany, India, Italy, the Netherlands, the UK and the USA. Attendees had opportunities to learn from and connect with one another – reflecting the core values in building community engagement, promoting literacy and sharing knowledge.

The Writers Guild of Kenya connects self-published authors and offers them editorial services. As a Writers Guild member, authors get a chance to self-publish their books and enjoy membership perks, including discounted services, book launch support, and book promotion across social media channels. In 2023 the Writers Guild partnered with the Kenya Publishers Association to exhibit books by self-published authors at the Nairobi International Book Fair. This was the first time there was a coordinated exhibition of self-published books at the fair – an acknowledgement of the growing influence of non-traditional publishing in the country. It was a unique opportunity to celebrate authors who remain largely unknown beyond a small circle of friends and acquaintances.

Some respondents have been able to work with international publishers and other external stakeholders on industry initiatives. There is a general focus on taking books closer to Kenya’s counties for the benefit of local communities.

*We go to the counties and we [provide] more information. We create awareness about publishing, about authorship, and what publishers are. In most cases in Kenya, people think publishers are printers. So we want to make that distinction, and to tell the public at the county*

*level who publishers are, what they do, and what kind of books are on the market. And we’ve had very good engagements in the regions we’ve gone to. A publisher*

Collaborations have also been forged outside the publishing sector. During the 2023 NBO Litfest, due to the limited parking space available at festival sites, a partnership was developed with the taxi app Uber to issue special discount codes to festival attendees. This helped serve as an incentive to attend the events.

There is a strong link between publishers in Kenya and UK organisations. More than 10 publishers currently make use of the UK-based, African-owned African Books Collective (ABC) to distribute their books in the UK. Beyond this network, some publishers have forged other connections. In 2023, creative art studio and publisher Avandu Vosi attended the MCM Comics Conference (MCM Comic Con) in the UK, to explore how the market would receive their products. The comics publisher had previously collaborated with Kugali Media – a Pan-African entertainment corporation with headquarters in the UK – for the sale of their posters on the UK market.

In 2024 Hay Festival Global and Book Bunk announced a new partnership, co-hosting the NBO Litfest and to promoting free expression and cultural exchange. Created by Book Bunk in 2021, NBO Litfest takes place over one weekend in libraries across Nairobi.

# How Publishing Contributes to the Creative Economy

In Kenya, the State Department for Youth Affairs and Creative Economy is in the final stages of producing a draft Creative Economy Policy and a Creative Industries Bill (Kenya News Agency, 2024). The government acknowledges that people who work in the creative industries contribute to the economy by generating jobs and paying taxes as a result of their professional activities. In the proposed Bill, Creative Economy domains are classified under five categories, namely: visual arts, audio-visual and interactive media, performing arts, design, and literary arts.

The role of the publishing industry in promoting the country's literary traditions is particularly noted in the draft bill (Nyamasyo, 2024). It states that the literary arts support creativity and originality through Kenyan authors; help achieve education goals, through the publication of textbooks and research material; and also support the establishment of reliable, relevant, and up-to-date library services in the country. Stakeholders in the country have lauded the government for proposing this bill. Chairperson Investment Committee of the Kenya Cultural Association of Artists said that if adopted, the bill will open up more opportunities for creatives (Kenya News Agency, 2024).

## Skills publishing entrepreneurs need to succeed

In addition to the requisite academic and professional qualifications (editing, marketing, sales, accounting, HR, editing, design and photography), respondents say the industry requires people who are meticulous, good planners, team players and creative/innovative. Broad-mindedness is also a much-valued quality.

Respondents note that stakeholders in the publishing sector are generous with information and open to mentoring fresh talent. There are various pathways into the industry, cutting across creative work (editing, illustration, graphic design, etc.) and professional functions like sales and accounting. At present, there are plentiful opportunities for candidates who are skilled in the use of digital tools.

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**We need to grow more illustrators. “  
We need any illustrators out there.  
They need to come and talk to  
publishers so that we know they  
exist, and we can use their skills.  
A publisher**

.....

Some organisations in Kenya have been involved in training and skills development. For example, Storymoja has run an intensive nine-month graduate training programme for new editors, partnering with the Nairobi Book Fair to expand these opportunities. The Nairobi Writing Academy, founded by author Makena Onjerika, offered online classes in various creative writing areas including short and long-form fiction, poetry, screenwriting and creative non-fiction. Classes were led by published and award-winning African and non-African writers.

The MSc programme in Publishing Studies at Moi University in Nairobi is a two-year programme that comprises coursework, examination and a thesis. It is targeted at individuals who wish to work or are working in both print and electronic publishing. Some of the modules offered as part of the programme include: Publishing Management, Advanced Book Trade, Entrepreneurship in Publishing, and Marketing Management in Publishing. Graduates of the MSc programme are expected to graduate equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to develop Kenya's publishing industry. Maseno University also offers postgraduate courses in children's literature and creative writing.

# KENYA

## SPOTLIGHT eKitabu

eKitabu is a digital platform, headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, that produces and publishes African content: books, audio and video – in original, adapted and translated forms. Since its establishment in 2012, eKitabu has engaged and partnered with over 100 local and international publishers to digitise and distribute over 5,000 titles, available in indigenous languages from 14 countries in Africa.

The name, Kitabu, is taken from the Swahili word for ‘book’. The organisation has 35 full-time employees comprising Africans and non-Africans, with 56 per cent being women and 14 percent Persons Living with Disabilities.

Ownership of content rights is held either by the author or eKitabu. Where eKitabu plays a part in producing or developing the content, ownership can be shared. While there is some work that comes through agents, they tend to work with authors directly.

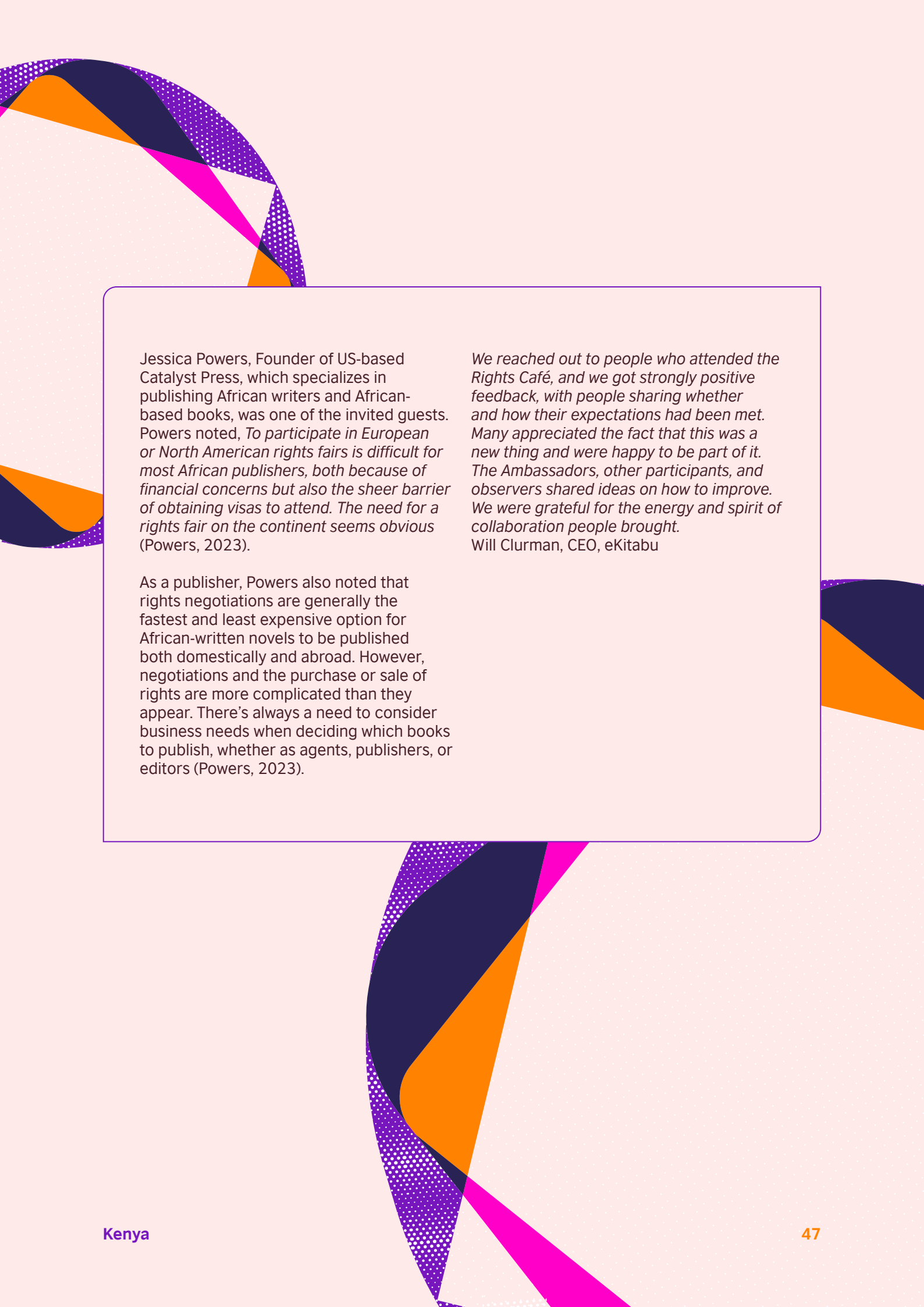
eKitabu earns revenues from various streams: an online store for digital and print books ([shop.ekitabu.com/](http://shop.ekitabu.com/)), production of ‘Sign Language Video Storybooks’, development of customised educational software, licensing content to third party organisations, and grant funding from donor partners and governments. There is also some support from private investors.

The business is marketed through promotional events, press coverage, social media, and their monthly newsletter, which has been in circulation for 10 years.

In 2020, under the Content Development Challenge (CDC) competition, eKitabu encouraged Kenyan publishers to produce early-grade reading materials accessible for use by Kenyan students, including those with disabilities. More than 25 publishers and content producers received practical training from eKitabu, along with online open-source tools to help them integrate accessibility into their products and publishing processes.

In 2023, eKitabu’s Digital Story Time was the most watched children’s programme on Kenya’s Akili Network with a weekly viewership of over 12 million.

As part of this collaboration with the Kenya Publishers Association, the African Publishers Network and Publishers Without Borders, eKitabu developed the ‘Rights Café’ at the Nairobi International Book Fair.



Jessica Powers, Founder of US-based Catalyst Press, which specializes in publishing African writers and African-based books, was one of the invited guests. Powers noted, *To participate in European or North American rights fairs is difficult for most African publishers, both because of financial concerns but also the sheer barrier of obtaining visas to attend. The need for a rights fair on the continent seems obvious* (Powers, 2023).

As a publisher, Powers also noted that rights negotiations are generally the fastest and least expensive option for African-written novels to be published both domestically and abroad. However, negotiations and the purchase or sale of rights are more complicated than they appear. There's always a need to consider business needs when deciding which books to publish, whether as agents, publishers, or editors (Powers, 2023).

*We reached out to people who attended the Rights Café, and we got strongly positive feedback, with people sharing whether and how their expectations had been met. Many appreciated the fact that this was a new thing and were happy to be part of it. The Ambassadors, other participants, and observers shared ideas on how to improve. We were grateful for the energy and spirit of collaboration people brought.*  
Will Clurman, CEO, eKitabu

# NIGERIA





# Publishing Landscape

In 2023 the Aké Arts and Book Festival and its founder Lọlá Shónéyìn won the first-ever International Aficionado Award, created by Frankfurter Buchmesse and Italy's Turin International Book Fair. The aim of the award 'is to recognize and pay tribute to the people, companies, and initiatives which innovate in original collaboration to improve the quality of publishing' (Anderson, 2023). The award also makes 'visible the wonders of the publishing industry – to learn, teach and share ideas about the important questions central to publishing' (Anderson, 2023). This honour is perhaps an indication of the increasing global significance of Nigeria's publishing and literature sectors.

The ISBN registrations in Nigeria show that in 2022, the country produced a total of 14,392 books (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2023). Nigeria also had 290 publishers that year, although the majority of these focus on educational books. It is widely believed that educational publishing presents one of the most encouraging areas for revenue and growth. Consistent demand for textbooks is driven by the high number of educational institutions across the country (Abodunrin, 2023). In 2022, Nigeria recorded a total of 144,042 government approved schools – the highest in Africa (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2023).

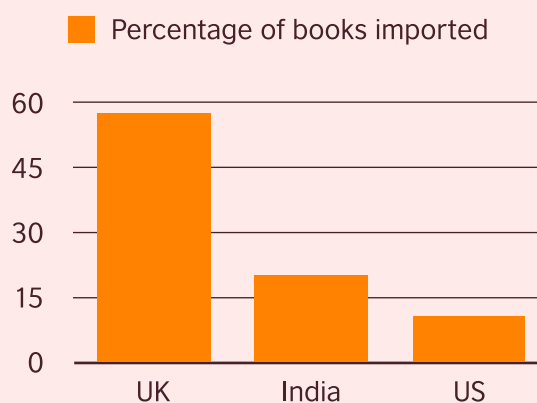
In 2014, the Nigerian city Port Harcourt became the 14th city globally to be designated a UNESCO World Book Capital. The programme recorded many successes. For instance, it led to the establishment of 200 book clubs in schools and a 350-seater library (Uhakheme, 2024).

Trade publishing holds promise in Nigeria, benefiting from a diverse and literate population keen on exploring literature across various genres. The country has also been producing a fresh wave of writers whose literary achievements are now receiving global recognition previously limited to renowned postcolonial authors like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, and more recently, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. According to PwC (2019),

professional, educational, and book sales in Nigeria were projected to generate US\$34 million in revenue by 2023, growing at an annual growth rate of 3.9 per cent between 2018 and 2023. Educational books were expected to account for 62.5 per cent of the total income. However, PwC (2023) indicates that sales of books will decline in Nigeria, due largely to consumers' preference for other content types such as videos.

According to the International Publishing Data 2023, in terms of imported books, Nigeria largely depends on the United Kingdom (58 per cent), India (20 per cent) and United States (11 per cent). The UK and Nigeria have had a long-standing trade and investment relationship. In 2024, the UK government signed the Enhanced Trade and Investment Partnership (ETIP) with Nigeria, to build on their already thriving trading relationship, which totalled GB£7 billion in 2023 (Department for Business and Trade, 2023).

In 2021, the Booksellers Association of Nigeria unveiled the first e-directory of booksellers in the country (Akubuiro, 2021). The e-book listed booksellers across the 36 states of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Lagos State recorded 705 booksellers and FCT had 286 stores (Akubuiro, 2021). The e-book was jointly published by Booksellers Association and CSS Bookshop. It was edited by Dare Oluwatuyi and Richard Mammah (Akubuiro, 2021).



**Figure 9: International Publishing Data: Nigeria book imports. (Source: IPA, 2024).**

Prize	Year founded	Genre	Frequency
Association of Nigerian Authors Literary Awards	1981	Various	Annually
Awele Creative Trust Award	2015	Short story	Annually
NLNG Nigeria Prize for Literature	2004	Various	Annually
SEVHAGE Literary Prizes	2013	Various	Annually
Quramo Writers' Prize	2017	Novel	Annually

**Figure 10: Notable literary awards in Nigeria**

Literary awards and prizes continue to significantly aid the acknowledgement, growth and development of Nigerian literary creations. Their influence goes beyond recognition, as they promote diversity, a thriving literary culture and innovation.

The Association of Nigerian Authors Literary Awards has more than 10 award categories including published and unpublished works, ranging from poetry to drama. Some of the prizes are endowed by institutions and individuals. The Awele Creative Trust (ACT) award was founded by author, Chika Unigwe and is awarded to a short story writer aged between 16 and 26. The Nigeria Prize for Literature was founded in 2004 and administered by an Advisory Board set up by Nigeria LNG Limited. The award rotates among four genres: fiction, poetry, drama, and children's literature, repeating the cycle every four years. The winner receives US\$ 100,000, making it the biggest literary award in Africa and highest paying literary awards in the world. The Quramo Writers' Prize was established in 2017 by Quramo Publishing to support new Nigerian and African writers. The SEVHAGE Literary Prizes are organised by SEVHAGE Publishers in collaboration with various partners. Categories include poetry, prose, spoken-word, drama and general writing.

## Some key players

Previous studies (for instance, Irele, 1988; Apeji, 1996; Currey, 2013; Shercliff, 2015) have explored the publishing practices in Nigeria, highlighting the influence of colonialism, Christianity and multinational companies on the

sector's development. Irele (1988) suggests that 'credit must be given to the multinational companies for having initially ensured an adequate supply of books to this country and contributing to educational development.' Irele further adds that these multinational companies helped to train indigenous staff on how to run a publishing business. Some of these multinationals include Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria, University Press PLC (UPL), Evans Brothers, Longman, and Macmillan.

Several other indigenous publishers have also enhanced the publishing and literature sectors in Nigeria. Spectrum Books was founded as a radical trade publisher in 1978. As described by publishing entrepreneur Bankole Olayebi, 'Spectrum Books, where, as it were, I cut my publishing teeth, was at the time at the cutting edge of publishing in Nigeria. It was young, and its style was dynamic and aggressive, as against the somewhat staid and lumbering approach of the older, more traditional publishing houses.' (Olayebi, 2006). Spectrum published the works of many notable Nigerian writers including Cyprian Ekwensi and Kole Omotoso.. Working at Spectrum inspired Olayebi to set up his own firm, Bookcraft in Ibadan, Oyo State.

When Bookcraft was founded in 1988, the publisher aimed to publish general interest books. Over the past years, Bookcraft has published several renowned authors. In 2003, it published the Wole Soyinka photo-biography, *WS: A Life in Full*. In 2021, Bookcraft published Wole Soyinka's third novel, *Chronicles of the Happiest People on Earth*. This was Soyinka's first novel in nearly 50 years, which was described as 'a narrative tour de force' (Flood, 2020).

Several independent publishers have emerged in Nigeria over the past decade. Narrative Landscape Press (NLP) started as a publishing services company in 2016. Two years later, it acquired the rights to publish Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's books in Nigeria, a strategy that has proved financially rewarding for the firm. NLP is now a traditional publisher of fiction by Nigerian authors and a few foreign writers.

Ouida Books was founded by Lọlá Shónéyìn in 2016 and has since published several award-winning Nigerian authors including Ayòbámi Adébáyò and Helon Habila. Ouida focuses on books for children and young adults, literary fiction and fantasy. Ouida's Open Mic Night has also provided a creative space for poets, writers and artists to showcase their talents. In 2023 Ouida Books launched a new African futurist imprint, Phoenix, led by Nnedi Okorafor and Lọlá Shónéyìn (Ghosh, 2023a). In 2024 Ouida also launched a new imprint, Lufu, focused on commercial fiction.

SEVHAGE serves both as a publishing entity and a registered charitable organisation committed to promoting Nigerian literature. It is one of the few English-language publishers based in northern Nigeria. Since its establishment in 2012, SEVHAGE has published over 60 titles. In addition to publishing books, it also runs the SEVHAGE literary prizes.

Noirledge is an independent publisher with 'a vision of publishing the future of African writing today.' Based in Ibadan, Oyo State, it publishes poetry, drama, and inspirational books. Noirledge also offers publishing opportunities for independent authors.

Other notable publishers in Nigeria include, Cassava Republic, Parresia Books, Quramo Publishing, Kachifo and Masobe Books. Many of these publishers use a hybrid business model that combines aspects of traditional and non-traditional publishing. This enables the provision of tailor-made publishing solutions to suit authors' needs, preferences and budgets. Publishers offering adaptable and personalised publishing options enable writers to realise their objectives in the way that best fits them. In 2024, three Nigerian publishers – Masobe Books, Narrative Landscape Press, and Ouida Books – were shortlisted for the Bologna Prize for the Best Children's Publishers of the Year, awarded

annually to highlight excellent publishing houses from all over the world.

A few dedicated comic book publishers are also thriving in Nigeria. Comic Republic, established in 2013, focuses on the digital distribution of comic books produced locally. It is one of the largest comics publishers in Africa. In 2023 the American television production company Universal Content Production (UCP), operating within the Universal Studio Group, announced the development of some TV shows based on characters from Comic Republic's comics (Salaudeen, 2023).

Panaramic is another media and entertainment company with a core focus on comics. Its leading product is the African historical comic book series *Okiojo's Chronicles*. These historical accounts have been adapted into easy-to-understand comics for kids and adults alike and are available in digital and print. Panaramic has published over 70,000 copies of its various editions (Schipani, 2023). Panaramic's comics books *Queen Amina*, and *1897* have been used as teaching material in the African Studies Department at Grand Valley State University, Michigan.

Book clubs have also played a role in the promotion of the literature and publishing sectors. The Uyo Book Club was founded by Dr Udeme Nana to create a community of readers, inspire writers, and provide a platform for book discussions. Numerous writers have utilised the opportunity provided by this Club to promote their books, and expand the distribution of their works. In 2021 Uyo Book Club hosted the first ever National Conference of Book Clubs in Nigeria. The Rainbow Book Club, Patabah Book Club, Women's Group Book Club, and the Lagos Books Club are some of the book clubs that are also encouraging Nigerians to read.

The Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) was founded in 1981 during a conference convened by the late Chinua Achebe. With the broad goals of encouraging the development of Nigerian literature, ANA has also ventured into publishing with its Nigerian Writers series.

Founded by Dr Wale Okediran, the Ebedi International Writers Residency is available to writers who want to finish ongoing projects, fully-funded and in a comfortable setting. Since

its founding in 2012, the six-week residency has accommodated around 120 writers from ten African nations, many of whom have been awarded numerous national and international literary awards.

Rovingheights, a bookstore co-founded in 2015 by Adedotun Eyinade, Oluwatobi Eyinade, and Adebola Eyinade, has become one of the most recognizable brands in the Nigerian book industry. It is a huge supporter of local publishing, and stocks books by many self-published authors. Other major bookshops in the country that support the literature sector include Glendora, Patabah Books, and Terra Kulture.

Online magazines like *Agbowo* exist to provide a quality platform for authors to publish their works and engage with a global audience. The magazine does this by publishing carefully selected creative works that are free to read. *Agbowo* publishes fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama and visual art.

The Nigerian literary landscape also supports self-published authors. Umezurike (2019) investigated the ways in which self-publishing emerged in Nigeria, its networks, and their impact on public readership. He concludes that self-publishing disrupts the conventional approach to producing books by offering a viable alternative for literary artists to have their works published. During military rule in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s, authors who were unable to get traditional publishers for their works were forced to self-publish. Others merely started self-publishing as a means of promoting their anti-military sentiments (Umezurike, 2019). Today, self-publishing is providing opportunities for Nigerian authors who want to remain in control of their works. A few still self-publish because of limited traditional publishing opportunities in the country.

## Rights and representation

There are a variety of channels that trade publishers in Nigeria use to buy and sell rights, but the most common approach is direct negotiations with authors. In some cases, other publishers or literary agents are involved (although no literary agency exists as a standalone business in the country). Authors do not typically retain full ownership of the rights to their works, except in cases where books are paid for by authors.

Many respondents confirmed they allocate rights based on the publishing agreement:

.....  
For some titles, we have world rights, others we don't. When we co-create works, authors usually own the rights. We never use agents.  
.....

A publisher

.....  
*It depends on what you are assigned. It also depends on the market. For instance, if we get a book we know we are going to invest in over three years to make the book the best that it can be, we acquire world rights. For subsidiary rights, we share 50-50. Right now, regional rights are also subsidiary rights, certain publishers license the Nigerian rights to us. We pay them normal royalty rates – ten to 15 per cent, depending on what we agreed. A Publisher*  
.....

## Distribution, marketing and sales

Marketing of books in Nigeria is a multifaceted process, encompassing various channels to reach diverse audiences. These include distribution through bookshops, events, digital platforms and personal sales. Several respondents use online advertising to target potential readers. Others rely on the power of personal recommendation and organic promotion in driving interest in books.

A few respondents only work with partner stores in the country, thus ensuring that new books are placed in more stores with little effort by the publisher. They also provide direct sales and delivery services to clients who order their titles online. Others prefer to use readers or authors to spread the word about books.

.....  
We actively encourage and facilitate word-of-mouth marketing, leveraging satisfied readers' love to spread awareness of our books within their social circles and communities. A publisher  
.....

Some of the respondents also actively pitch their books to various academic institutions, leveraging their titles' educational value and relevance to curriculum requirements. When selected, these books become part of school libraries or recommended reading lists and in turn drive bulk sales.

## Funding

Several respondents started their businesses using personal funds. Others rely on a combination of revenue streams, which include consultancies, book sales, awards, licensing, events and partnerships to generate supplementary income and support their activities.

.....

**We bootstrap our operations. To start the business, I raised funds as an individual. Unfortunately, the banks are not supporting the publishing sector. A publisher**

.....

Although many financial institutions in Nigeria don't generally give loans to publishers, some banks in the country have been supporting the sector in various other ways. For instance, Sterling Bank has been a sponsor of the Aké Arts and Book Festival. In 2022 Sterling Bank also collaborated with Kachifo to launch an anthology of Nigerian writing.

## Publishing in indigenous languages

Opportunities for publishing literary works in indigenous languages in Nigeria are sparse. Respondents said they did publish or sell some local titles, but their numbers are low compared to English language titles.

*We have published two books in Yorùbá. We are also set to publish a collection of poems in Kalabari.* A publisher

*We created a Covid-19 awareness comics book, which was initially developed in English and then translated into Hausa and Pidgin English.* A publisher

Several scholars (for instance, Musa, 2019; Whitsitt, 2002). have discussed 'Kano market literature' - novels written in Hausa language – a genre that has existed in northern Nigeria since the 1980s. Although this literature can be found in the cities of Kano, Zariya, Kaduna, Katsina, and Sokoto, most of these books are published and sold in Kano, hence the term 'Kano market literature'. Most of the authors and readers of these works are women. As Sanusi (2016) notes, these novels, known as *Litattafan Soyayya*, are primarily written by women for women, and are a booming business. The novels are mostly self-published and can be found in major bookshops in Kano.

The Hausa International Book and Arts Festival (HIBAF) was launched in 2021, with the goal of working with writers of Hausa novels. Although the sales of the novels have been thriving, there is a lack of formal publishing structure for them. With the festival, organisers sought to have conversations with authors and make their books available for purchase beyond the bookshops in Kano. It was the first time that Hausa language writers, printers and publishers gathered in one space to discuss their books. The festival was successfully held in 2022 and 2023. With support from the Ford Foundation, HIBAF seeks to publish ten women writers from northern Nigeria over the next three to five years. This would focus on longform writing, including novels.

Some of the respondents haven't focused on indigenous language books due to capacity constraints.

*We currently publish only in English. Our current capacity limits our ability to review and edit works in other languages. We pay thorough attention to the works we publish. This means we do not just select the work, but editors also support the authors in improving them. Thus, taking on a new language might require dedicating more resources to such thorough efforts. On the other hand, we work with partners who are interested in publishing works by our authors in other languages.* A publisher

One respondent argues that readers of indigenous language books have dwindled over time because their appetite has not been satisfied, due to the absence of publishing outlets and books.



When [indigenous publishing] comes back, so will readers. So, we can't use the absence of visible... readers in this particular climate to judge the availability of readers.  
A publisher

Some publishers have chosen to promote indigenous language works through translations. To mark the 2023 International Mother Tongue Day, the online journal *Olongo Africa*, founded by linguist Kólá Túbòsún, produced ten short stories written by African writers in English and translated them into ten different African languages. These stories were also recorded and uploaded online as audio files. The Olongo Multilingual project, as this initiative was called, focused on readers who can access the internet (and WhatsApp, for audio editions). Kólá Túbòsún has been involved in various projects, notably translating from English to Yorùbá, and from Yorùbá to English. In 2020, in partnership with the British Library, he translated the Caine Prize-winning story *Grace Jones* by Irenosen Okojie into Yorùbá.

## General challenges

Some of the challenges identified by respondents are linked to economic constraints such as inflation, currency devaluation and fluctuating purchasing power – which can affect consumers' ability to afford books. Another major challenge is high production costs.

Many respondents listed piracy, poor reading culture, inadequate infrastructure and distribution, poor quality control, and limited funding/investment as some of the challenges facing the sector. Some have also had issues with obtaining ISBNs for their books or have lost revenue when bookshops shut down.

*When a bookshop closes down, we often receive nothing for the books we supplied.* A Publisher

*The big publishers who are mostly selling textbooks don't seem to be interested in salvaging the market.* A publisher

Some of the challenges listed by the respondents were previously reiterated during the 2023 Nigerian Publishers Association convention in Lagos. Cyril Anioke, the national chairman of the

association, decried the deplorable state of the paper mills in Nigeria, with only a small number of companies remaining in operation. As a result of this, the nation is now mostly dependent on imports, which has caused severe difficulties in the publishing sector (Abodunrin, 2023).

Efforts are being made to address some of these challenges. The 2023 Copyright Act is said to be comprehensive and accommodates various forms of creative works, such as audiovisual, musical, artistic, literary and broadcast. The Act further authorises copyright holders to pursue legal action against online infringements and addresses the difficulties they encounter in the digital environment. As a whole, the Act shows that significant progress has been made in tackling the hazards associated with technological progress (Esegi, 2023).

## How Publishing Drives Innovation

Many of the respondents are leveraging new digital technologies and integrating them into their publishing processes. Some have published several electronic anthologies and are selling a number of their books on digital publishing outlets like Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Bambooks.

Bambooks is a Nigerian platform that gives consumers the ability to access thousands of eBooks, periodicals and comics from any internet-connected device, including PCs, tablets and smartphones. To begin reading, users just need to visit the Bambooks website or download the free app from the Google Play or App Store. For a minimal monthly membership fee, Bambooks provides customers with unrestricted access to the library. Payment is made via debit cards or bank accounts.

*Our readers are comfortable reading works on our platform and share feedback where necessary.* A publisher

Scholars have stressed the significance of digital technology in the production of and consumption of Nigerian literature (Harris, 2018). Before now, many writers turned to foreign literary magazines to showcase their works. *Agbowo* publishes carefully selected creative

works by Nigerians and provides avenues to promote such works, paying authors whose works have been published. *Agbowo* has always been a digital-only publication.

Comic Republic adopts monetisation tactics to grow its revenue. Its core monetisation is licensing of intellectual property and characters. The company also relies on internet commissions, that is, commissioned projects by organisations who are interested in narrative storytelling. Through such arrangements, Comic Republic accepts special projects, as guided by the customer. It also releases a new comics book every two weeks that are usually available for download on their website.

According to some of the respondents to this study, authors have generally reacted positively to the innovations in digital publishing and distribution. They appreciate the opportunity to have their books available in various digital formats and online platforms, recognising the potential for greater accessibility and exposure to a wider audience. The convenience of digital publishing allows authors to reach readers across geographical boundaries, expanding their reach beyond traditional markets.

However, as one respondent points out, there remains a prevailing preference in Nigeria for physical copies over e-books, especially when they are not free to read.

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Despite the convenience of digital formats, some readers still harbour reservations about buying e-books, leading to a reluctance to fully embrace digital publishing. This sentiment is compounded by the prevalence of piracy, with many readers opting for pirated copies distributed freely among peers.

A publisher

---

Book clubs across the country have adopted innovative practices to promote books. In 2023 the Uyo Book Club supported Nigerian John Obot in his official Guinness World Record attempt for the longest marathon reading aloud event. Obot read for 145 hours, surpassing the 124-hour record set by Rysbai Isakov from India (Umo, 2023). The Uyo Book Club also operates a WhatsApp group where intellectual discussions are held. People are usually added to the WhatsApp group after they have attended at least one presential reading session.

In 2024 the Rainbow Book Club launched a new initiative, Talking Books Africa, a monthly, virtual, live conversation with authors. Award-winning Nigerian author Chibundu Onuzo was the first guest of the programme (Uhakheme, 2024). The initiative is supported by UNESCO.

The Hausa International Book and Arts Festival (HIBAF) received an EU grant to capture festival activities using virtual reality (VR).

Despite being mostly linked to the gaming and entertainment industry, VR in Nigeria is increasingly being used in other sectors such as education. Modern technology is at the core of business strategies as enterprises vie to deliver the most desirable user experiences. VR is therefore a promising technology that can be used to engage festival attendees because of its potential for visitor engagement and immersion. Furthermore, new companies have sprung up in Nigeria with the goal of making VR experiences widely available to everyone irrespective of status.

# How Publishing Creates Connections

Publishing entrepreneurs in the country use a variety of formats and platforms to facilitate communication and foster partnerships. Some respondents maintain personal relationships with many stakeholders within the industry. This often involves direct communication through phone calls and emails to discuss potential collaborations, share insights and exchange ideas.

Others also leverage social media platforms to connect with fellow publishers, authors, literary agents, editors and other professionals in the sector.

Social media provides an accessible and efficient means of networking, allowing us to engage in discussions, share relevant content, and promote collaborative initiatives. A publisher

Additionally, many respondents recognise the value of face-to-face interactions and physical meetings in developing relationships and strengthening partnerships. This leads to participation in industry events, conferences, book fairs and literary festivals where

collaborative opportunities are explored. Collectively, these literary festivals support the vitality of the Nigerian literary landscape and provide authors and publishers a platform to interact, collaborate and discuss shared issues.

The Aké Arts and Book Festival is an annual festival that brings over 2000 writers, poets, musicians, actors, filmmakers, artists, and thinkers together to celebrate creativity. It was founded in 2013 to facilitate dialogue and understanding between people who may have opposing ideas. The festival topics are sometimes inspired by social media conversations.

The Nigeria International Book Fair was founded in 2002 and hosts exhibitors from across the country and continent. In 2024 more than 100 exhibitors from over 20 countries – including Ghana, India, Turkey, UAE and the UK – participated in the book fair (Nana, 2024). Additionally, the book fair had over 15,000 visitors (Nana, 2024).

Other active literary festivals/book fairs in the country include the Lagos Book and Art Festival, Kaduna Book and Arts Festival, Abuja Literary and Arts Festival, and the Association of Nigerian Authors Convention, an annual event which takes place in different parts of the country. Others are the Sokoto Book and Arts Festival, Benin Arts and Book Festival, Kwara Books and Arts Festival and the Crater Literary Festival. This list is by no means exhaustive.

The Hausa International Book and Arts Festival (HIBAF), in partnership with the University of Bristol, is developing sustainable literary infrastructures, innovative forms of literary

Name	Frequency	Duration	Attendance (estimated)
Abuja Literary and Arts Festival	Annually	Three to five days	Over 1000
Aké Arts and Book Festival	Annually	Three days	Over 2000
Hausa International Book and Arts Festival	Annually	Three days	Over 500
Kaduna Books and Art Festival	Annually	Four days	About 1000
Lagos Book and Art Festival	Annually	Four days	About 1000
Lagos International Poetry Festival	Annually	Four days	About 1000
Nigeria International Book Fair	Annually	Three days	Over 15,000

Figure 11: Notable literary events in Nigeria

production, and new networks and cross-cultural partnerships between the UK and five countries across Africa. Three hundred people attended the maiden edition of the festival. That number increased to about 500 in the second edition and attendance maintained into the third edition.

*We have a model. We have a programme that works. We have an audience. We are also exploring more local funding instead of relying on international organisations. A festival director*

Beyond festivals, some publishing entrepreneurs have explored a range of partnerships with various organisations in the country. Comic Republic has collaborated with Meta on a two-year project that uses books to fight misinformation. As part of the project, Comic Republic created comics in English, French and Hausa.

The Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) is leveraging its position as the largest writers' facilities in Africa to develop collaborative programmes benefiting writers across Nigeria and beyond. The association is actively pursuing collaborations with national and international entities, like the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), the National Orientation Agency (NOA), the Nigerian Book Trust and UNESCO to help grow the publishing sector.

**We have collaborated with publishing professionals in Kenya and Ghana. Sadly, we have discovered that it is cheaper to do business with Europe than Africa.**  
**A publisher**

Lawal (2024) explains that due to intra-continental trade barriers, importing products from within Africa currently costs 6.1 per cent more than importing from outside the continent. Because of the markup, commerce between nations is extremely limited; intra-African exports account for only 14% of overall African trade, compared to 55 per cent in Asia, 49 per cent in North America, and 63 per cent in the European Union (Lawal, 2024).

For directors of book festivals, innovation is hugely important and inevitable. Aké Arts and Book Festival introduced an Africa 'rights forum' in 2023, which brought together about twenty participants from across the African continent, and thirty members of the Nigerian Jubilee Fellows Programme, run by UNDP. The participants were taught how to become literary agents and editors. Aké also introduced a 'festival directors fellowship', which brought together festival directors from all over the world.

Some respondents are keen to connect with more stakeholders in the UK.

*Recently, I joined the Royal African Society and the African Studies Association of the UK (ASAUK) with intentions to collaborate with various stakeholders. However, we are yet to make much progress. We have not had avenues to connect with others since we joined. We are open to joining such networks that help us collaborate with other stakeholders in the sector. A Publisher*

# How Publishing Contributes to the Creative Economy

In Nigeria the creative economy is emerging as an important and expanding source of employment and prosperity. In 2023, for the first time, the Nigerian government created a ministry specifically for this sector: the Ministry of Art, Culture, and Creative Economy. This new ministry oversees publishing and literature activities, as well as film, music and arts. The creative economy plays a significant role in innovation and entrepreneurship, and the Nigerian government has ambitious plans for growth, including the construction of Abuja Creative City. The government is particularly keen to collaborate with various groups in the literature and publishing sectors. In 2024 Hannatu Musawa, Minister of Art, Culture, and The Creative Economy solicited Wole Soyinka's support regarding the promotion and preservation of literature in the country (Guardian Nigeria, 2024). The Minister has said the creative economy will increase the country's GDP by contributing at least US\$100 billion by 2030 and create two million jobs in 2027 (Vanguard, 2024).

In terms of job creation, respondents to this study suggest that on average, their organisations employ more than five people.

*It's a full-time job, with 8 full-time roles that cover all aspects of publishing – from editorial to distribution. A publisher*

*Our core operations boast about 12 dedicated staff. We also have a pool of consultants and volunteers who we call in, depending on which project we are looking at. A publisher*

*A small organisation, we have 12 full-time employees, but engage with several freelancers on a project-by-project basis. A publisher*

Comic Republic employs over 100 people in a range of roles. Some of these workers include illustrators, writers and artists. Employing such a high number of staff ensures that the company management can adequately serve the needs of its readers and clients.

Nigeria's creative sector and the government have also worked together to change the country's creative landscape through legislation such as the Creative Industries Development Bill (CIDB). There are also plans to establish a Creative Impact Fund to help grow the creative industries sector even further.

The CIDB has been of interest to academics in the UK. In 2023 the University of Aberdeen hosted a roundtable on the proposed bill (Adebola, 2023). The unique gathering was an opportunity for participants to discuss and provide informed feedback to the sponsor of the bill. Participants at the roundtable were drawn primarily from the law faculty of the university (Adebola, 2023).

Nigeria's Ministry of Art, Culture, and Creative Economy also partnered with the African Development Bank (AfDB) to launch the US\$617 million Investment in Digital and Creative Enterprises (IDICE) fund (Anyanwu, 2024). With a focus on fundraising, IDICE seeks to address the major obstacles that start-ups in creative fields, including publishing, must overcome.



## Skills publishing entrepreneurs need to succeed

Respondents to this study have listed a number of skills that are required in the publishing and literature sectors. These include finance, project management, editorial, and other soft skills such as problem solving, organisational and interpersonal skills.

.....

I think you need to know people in the industry. It's important to be connected. Being able to think on your feet. Being able to lead. Being able to take charge. You need a thick skin. Being able to prioritise – these are things that also come with organisational skills. A publisher

.....

Some respondents say that previous experience is not needed to get into the publishing sector, arguing that it's possible to learn on the job and by networking with peers.

*I learnt a lot on the job. I believe in networking and asking questions. I have also been able to travel and attend other festivals. Last year, I was at the European Festival Academy where I participated in a weeklong workshop that helped with networking and understanding what other festivals outside your own space are doing. These are some of the ways I learn. When I was in Berlin for a residency, I was able to visit some art galleries to understand how curation works at the international level. A festival director*

More specialised skills are however required for comics books. As a respondent explains:

*In making ta comics book, you need somebody who is good at concept development and world-building. And then you need a writer... putting words together in a way people can read and feel the character is an art itself. Then, you need the person who is going to colour, and then you need the editor who's going to put the book together. A publisher*

Some respondents argue that there's a poor understanding of the publishing industry which has affected the sector's development. The issue is further compounded by a high turnover of employees in the sector.

.....

Most of the people who work in the industry often get scholarships for MFA programmes and then leave the country. Some others move to more lucrative content production companies. A publisher

.....

Several academic institutions in Nigeria offer publishing programmes that could help grow the sector. In 2024 The University of Abuja announced the establishment of an International Institute for Publishing Studies. According to the university: 'Our aspiration is to have high quality programme in publishing that will contribute substantially to the skills and development of academic institutions, private businesses and professionals, government and law enforcement sectors, as well as those who seek to become publishers around the world' (Erunke, 2024).

The University of Ibadan is Nigeria's premiere university, where many notable authors (including Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka) studied. Creative writing and publishing courses at the institution only exist as modules and not stand-alone degree programmes.

Several other institutions including Thomas Adewumi University (TAU), Lead City University, University of Nigeria, Nsuka and National Open University of Nigeria all offer publishing modules as part of their undergraduate programmes.

# NIGERIA

## SPOTLIGHT Rovingheights

Rovingheights has become one of the most recognisable brands in the Nigerian book industry. It was established in 2015 and is a family-run bookstore that has an online and bricks and mortar presence. It sells books of all genres and strongly supports the local publishing scene, stocking titles from traditional and non-traditional publishers.

The business was started by Adedotun Eyinade, Oluwatobi Eyinade and Adebola Eyinade, using their personal funds.

*I come from a family of readers. I've got two sisters and myself, so when I came up with the idea it was only natural to ask my sister, being a reader herself, to say, 'let's work on this together'. Adedotun Eyinade, Co-founder, Rovingheights*

Rovingheights initially started by helping self-published authors distribute their books. Operating primarily from social media platforms such as Instagram and X (Twitter), the business then moved to a physical shop to assure customers of their credibility and build a community around the store. In 2018, Rovingheights opened its first physical bookstore in Surulere, Lagos. The year after, it opened a second branch in Abuja, the nation's capital.

*I think at that point we started to realise just how much we needed physical spaces for books and how the fact that just having physical spaces devoted to all things books would support the book industry, and also help to deepen the interest that people have in reading. So, when people say 'Nigerians don't read,' my immediate answer would be that there's a lot of reading going on. You would be surprised at the kinds of books that people are reading and are asking booksellers to stock. Adedotun Eyinade, Co-founder, Rovingheights*

In 2023 Rovingheights received a special commendation for Bookstore of the Year at the London Book Fair's International Excellence Awards. The awards recognise publishing achievements of organisations and individuals around the world. Rovingheights was the only African bookstore shortlisted (Bodunde, 2023). Organisers described Rovingheights as an 'impressive' bookstore and a 'beacon for literacy' (Bodunde, 2023).

The bookshop receives a lot of requests from self-published authors and independent publishers. The business is run on a sale or return basis. Self-published authors can receive a sales report, and where copies sell out, further orders are made. There is a similar arrangement with traditional publishers. For any upcoming titles, publishers tend to offer options for Rovingheights to distribute on their behalf. This is normally in the form of a formal distribution agreement which details terms, conditions and commissions.

About 80 per cent of foreign publishers that do business with Rovingheights trade with them on credit. The UK is their biggest market. Rovingheights made a decision not to buy from the US due to high costs and turnaround time. Using air freight, books ordered from the UK can reach Nigeria within 6 hours. It takes much longer when books are imported from the US.

*I remember having to fly to the London Book [Fair] for the very first time to make a strong pitch for a credit line. I told the publishers that I can't do business at the pace I want to... trading on our own and that we would need a credit line. Graciously, a number of them offered us credit lines after that meeting.* Adedotun Eyinade, Co-founder, Rovingheights

Rovingheights currently buys books from major UK publishers including Bloomsbury, Canongate, Hachette, Penguin Random House, among others. The trust built with these publishers has helped the business grow. Without those credit lines, Rovingheights would have had no choice but to seek external investment.

*I have thought about that idea and have been on the verge of doing that a couple of times but I have always told myself that I don't want anybody to come in and change the direction of the business. If you take people's money... they might push you to go at a pace that might seem abnormal. For example, an investor might say: 'oh, you have four stores now you should be doing 10 stores by this time'. They could push you to go faster than the organic pace of your business and I think that is a recipe for disaster.* Adedotun Eyinade, Co-founder, Rovingheights

Rovingheights partnered with the online magazine *Open Country* to launch The Rovingheights Best Seller List in 2023. This became Nigeria's first-ever formal bestseller list highlighting the bestselling books across all Rovingheights stores. Several fiction titles have been featured in this list, for instance *Honey & Spice* by British-Nigerian writer, Bolu Babalola. Rovingheights did a deal with the UK publishers of the book for the Nigerian market. The bookstore got the author to sign a thousand copies which were then shipped to Nigeria.

*Some Nigerian entrepreneurs who have done well in their own right are also writing about their own experience of doing business in Nigeria, often a memoir in the format of 'how to', [or] 'how you can do well as a small business owner in Nigeria'. Those books are also selling in their tens of thousands. One particular book... written by a politician sold well over 9,000 copies in our shop. The book is self-published and I am sure the author sold well over 50,000 copies.* Adedotun Eyinade, Co-founder, Rovingheights

In 2021, Rovingheights opened a third shop in Lagos - a big step for the business. It now has a fourth bookshop also in Abuja where it's added a café. Store locations are also rented out for events to create familiarity with books.

*We actually sell more fiction than any other genre except our store in Wuse 2 (Abuja) where we get people looking for history books. We sell more Nigerian fiction than foreign fiction, so that tells you there is a huge market.* Adedotun Eyinade, Co-founder, Rovingheights

In terms of organisational structure, the business has 34 full-time staff, along with part-time weekend workers at their Lagos shops. As well as their four physical stores, Rovingheights has a back office which houses the warehouse, accounts, customer care and the social media team. The founders have received interest in setting up additional shops via franchise models.



# SOUTH AFRICA



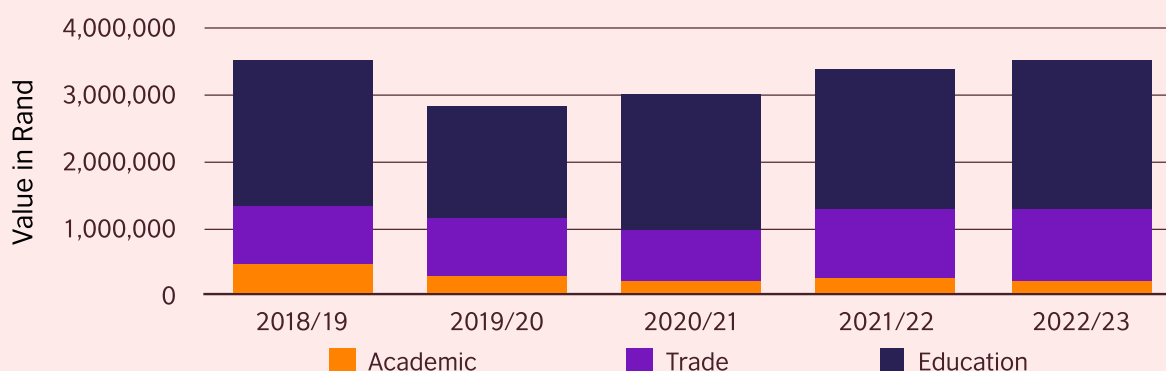
# Publishing Landscape

In April 2024 the Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA) published its annual Book Publishing Industry Survey which highlights the growth and development of the South African publishing industry. The research was conducted by the Department of Information Science at the University of Pretoria and provides important and current data on trade publishing as well as the sector in general. According to the report, in the 2022/23 financial year, the South African publishing industry generated around R3.5 billion in revenue (PASA, 2024).

in the world to win the Booker Prize twice. The novel was first published in 1974 by a small press in Johannesburg called Ravan which specialised in anti-Apartheid literature. The publishing firm was later acquired by Pan Macmillan.

The publication of a first book is a critical event in the career of an author. In South Africa, the role of independent publishers in discovering new or marginalised authors cannot be understated. These small presses have, in many ways, shaped the South African literary canon.

However, Miya (2023) notes that in a nation where black people make up the majority of the population, the combined publishing outputs of major fiction publishers in the nation during the four years between 2018 and 2021 have primarily benefited white authors. Miya suggests



**Figure 12: South African publishing industry revenue, 2018–2023 (R'000). (Source: PASA, 2024)**

As shown above, approximately 60 per cent of all revenue in South Africa comes from the education sector, which includes textbooks for schools.

A lack of finance is slowing growth in the South African publishing sector and hindering the ability of organisations to fulfil their strategic objectives. The South African Book Development Council (SABDC) which was established by the government in 2007, was shut down in 2021 due to financial hardship (Brittle Paper, 2021). Specifically, SABDC sought to showcase, strengthen and diversify the South African book industry and its long supply chain.

The year 2024 also marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Dusklands*, the first novel by South African author J.M. Coetzee the first writer

that the major fiction publishers in South Africa ought to make a concerted effort to include greater diversity representation in their lists. It is an argument that black publishing entrepreneurs in the country support. In an interview with *Brittle Paper*, Thabiso Mahlape the founder of Blackbird Books said 'If you look at the demographic makeup of the South African publishing industry you will see that a lot more ground needs to be broken still, and for that reason, we will need to have ground-breaking movers and shakers on different participatory levels for a long time to come' (Akram, 2023).

Literary and book prizes play an important role in promoting writing and scholarship in South Africa.



Prize	Year founded	Genre	Frequency
SALA/ South African Literary Awards	2005	Various	Annually
Jacana Literary Foundation prizes	2004	Various	Annually
Media24 Books Literary Awards	2011	Various	Annually
Sunday Times CNA Literary Awards	1989	Various	Annually
The Ingrid Jonker Prize	1965	Poetry	Annually
The University of Johannesburg (UJ) Prize for South African Writing/UJ Prize	2006	Various	Annually

**Figure 13: Notable literary awards in South Africa**

Some respondents believe that these awards can go some way to make writing a more financially sustainable or rewarding endeavour for the most talented (or otherwise selected) writers. The Sunday Times CNA Literary Awards are believed to be South Africa's most prestigious awards for non-fiction and fiction. The Sunday Times, a weekly newspaper published in South Africa, presents these awards to national writers each year in collaboration with Exclusive Books, awarding R100,000 to each winner.

## Some key players

The total number of active publishers in South Africa is unknown. However, estimates by PASA suggest that there are between 150 and 200 in the country. This figure includes multinational and small independent presses (PASA, 2024).

The trade sector is made up of several small to medium-sized publishers in addition to multinationals.

The small presses in the country are often owned and managed by the same person. 'Owner-publishers' are usually very emotionally involved in their organisations. Because of the small size, the owners are also very closely involved in day-to-day operations, supported by a retinue of freelancers and part-time staff.

Modjaji Books is a small independent publisher that Colleen Higgs founded in 2007 to publish works by women from southern Africa. It publishes short stories, novels, memoir,

biography, poetry, essays, narrative non-fiction, reference books and relevant non-fiction. Modjaji also publishes the *African Small Publishers' Catalogue* to promote small publishers. In 2024, Modjaji launched Pulani Press, a new imprint to make books by South African academics published by international presses more affordable and accessible within South Africa.

Book Circle Capital is an independent bookshop in Johannesburg that focuses on African literature, founded by Loyiso Langeni in 2016. Langeni and his co-owner Sewela Langeni have a strong interest in reading and bringing literature about South Africa and the continent at large to the public. Beyond selling books, the shop also organises book discussions.

Xarra Books is a black-owned bookshop founded by June Josephs-Langa and Dr Khanyiso Mguni in 2006. In 2014 the company ventured into publishing. All African book categories are represented by Xarra Books, including travel, romance, life, non-fiction and fiction.

Other publishing companies that are active in South Africa include Penguin Random House, Pan Macmillan, NB Publishers and Jonathan Ball. Several independent small publishers have emerged in South Africa over the past decade. In a risk-averse climate, a lot of what is exciting, original and untested is being published by the country's independent publishers.

uHlanga, which began as a KwaZulu-Natal poetry journal in 2014, is now mostly focused on publishing collections of poems by a single

author. A limited number of edited anthologies and chapbooks are also published by the small press, which is run by Nick Mulgrew.

Blackbird Books was founded by Thabiso Mahlape in 2015 to give black writers a voice. By starting the publishing business, Mahlape became the first black woman to own a publishing imprint in South Africa. The founder was awarded the Brittle Paper 2022 Literary Person of the Year.

Dryad Press is an independent publisher that focuses on promoting and publishing South African poetry. Founded in 2016 by Michèle Betty, the small publisher has published both new and established poets, including Beverly Rycroft, Sally Ann Murray and Tony Ulyatt.

impepho press is a feminist publishing house committed to championing brave voices. It was founded in 2018 by Vangile Gantsho. The press is particularly concerned with how women and female-assigned and women-identifying people tell their own stories. It primarily focuses on poetry due to its small team.

Inkani Books was founded by Efemia Chela in 2021 and describes itself as a 'people's movement-driven publishing house'. Based in Johannesburg, it publishes accessible books that 'intervene in the Battle of Ideas, and discussions around the contemporary dilemmas of humanity, with a focus on pan-African themes, Marxism, and struggles in the Global South.'

Other non-traditional firms like Boutique Books facilitate self-publishing by offering a way for people who would not otherwise be published to release a book of a high standard. Interestingly, Boutique Books has clients who have been previously published by mainstream publishers, but who wish to self-publish because they want to oversee the editorial process.

## Rights and representation

Some publishers in South Africa rely on literary agents who work with authors in several different ways, from securing publishing opportunities to managing negotiations. The Lennon-Ritchie Agency is a literary and rights agency based in Cape Town, and sells international, subsidiary, and film/television rights for Penguin Random House South Africa, Pan Macmillan South Africa and Jonathan Ball Publishing. In 2023 the agency sold Chinenye Emezie's Nigerian drama *Glass House* to one of Canada's leading independent trade publishers, Dundurn Press. The book was initially published by Penguin Random House South Africa. The agency also sold North American book rights of South African Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu's *The Creation of Half-Broken People*, to House of Anansi Press.

Other literary agents have forged strong relationships with South African publishers helping African writers to reach global readership. Based in Spain, Pontas works closely with Jacana Media to sell their rights abroad. Representatives of the two companies first met at the Zimbabwe Book Fair in 1998 and have been working together ever since. Jacana often retains world rights of the books it first publishes and then sells the subsidiary rights through Pontas. For instance, Rešoketšwe Manenzhe's novel *Scatterlings*, published by Jacana in 2020, was later sold to several publishers in China, Croatia, Italy and Portugal. Similarly, the award-winning novel *Coconut* by Kopano Matlwa was also first published by Jacana Media. Translation rights were later sold to French, Spanish and Swedish publishers.

South Africa rights of *Intruders* by Mohale Mashigo, published by Pan Macmillan, was sold to The Ishmael Tree (USA) by African Literary Agency, which works to empower African voices in literature. The African Literary Agency has also worked with publishers in South Africa, including Modjaji. *The Pride of Noonlay* by Shanice Ndlovu, first published by Modjaji was later sold to Ishmael Tree in the US. The African Literary Agency also sold *The Invisible Girl* by South African author C.L. Farley, to Luna Books in the UK.

I have a good list and I have a team of three who are working with me and scouting and editing and I'm really only focused on the African authors. There are a few living in the UK, there is one living in Australia, but they are rooted in Africa. **An agent**

Several publishers in South Africa also buy and sell book rights themselves with some success. One respondent started attending the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2011 and is also part of the International Alliance of Independent Publishers. According to this respondent, the selling of rights comes down to personal connections. Some other respondents have been able to sell rights by coincidence.

We have sold one or two rights to other international organisations. But it's not through any systematic method. It's just by coincidence that they like a book, and suggest publishing it either in part or in full in their other territories. **A publisher**

Literary agencies add a lot of value because of their global perspective and connections, whereas a publisher has a different focus point. As one respondent notes:

*Publishers need to publish a book... they need to translate it, they need to establish a relationship with authors...they need to attend events ... But they are not specifically related to the publishing houses abroad and my task as a literary agent is to find those publishing houses and to have the patience to submit several times because the market is challenging.* **An agent**

## “ Funding

Many of the respondents in this study are self-funded. A few have received bank loans and other financial support from corporate investors, but the practice is rare.

*Initially, we did get some funding. That's way back when we started the business. We did get some funding from one of the local banks, but we had to pay it back, of course. And after that, we've been self-funding. Of course, we're grateful that they gave us the loan.* **A publisher**

Some traditional publishers in South Africa have been exploring alternative funding models such as grants and donations.

One respondent reveals they raised funds by shares in their business.

*So, I own 53 per cent of the shares and five other shareholders own the other shares.* **A publisher**

Some non-traditional publishers rely on authors to fund their work, one respondent notes. In this instance, they ask for a 50 per cent deposit before starting the work, and the balance before printed books or e-book files are made available to the authors.

Another respondent adopts a different method to fund book production:

*Sometimes, organisations that sponsor authors pay part of the publishing. It really helps, especially with cash flow. They pay us upfront, and we take less of the royalties afterwards.* **A publisher**

Feminist press, Modjaji established the Modjaji Publishing Fund so people can support their work financially. This helps them to continue publishing books by southern African women. People who donate to the fund have their names listed as a donor on the publisher's website and in the books published in the calendar year of the donation.

## Distribution, marketing and sales

Many traditional publishers in the country handle the marketing, distribution and warehousing of books as part of the publishing offer. Social media remains the most popular and cost-effective way for publishers to generate a buzz about new books.

*We use social media marketing, paid ads on those platforms. A publisher*

The particular social media platform publishers use is somewhat dependent on certain features such as popularity and ease of use. WhatsApp, Facebook and TikTok have emerged as some of the favourite social media platforms in South Africa (McInnes, 2024).

TikTok provides advertising solutions in South Africa to support small and mid-size businesses in growing their brand. These solutions enable publishers to tap into the creativity of the TikTok community, reach new audiences and optimise their marketing campaigns. Furthermore, coinciding with Book Lovers' Day in 2023, TikTok encouraged book lovers in South Africa to join their global community to create #BookTok-themed content, such as book reviews, holiday reading lists, book recommendations and more (TikTok, 2023).

While some publishers have a good presence on social media posting four to five times a week, writers themselves also help in promoting their books.

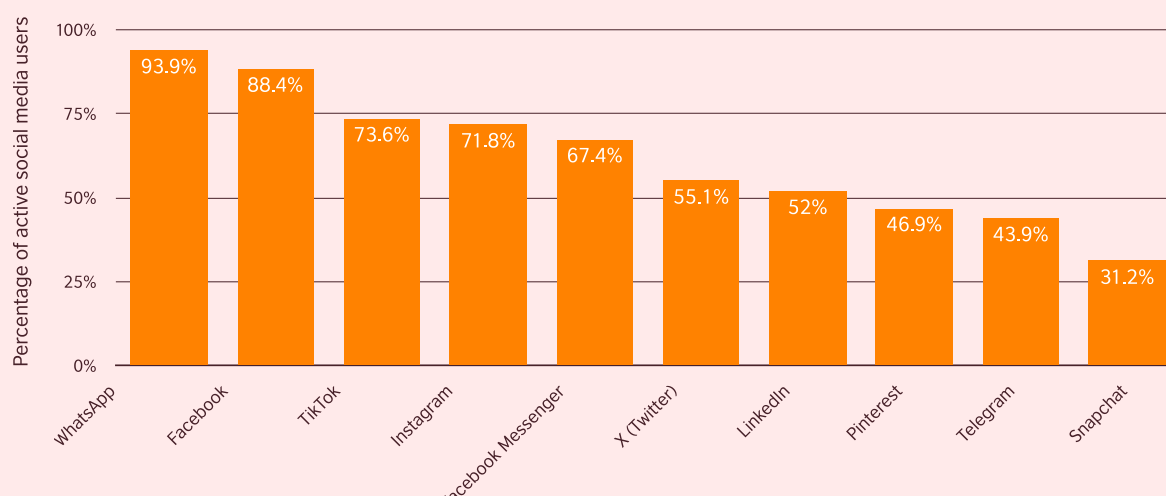
A lot of our books are pushed by the authors themselves actually and we just make sure that we support them. A publisher

Authors generally use popular social media channels for these promotions. In addition to fostering relationships with readers and other writers, social media also help these authors develop their brands and increase book sales. Additionally, they enable authors reach people who aren't currently fans of their work.

According to the respondents, a large number of books are being sold through online or e-commerce retailers (such as Takealot), bookstores (such as The Commune), supermarkets and other outlets that do not just focus on books.

Launched in 2011, Takealot.com is a leading e-commerce retailer in South Africa. It employs over 2,000 people, (according to the company's website). The Commune is a feminist bookshop and coffee shop located in Johannesburg. It also hosts regular book launches, talks, discussions and film screenings, as well as poetry and music performances.

Poetry publisher, uHlanga only sells its books as physical bound books through retailers. An exception is selling books through the African Books Collective, which handles print-on-demand sales and distribution for uHlanga in Europe and North America. Previously, uHlanga relied heavily



**Figure 14: Most used social media platforms in South Africa, January 2024.**  
(Source: McInnes, 2024)

on sending books through the South African Post Office, but the collapse in their services and closure of their branches made this untenable.

Direct selling is also of huge interest to some respondents as it typically involves lower discounts.

*If people buy books using website, I just package them here and send them. I've got two different couriers that I use for different purposes. A publisher*

An advantage of selling through a publisher's website is that customers can browse all available books without the owners being present to answer questions and physically issue invoices. The process is fully-automated. Customers are also able to view all products and necessary information in one place.

## Publishing in indigenous languages

According to Publishers Association of South Africa, the trade sector focuses mostly on the English-language audience, with a small but consistently loyal Afrikaans book-buying public as well (PASA, 2024). Publishers sometimes translate one book into multiple languages rather than a range of books in a variety of languages. In the past year, however, publishers have added to the range of languages published, especially in non-fiction. (PASA, 2024).

In this study, respondents stressed the need to publish books in indigenous languages to support South Africa's linguistic diversity.

.....  
Actually, this is something very important for us... to publish in African languages. A publisher  
.....

However, most respondents are not actively publishing or selling indigenous language books. This is due, in large part, to a lack of demand. It is believed that there's a very small market of readers in local South African languages because of literacy issues.

*There's always a sense that book readers like to read in English primarily in terms of the number of books sold... because at the end of the day, every business is a numbers game. A Publisher*

One respondent suggests that publishing books in indigenous languages tends to be quite expensive. One reason for this is that there are very few good editors for some of the languages, unlike English literature, where there are plenty of editors.

Respondents suggest a need to develop translators in South Africa to encourage the publication of more works in indigenous languages. Specific training programmes are also believed to increase local translation capacity, ultimately ensuring that more people have access to literature in the language that they understand.

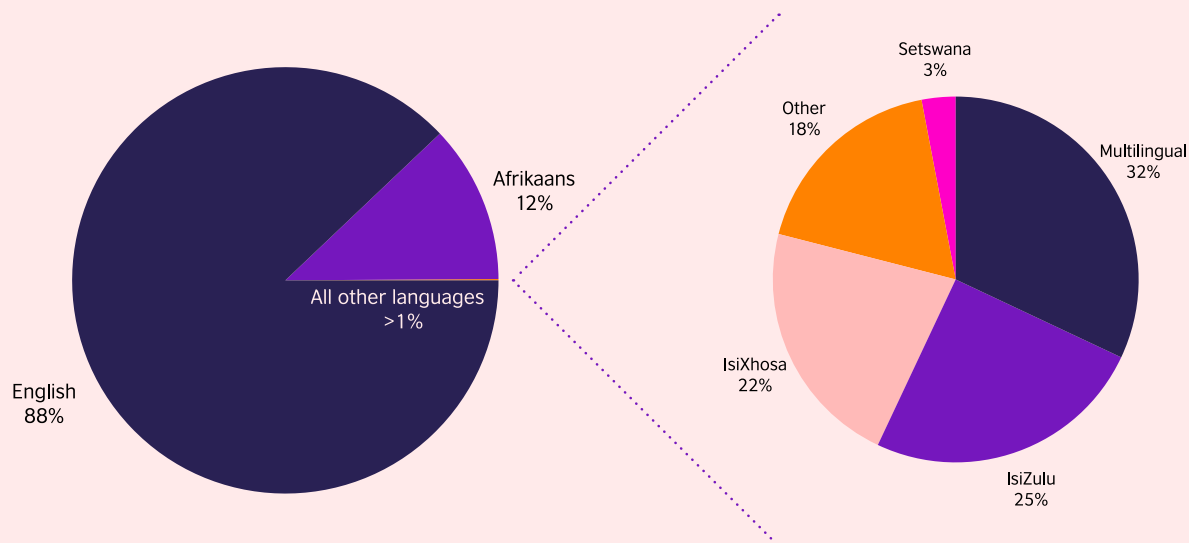


Figure 15: Revenue by language, Trade sector, 2022-23 (Source: PASA, 2024)



.....

We would like to publish in other languages and we also want to make sure we do it authentically. So, it's really, really important that we get good editors in those particular languages. Consequently, it's a capacity decision at the moment. But if we received a script that was mind-blowing enough, we would go to the end of the world for it.

### A publisher

.....

According to the National Reading Survey 2023, South Africans are multilingual readers: 68 per cent of the population are capable of reading in multiple languages and 63 per cent can read in at least one indigenous language. The study also points out that access to books in isiZulu is low when compared to English and Afrikaans (Polzer-Ngwato, et al, 2023).

*I think that we need a sort of political will and some funding. We need to have a publisher that is focused on publishing in African languages. There are some very small publishers that do so currently, but there's no real support for it.* A publisher

Support, however, appears to be on the horizon. In 2024 Jacana Media announced a contract from the DSAC and the Academic and Non-Fiction Authors Association of South Africa (ANFASA) to publish works by five new authors writing across South Africa's official languages. Jacana Media has created a new imprint, Vela Books, for this purpose.

## General challenges

The South African National Assembly passed the Copyright Amendment Bill in March 2024. The legislation looks to amend the Copyright Act of 1978 - the first comprehensive effort to change South Africa's copyright law (Anderson, 2024). The creative industries, including publishers and authors, believe the bill weakens copyright protection. Publishing and literature bodies comprising PEN South Africa, PEN Afrikaans, the

“ Academic and Non-Fiction Authors Association of South Africa (ANFASA) and the Publishers' Association of South Africa (PASA) issued a joint statement: 'It is extremely regrettable that despite widespread criticism from copyright experts and the sincere concerns of our country's authors and publishers who rely on copyright to make a living and to contribute to society, the legislature chooses to simply proceed with this bill that will do so much harm to our book industry.' (Anderson, 2024).

Some of the challenges highlighted by the respondents include distribution. Although South Africa boasts a range of book distributors, there are few opportunities to export books to other African countries. Many respondents believe that it is easier to distribute books in the UK and the US than in African countries. There is also a belief that the sector is dominated by a small number of corporate interests that skew the retail market and the attention of the press in their favour.

*The book industry is very much dominated by the big global publishers and syndicates. Their interest is not so much in levelling the playing field, but just to sell according to what they think makes sense.* A publisher

On lack of diversity, some respondents believe the South African publishing industry is exceptionally white. Thus, many of the books that get published and the authors that are supported alienate black readers who make up the majority of the population.

Some respondents suggest that many people are leaving the sector for other industries that are more financially rewarding. This in turn means that jobs are taken up by wealthy and often white individuals who can afford to work in the sector as they have other means of support.

Many respondents also cite rising costs as a major challenge. As with other industries, publishers are seeing hikes in the cost of raw materials such as paper and ink.

*In South Africa, for some reason, I don't know if this is an international phenomenon, but paper has become very expensive.* A publisher

# How Publishing Drives Innovation

South Africa has made strides towards embracing digital technology. The government recognises the importance of developing digital skills and has taken steps to ensure people have the required digital skills. In 2024 the Communications and Digital Technologies Minister, Mondli Gungubele, launched the Digital Skills Forum (DSF) to enhance the national digital skills programme (SA News, 2024).

Respondents to this study highlight how digitalisation has enabled publishing innovation in several ways, including the use of digital printing.

*I use digital printing. Digital printing has become so good that unless you are really involved in printing and publishing, you wouldn't be able to tell the difference between a litho-printed and digital book.* A publisher

An industry report, The Future of Digital versus Offset Printing to 2027, highlighted that digital presses have become more advanced as customers demand change (Smithers, 2022). Digital's faster turnaround, low-cost customisation and better cost profiles on short runs have made it particularly attractive to printers and publishers. Furthermore, digital presses can now reach higher volume jobs that were previously only cost-effective on litho.

New technologies have also impacted other aspects of the publishing value chain such as distribution.

We produce files that can be uploaded to all the mainstream distributors like Amazon, Smashwords, D2D, etc. There has been a steady increase in requests for these files from authors.

A publisher

The availability of content across different distribution platforms has enabled e-books to emerge as one of the main drivers of change. According to the South African Book Publishing Industry Survey Report, e-books saw a massive boom because of the Covid-19 lockdowns. This rise, no doubt, mirrors a worldwide trend, but it has contributed to an overall improvement in sales in the country.

Digital technologies have transformed how literary works are shared and consumed in the country. Several technology companies that support the publishing and literature sectors are operating in South Africa. Snapplify, for instance, promotes reading using digital means. Furthermore, social media, blogs and online literary magazines have allowed poets and authors to reach global audiences and gain recognition without the traditional gatekeepers.

Yet a few publishing entrepreneurs who took part in this study haven't adopted many of these digital tools and platforms due to lack of resources.

*We haven't really done this. Most of the areas we have not explored are because of understaffing and lack of funding.* A publisher

Activity	2020/21		2021/22	
	Local	Imports	Local	Imports
Sales of print books	647,647	95,112	828,470	118,083
Sales of digital book products	8,055	5,128	9,355	17,562
Rights sales	1,310	259	638	795
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>657,012</b>	<b>100,498</b>	<b>838,463</b>	<b>136,441</b>

**Figure 16:** Revenue from book-related activities, trade sector (R'000). (Source: PASA, 2024)

# How Publishing Creates Connections

In 2018 Durban was selected as a UNESCO City of Literature. It was the first time since UNESCO launched its City of Literature programme in 2004 that an African city had been chosen. Durban was selected due to its thriving cultural scene and expertise in hosting vibrant literary festivals as well as book fairs. In 2023, Buffalo City was also designated a City of Literature.

Book fairs and literary events have become invaluable resources for publishers looking to connect with audiences. As one respondent notes:

Literary festivals are of a very good quality in South Africa (in terms of programming and content) and there remains potential in the literary tourism industry.

A publisher

These events provide a unique opportunity not only to showcase new work but to also network with industry professionals. Many respondents have therefore incorporated these fairs and festivals into their publishing activities.

The publishing sector in Africa is hard to access but we're trying to build a union of African publishers who exchange rights at low cost in order to grow the readership of our books beyond our borders.

A publisher

To build this union, some publishers have joined with festival curators to ensure that a book gets the exposure it deserves. One such festival – the Open Book Festival – was founded in Cape Town. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, organisers now run a more flexible festival with multiple events throughout the year. The festival is sponsored by publishers including Jonathan Ball and Pan Macmillan. Additionally, the Durban International Book Fair provides a platform for writers, academics and publishers to launch and market their work to diverse audiences. Similarly, the Jozi Book Fair has created a common meeting space for small publishers and writers, and an opportunity for readers to signal to authors and publishers the kinds of stories they are interested in. The Johannesburg Festival of Women Writers, an initiative by the University of Johannesburg's Johannesburg Institute of Advance Studies, was hosted for the first time in 2023, to celebrate women writers and promote a culture of reading by creating links between writers, readers and publishers.

These book fairs and literary festivals in South Africa are serving as a stepping stone to potential publishing opportunities. The chance to interact with professionals allows emerging publishers to gain insights, learn about industry trends and receive guidance on their publishing journey. Only a few of the respondents are often able to attend international book fairs due to financial constraints.

Name	Frequency	Duration	Attendance (estimated)
Durban International Book Fair	Annually	Five days	Over 10,000
Jozi Book Fair	Annually	Three days	Over 3000
Open Book Festival	Quarterly	Three days	Over 10,000
Time of the Writer International Festival	Annually	Seven days	Over 4000
Franschhoek Literary Festival	Annually	Three days	Over 8000

Figure 17: Notable literary events in South Africa

So, there are a lot of us who still stay connected from that time but recently it's more difficult in terms of budget to try and attend different fairs. We'd love to do it, of course, but it's expensive.

### A publisher

Sometimes there is external funding for small publishers to attend select international book fairs within Africa, Europe and the Middle East. This has enhanced opportunities to sell foreign and subsidiary rights sales. However, some funders impose strict application criteria and administrative hurdles that can limit publishers' ability to take advantage of these funding opportunities. Some of the South African publishers who have attended international fairs and festivals have found the experience to be worthwhile.

*I've done workshops in Ghana, and I did a lot of work at the Zimbabwe Book Fair, training publishers who were funded to attend. And they were wonderful. I just made so many connections there. I'm still working with publishers that we met there. A publisher*

In 2010 South Africa was the market focus at the London Book Fair. The opportunity of being the focus country provided the ideal opportunity for South Africa to showcase its authors, publishers, booksellers and other aspects of the book industry to world audiences.

UK organisations and publishing entrepreneurs have also been invited to connect with the sector in South Africa. In 2024 Margaret Busby was the headliner of the Johannesburg Festival of Women Writers. Busby is Britain's first black woman publisher. She was instrumental in the careers of generations of writers such as Buchi

“

Emecheta, George Lamming and CLR James. She has also been a judge of the Booker Prize, the Caine Prize for African Writing and the Commonwealth Book Prize.

Jacana Media participated in the Green Book Fair – a pilot online book fair that offered a new, environmentally responsible way for international publishers to conduct business. This Arts Council England-funded initiative took place online in 2023. The fair showcased the collective strength and diversity of independent publisher networks worldwide. A wide range of independent publishers were invited to host introductory sessions and drop-ins, providing valuable insights, contacts, industry trends and networking opportunities for participants.

Connections have also been created directly among publishers to enhance their visibility internationally. In 2023 UK-based Legend Press and South African publisher Blackbird Books announced a partnership to help support and give exposure to South African authors (Bayley, 2023). The agreement followed a similar deal that Blackbird made with Rising Action, a Canadian independent publisher in 2021. Set-up in 2004, Legend Press is an independent publishing company. The founder of Blackbird Books, Thabiso Mahlape, saw the partnership as a way to amplify South African voices and showcase their talents to a wider audience (Bayley, 2023). According to Mahlape: 'Collaboration is the one strategy that makes the most sense to me and so I am very excited about this partnership and what it means for our authors. It's a privilege to be able to showcase our talents to a wider audience' (Bayley, 2023).

To create a strong connection with readers in the UK, some independent publishers work with African Books Collective (ABC) - the African-owned, marketing and distribution outlet for books from Africa. Over 30 publishers in South Africa use this channel to distribute their books.

Other respondents have also nurtured and retained strong relationships with bookshop chains, supermarkets, international distributors and agents in South Africa.

*I rely heavily on Jonathan Ball. I get all the UK books from them. A bookseller*

Jonathan Ball Publishers was founded in 1976 to publish books. It is also a leading agent for British and American publishers, marketing and distributing books on their behalf in southern Africa. Several booksellers in South Africa depend on this organisation for their foreign titles.

Trade associations in South Africa have also helped create strong connections among professionals within the publishing sector. The Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA) is the largest publishing industry body in South Africa. The strength of this association lies in its ability to bring together diverse stakeholders, collaborate on common goals and advocate for the collective interests of members. Similarly, South African Booksellers Association represents the retail book industry in South Africa. Among other roles, the association brings booksellers from around the country together annually to discuss matters of general interest. Supported by Nielsen BookData, the South African Booksellers Association, in coordination with the Publishers Association of South Africa, runs the SA Book Awards. The awards are conferred in three categories and their winners are voted for by booksellers from a list of bestsellers in a programme enabled by Nielsen BookScan.

Some respondents have used WhatsApp to create connections. This platform is cited as making collaboration for literary purposes across the continent a lot easier.

*We have published two authors that were referred to us through the WhatsApp platform. And then we've also been able to enter into a co-publishing agreement with a Nigerian publisher. So, it's something that I think holds a great future for African publishing. A publisher*

One respondent believes that South Africa in general is an exciting place to work because one's actions can have immediate and wide-ranging effect.

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South Africa remains a literary country, which produces involved readers and writers of all kinds of literature. People want to read books and need more local books, as well as more access to them. **A publisher**

.....



# How Publishing Contributes to the Creative Economy

The South African Cultural Observatory – established to undertake economic research for the cultural and creative industries in South Africa – published the ‘Economic Mapping of the Cultural and Creative Industries in South Africa 2022’. This report describes how the cultural and creative industries contribute to the economy of South Africa in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and GDP growth, employment and transformation, and international trade. The creative economy accounts for 6 per cent of all employment in South Africa – an estimated 1 million jobs, the report found. Furthermore, visual arts and crafts have the highest percentage of cultural jobs (44.5 per cent), with intangible cultural heritage coming in second (22.5 per cent), design and creative services (13.4 per cent), and books and presses (12.4 per cent) (South African Cultural Observatory, 2022).

Success in creative enterprises depends largely on having relevant skills. In South Africa, developing these core skills has been a challenge, according to some respondents to this study.

There is little internal training within publishing houses. People are rarely sent on courses to improve their skills or learn new ones. The industry also rarely collaborates with other creative industries. A publisher

To address this challenge, many publishing entrepreneurs are engaging interns in their businesses. Some respondents only accept interns with creative writing, editing and event management skills.

*We have two interns at the moment. We are about to take on another three. We'll take on a design intern, an events management intern and an editorial intern. They will spend a year with us. A publisher*

## Skills publishing entrepreneurs need to succeed

Successful publishing entrepreneurs combine a wide range of abilities and characteristics. Certain aspects, including personality traits, can be innate. To help people get ready for doing business in the modern world, the majority of the respondents say that entrepreneurs will also require a variety of soft and hard skills.

Respondents acknowledge that an editing or literary background is crucial. Networking is also another key skill that publishing entrepreneurs need.

Being open and talking to people – “you never know. It always leads to the next thing that you didn't know you had access to and that you could get. Attending book launches and networking with book bloggers are key. A publisher

In the publishing sector, profit margins are typically small, especially for small publishers. There's a need for many in the business to learn new professional skills and converge their professional roles.

*A small publisher might struggle if: they cannot typeset or design, part or all of their own books; they cannot do their own accounts, or handle royalty payments on time; they cannot draft or review rights contracts or do not understand copyright law; or they cannot commission or edit, whether this is developmental editing or line editing. A publisher*

Many publishing entrepreneurs are enthusiasts by nature, and some respondents view this as an important skill.

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If you are enthusiastic about what you're doing, you can overcome things... you can find ways around them. If you're just publishing for profit, that's not going to get you out of bed in the morning. A publisher

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Respondents point out that publishing professionals in the country should be able to do more than one job to reduce overheads and increase their operational efficiency; for small publishers, this is the difference between running a sustainable press, and running out of money very quickly.

A few institutions in South Africa offer publishing programmes that are helping to develop the critical skills needed in the sector.

The MA Publishing Studies programme at the University of Witwatersrand has been running since 1993. Some of the modules offered in the course include Context for Publishing, Advanced Copy-editing and Manuscript Preparation, Publishing Management, and Finance.

The Advanced Copy-editing and Manuscript Preparation module teaches students the skills and theories needed to prepare a manuscript for typesetting for either electronic or paper production. It also exposes students to copy-editing for specific audiences. Students also learn how to proofread, prepare briefs for editors, translators and typesetters. The MA programme has strong links with the industry, including the Publishers' Association of South Africa.

The BIS Publishing programme at the University of Pretoria was created to teach students how to produce books for different audiences. Students also learn about the local and international publishing industry. The programme also helps students develop relevant workplace skills including manuscript commissioning, copy-editing, design, production, marketing and distribution.

There are many universities offering courses in creative writing. The University of Cape Town, University of Pretoria, Rhodes University and Stellenbosch University all offer MAs while the University of South Africa offers a BA in creative writing.

# SOUTH AFRICA

## SPOTLIGHT Jacana Media

Jacana Media is a leading independent publisher in South Africa. It was launched by Maggie Davey in 2002 and acquired by eMedia some 10 years later. The parent company decided to dispose of Jacana in 2019 when Bridget Impey and Maggie who were already involved in running Jacana, offered to buy the company.

*So we met with a lawyer and asked, 'can't we do a deal?' And he said, 'of course we can'. We can sort this out'. So we bought Jacana. We took our life savings and did that. It was absolutely crazy. We didn't think about it. We just jumped in and did it because it needed to be done. Bridget Impey, Publisher Jacana Media*

At the time of sale, Jacana had about 1000 contracts with authors. The new owners restructured the business, including reducing the workforce from about 30 to 12, all of whom are full-time staff.

Jacana publishes books in arts, history, lifestyle, fiction, current affairs, memoir, children's literature and public health. Its children's books are published in multiple languages and distributed mainly to NGOs and libraries. Only a very small percentage of the books for children are sold through bookshops. In 2018, Jacana was awarded

the Bologna Prize Best Children's Publishers of the Year (Africa region).

*We don't play by the same rules as everybody else. Our strap line is 'we publish what we like' and that has served us well over the years. Bridget Impey, Publisher, Jacana Media*

In 2007 Jacana published Kopano Matlwa's novel, *Coconut*, which has since sold about 40,000 copies. In 2018 Jacana Media won the Bologna Book Fair award for Best African Children's Publisher. Maggie Davey



was the originating publisher of the Caine Prize and in 2020 Jacana published *Twenty Years of the Caine Prize for African Writing*, an anthology of short stories featuring the first twenty winners of the Caine Prize. The collection features authors not only from South Africa, but also Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe. In 2023, it launched a new imprint called Mother, focussing on fantasy, speculative fiction, Afrofuturism, and horror fiction.

Jacana Media has adopted several funding models to enable it stay afloat. For instance, it publishes many books funded through institutions and foundations.

*We have a part of our list called Fanele, which publishes what we call 'necessary books'. It's a word meaning 'necessary' in isiZulu. These are books for which certain academics have obtained funding. We help them produce that book using the funds that they've obtained. So, one part of our model is taking books that might otherwise be lost, dress them up, and put them out into the world, so more people can read them.* Bridget Impey, Publisher, Jacana Media

The non-profit arm of Jacana Media is Jacana Literary Foundation (JLF) which was set up to promote new writing through a number of initiatives. The JLF is able to publish literature that would not otherwise

be published because of its financial viability, although the readers are there. Through this foundation, Jacana runs the Dinaane Debut Fiction Award, the Sol Plaatje European Union Poetry Award, and the Gerald Kraak Anthology and Prize, which focuses on the subjects of gender, social justice and sexuality.

In 2024 the Jacana Literary Foundation received a grant of US\$35,000 from Hawthornden Foundation in the US. The fund will enable Jacana to publish more debut fiction and launch a creative writers' development programme to support budding writers in South Africa and beyond.

In terms of distribution and sales, Jacana uses Booksite, a company that provides warehousing and distribution services to publishers in South Africa. Jacana also actively sells books through its website, a practice that began during the Covid-19 pandemic. The business owner is pleased to be less reliant on bookstores.

*Although it's still a small part of our business, we love the market that we've been able to connect with through our website. There are a lot of people who don't use traditional bookstores but are able to buy from our online list.* Bridget Impey, Publisher, Jacana Media

# UGANDA





# Publishing Landscape

In 2023 the inaugural issue of the journal, *The Weganda Review* was published. Founded by author and journalist Rodney Muhumuza, the publication features fiction, poetry, essays, art and more. *The Weganda Review* is a Pan-African publication that welcomes contributions from across Africa as well as the diaspora, while having its roots in Uganda. Its goal is to provide a ‘strong, reliable platform to intellectuals whose ideas in prose, poetry and art are worth sharing’. Literary magazines like this have long been responsible for projecting new literary voices, but these publications also generate spaces where pan-African ideas can flourish (Ouma & Krishnan, 2021).

Also in 2023, award-winning Ugandan novelist Goretti Kyomuhendo republished her novel *Whispers from Vera*. In an interview published in *Brittle Paper*, Kyomuhendo disclosed that the new edition was available in different formats. ‘It came out in hardback and has been published as an ePub, and will soon appear as an audiobook and in paperback’ (Anena, 2024). The first edition, which was published in 2002, only appeared in paperback and was mostly distributed in Uganda. With a variety of digital channels, the new edition of *Whispers from Vera* is catering to a worldwide readership - highlighting how technology can enable a book published locally to transcend borders.

Educational books dominate the publishing market in Uganda. The government prioritised education when the country gained independence in 1962 in an effort to combat poverty and ignorance (Rutangye, 2019). To accomplish these goals, authorities invested in educational texts, which is one of the reasons Ugandan curriculum materials – primary, secondary, and preschool books – remain popular. The privatisation of government businesses in the 1990s, including publishing, further enhanced the educational publishing sector (Rutangye, 2019).

There is an emerging set of non-traditional publishers who are eager to promote new voices. To a large extent, their emergence has expanded

publishing in the country and increased access to books. According to the World Intellectual Property Organisation (2023), a total of 1,523 books were deposited at selected legal repositories in Uganda. Publishers in the country are mandated by law to deposit any new book in the library. The types of books submitted to the library include educational, religious, cultural, self-help, leisure and fiction. Yet, the importance of the legal deposit system and how it might help depositors, is still not fully understood by many Ugandan publishers (Matovu and Musoke, 2012). Many publishers do not feel compelled to assist the authorised deposit centres. Due to the high volume of litigation involved, imposing penalties on defaulters has proven to be challenging (Matovu and Musoke, 2012).

Based on data received from the National Library of Uganda, books submitted by publishers and authors in Uganda are categorised as follows:

Year	Publishers	Authors
2022	77	504
2021	36	457

**Figure 18: Legal deposits in Uganda. (Source: National Library of Uganda)**

The above data suggests that more books are deposited by authors than publishers. Like the rest of SSA, self-publishing has become a popular route for authors wishing to publish their own works in Uganda. In most cases, the authors bear the cost of providing legal deposit copies.

For many years, self-publishing was seen as a humiliating indication that a writer wasn’t good enough to be signed on by a traditional publisher. With few traditional publishing opportunities available even for talented authors, industry professionals have stepped in to offer guidance to self-published authors, so that the quality of their work can be enhanced. In 2024, African Writers Trust in Uganda organised a seminar on the theme: ‘Self-Publishing in Africa: What you need to Know’ to discuss how self-published books, not just those published in Uganda but also across SSA, can meet international publishing standards. The discussions were facilitated by Goretti Kyomuhendo, Bieke van Aggelen, founder of

Prize	Year founded	Genre	Frequency
National Book Trust of Uganda Literary Awards (NABOTU Literary Awards)	1998	Various	Annually
The Writivism Literary Initiative	2012	Various	Annually

**Figure 19: Notable literary awards in Uganda**

the African Literary Agency, and Susan Kiguli, a poet and professor of Literature at Makerere University. Authors from Uganda, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon and South Sudan attended the programme.

Uganda had its first major international conference, the first African Writers Conference, shortly after gaining independence in 1962. The historic event was held at Makerere University. African writers who would later become well-known attended this conference, including Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe. Rajat Neogy, the creator of *Transition*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Lewis Nkosi, and Ezekiel Mphahlele were among the other well-known African writers who attended.

There are few notable literary awards to reward innovation and celebrate the publishing and literature sectors in the country. In 2023, The Writivism Literary Initiative relaunched its literary prizes after a three-year hiatus. Its first literary event was held in Kampala in 2013. The categories for the 2023 awards were short fiction, creative nonfiction and poetry in translation.

The National Book Trust of Uganda Literary Awards (NABOTU Literary Awards) was last held in 2020, but organisers plan to resume the awards in 2025. In 2016, the Okot P'Bitek Prize was launched as a one-off prize to mark the 50th anniversary of the book *Song of Lawino*. The Janzi Awards was held for the first and only time in 2021, to celebrate outstanding achievements and innovation in the arts, including writing.

## Some key players

The trade sector is relatively small in Uganda. Only a couple of long-established independent publishers can perform the dual role of publishing both educational and literary books. These publishers have been able to give a voice to some underrepresented groups and document the country's history.

Fountain Books was established in 1988, following a national campaign for the creation of an indigenous publishing house. Prior to this Uganda depended on books imported from Kenya and Europe.

Some respondents in this study have acknowledged the role that Fountain Books has played in the country.

*Fountain did a lot of publishing of Uganda's seminal works around history, novels and poetry. If you look at some of the works published in the 1990s and early 2000s, these are very good works. They remain best sellers. A publisher*

FEMRITE, the Ugandan Women Writers' Association, has also been very visible in the country's publishing sector and on the continent. Since its inception in 1996, the organisation has focused on developing women writers in the country. Femrite Publications is a project within the organisation that was initiated to publish fiction, short stories, anthologies, poetry as well as non-fiction and 'true-life' stories.

So Many Stories is an independent press that publishes fiction and creative non-fiction by Ugandans. It was founded in 2014 by the writer Nyana Kakoma. Scribe House also provides professional editing and book production services to authors in the country.

The African Writers Trust (AWT) is an organisation that seeks to create a connection between African authors and publishing professionals on the continent and in the diaspora. The goal is to create opportunities for collaboration and to exchange knowledge and skills. It is registered as a charity in Uganda and also has a base in the United Kingdom.

Leap Publishers serves the needs of self-publishers in cover designing, editing, formatting and typesetting services. AfricanBooks.com is the digital publishing arm of Leap Publishers that allows Ugandan authors to sell and promote their e-books.

Honey Badger is a print and publishing company that works with self-published authors. The organisation has printed children's books, novels and biographies, among other genres.

The Oasis Book Project publishes children's books and works to enhance reading among Ugandan youth. The organisation has been actively promoting reading since 2012 by collaborating with schools. It has published more than thirty children's books and other learning resources.

ZAAZ Press provides editorial, design, registration and advisory services on publishing and sales of published works. The company also helps new authors publish their works.

Located in Kampala, the African Sellers Bookstore is a publishing and book distribution company. It was established in 2016 by Atukwatse Wartson to advance the visibility, accessibility and documentation of African works.

## Rights and representation

As described by respondents, rights tend to be managed differently depending on the type of publisher. Traditional publishers allow authors to maintain copyright of their works, while publishers maintain rights to publish in Uganda. With non-traditional publishers, mainly those providing on-demand publishing, no rights are bought or sold from the author. For other publishers, rights are owned by them solely.

*We do not buy or sell book rights. The authors are self-publishing and therefore retain full rights over their books.* A publishing consultant

*Each writer comes with what they want. But we prefer to give as much freedom to the writer to do what they want with their books. Because as I said, we are not commercial publishers. So, our role is supportive.* A publisher

There is some use of literary agents, mostly with newer authors looking to reach international publishers and markets.

Many of the respondents seem to know very little about buying or selling rights. But they are keen to learn.

.....  
**We neither buy nor have we started selling book rights yet. We only support local authors to publish and sell their books. However, we are actively exploring opportunities and seek to learn more about the nuts and bolts of selling rights in territories outside of Uganda.** A publishing consultant  
.....

## Distribution, marketing and sales

Some respondents have adopted a number of strategies to help grow their businesses and create value for customers.

All authors published by Oasis Book Project are obliged to be active salespeople (selling both their books and those of other authors published by Oasis). Through its Rural-Schools Reading Skills Development programme, Oasis Book Project sells books to those who can afford them and donates to those who can't.

The *Weganda Review* is distributed through stockists, ranging from art galleries and bookstores to cafes and restaurants in the greater Kampala metropolitan area. Efforts are underway to collaborate with stockists in other metropolises.

## Funding

A variety of funding sources are used by publishing entrepreneurs in Uganda. Sometimes, donations and grants are received in addition to profits from trading activities. Many of the respondents are self-funded and operate using a business model through the paid services they offer their self-publishing clients. Self-published authors themselves tend to fund their own publications.

*The organisation doesn't have institutional backers. We accept adverts and donations from cultural and educational institutions but not from the government, partisan groups, or those whose work is deemed divisive.* A publisher

Many respondents disclosed that proceeds from previous projects were usually reinvested into the business. In general, publishing entrepreneurs usually select the types of funding that will meet their needs and are likely to get them the immediate cash required.

A book club, Growth Lane, requires each member to pay an annual subscription or membership fee of 50,000 Ugandan Shillings. The fee helps in covering the operational costs of renovating a run-down community library in Entebbe. The renovation of the library is part of efforts by Growth Lane to support the community.

## Publishing in indigenous languages

Respondents' attitudes towards publishing in indigenous languages vary depending on the type of publisher. For traditional publishers there is a desire to produce titles in local languages. In 2023 Femrite Publications published its first translation; the classic poetry collection *Song Of Lawino* by Okot p'Bitek. The collection was translated into Lumasaba by Lucy Lunyolo and titled *Kamalilo Ka Lawino*.

Nonetheless, the additional costs and resources needed to produce such titles (i.e. editorial and translation costs) can pose a financial risk to many organisations.

.....  
We publish in English only at the moment, given our limited funding and the attempts to maximise the potential market size for our existing products. A publisher  
.....

Other respondents are willing to make the required investment and note that there are titles in indigenous languages selling well, although these tend to be storybooks for children and textbooks.

*There are many good books in indigenous languages that are selling, for instance, dictionaries, books on traditional concepts, proverbs, folktales, etc.* A publisher

There is consensus among respondents that there isn't enough demand for titles in indigenous languages.

*Our clients speak and write in English. It is not yet profitable for us to invest in editors of other languages because we hardly receive clients who use other languages.* A publishing consultant

Some respondents point to a lack of ability to read in indigenous languages as a reason for the low demand for such books.

.....  
A lot can speak the languages, but they can't read them. They find it unfashionable... they prefer books in English. A publishing consultant  
.....

The government is keen to promote indigenous language in the country. In 2022, the Cabinet of Uganda made Kiswahili an official language and instructed that it be taught as a compulsory subject in primary and secondary schools across the country (Githaiga, 2022). The decision follows a resolution from the 2021 East African Community (EAC) Summit, which agreed to establish English, French, and Kiswahili as the bloc's official languages. It is anticipated that as a result of this policy, writing and publishing in local languages would flourish.

## General challenges

Respondents listed several challenges posing a threat to the publishing sector in the country. These can be grouped into four categories: poor reading culture, piracy, low investment and poor distribution.

The majority of respondents agreed that Uganda has a poor reading culture, that is, most people don't read for leisure.

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We have a minuscule number of serious readers, and I think this is the biggest obstacle. Even among people who describe themselves as bookish and have the courage (and means) to buy books, how do we get them to read serious books cover-to-cover? A publisher

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Respondents also view piracy as a serious challenge to publishing in the country. Piracy of popular books is believed to be quite high and unchecked. Hence, the more popular a book becomes, the more prone it is to piracy.

*Every author's dream would be to have their book recommended by the government as a reading text in schools; but ironically in Uganda, the day that happens may be the last day you smile, as the pirates who have more money and better networks in the market will swoop in.* A publishing consultant

Respondents suggest that some pirates also own both bookshops and printing presses.

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So, once you sell them the first few copies of your books, and they realise the books are popular, they will just commence printing them and selling them illegally, without ever being caught or reprimanded. A publishing consultant

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There are laws in the country that seek to protect intellectual property, including books. The Copyright and Neighbouring Rights Act stipulates that commercial piracy is prohibited, as it denies authors an income. Those

who deal in pirated books can be arrested and prosecuted, according to the law, but enforcement has been weak (Kaddu et al, 2022).

The Uganda Publishers Association (UPA) and Uganda Reproduction Rights Organisation (URRO) also launched an anti-piracy initiative called the URRO hologram – a sticker with special security measures embedded – attached to books sold in Uganda to distinguish original material from pirated copies. The initiative was largely welcomed by publishers. In 2023, some members of the UPA met and stipulated a six-month term during which all their books sold on the open market would bear the hologram. However, the initiative hasn't fully taken off, particularly with self-published books due largely to the costs associated with printing the hologram and the lack of awareness in the market. Importantly, the holograms do not have any legal backing. 'The existing laws do not provide for use of holograms as a security feature and do not explicitly provide for authors to adopt any security feature' (Kaddu et al, 2022).

Respondents also believed that there is little investment in the publishing sector. The cause of this is wide-ranging, from the poor-quality content being commissioned and poorly designed books in terms of typesetting and cover design, to the rise of self-publishing companies producing to an inadequate standard.

One respondent pointed out that many writers in the country are primarily self-taught and therefore have no support systems to help them produce good-quality manuscripts. This in turn means a publisher may not have a steady supply of manuscripts to make long-term business sense.

Some respondents are of the view that the government undervalues publishing and the broader creative industry as well as its contribution to the country's economy, hence the lack of investment. There are few opportunities for grants or other forms of interventions to reduce the costs incurred as part of the publishing process.

Uganda is affected by the same restrictions in the movement of goods as seen in other African countries. Among respondents, it was felt that while there is a will to distribute books within and outside of the country, the costs involved in transportation, taxes and commission continue to be a challenge. This is in addition to the low number of traditional sales outlets in the country.



# How Publishing Drives Innovation

Uganda launched the Digital Transformation Roadmap in 2023. In line with Uganda's Vision 2040, the roadmap describes the country's progress toward becoming a completely digital society (Independent, 2023). 90 per cent of households should have an internet connection by 2040, according to the roadmap, and 90 percent of residents should be able to access government services online. Enhancing digital infrastructure and connectivity, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship, and boosting digital literacy and skills are some of the ways the government hopes to achieve the objectives of its digital strategy. The roadmap appears to be on track. In 2023 the Uganda Communication Commission revealed that the total number of fixed and mobile subscriptions was 33.2 million, which represents about 68 percent of the total population (Oketch, 2023).

With the help of Ugandan commercial banks, consumers can electronically transfer money to businesses or individuals using their mobile phones. Furthermore, some cards that enable online payments are offered by these banks. Several publishing entrepreneurs are leveraging these digital opportunities to serve readers and writers.

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Through digital technology, communication is eased which facilitates quick production times. Furthermore, we can work with writers beyond our immediate pool, expanding the reach of our vision. A publisher

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In 2024, African Writers Trust launched an online bookshop called Tubaze African Books. The mission of the store is to sell books by African writers published outside the continent at an affordable price in Uganda. Customers can purchase books by making bank transfers or using mobile money. Upon receipt of payment, orders are delivered within a day, depending on the location.

In 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, two women Phyllis Katembwe and Crystal Mugimba founded an online bookstore – Mahiri Books – to support African writers and increase accessibility to literature. Payments for books can be made via mobile money, cash on delivery and credit cards.

In Uganda and many countries in SSA, phones are used to send and receive money through mobile money services. This is a unique way to provide financial services to those without bank accounts. Mobile and network operators are increasingly offering mobile money services throughout Africa due to the widespread use of mobile phones. The pace at which mobile money has taken off in Uganda in comparison to other payment methods is indicative of its potential for financial inclusion. Debit and credit card numbers rose by almost 25 percent in the country between 2018 and 2022, while the number of active mobile money accounts surged by 73 per cent around the same time (Simione and Muehlschlegel, 2023).

Some publishing enterprises in Uganda have deliberately refrained from adopting digital technologies due to their corporate mission. One of the core missions of Oasis Book Project is to produce affordable print books. Its target audiences are financially underprivileged and could view the technology needed to consume digital books as luxuries.

Beyond digital technology, publishing entrepreneurs in the country have also created innovative practices. The Kampala Book Market was established as a street market for writers, readers, publishers, literary performers and booksellers to come together in an open and engaging environment. Its primary goal is to enhance the visibility and accessibility of Ugandan and African literature as a whole. A wide range of books, from timeless classics to recent releases and emerging writers, is carefully curated each month for the market. The book market comprises distinct stalls and visitors are welcome to explore these. Hundreds of people attend this market every month.

# How Publishing Creates Connections

A strong desire to collaborate exists among many publishing entrepreneurs in Uganda. Within the sector, there is a network of industry groups looking to represent the interests of members. These include the National Book Trust of Uganda and the Uganda Publishers Association.

*It's good when you associate with others, then you know what others are doing and what you can do with them. We don't have a specific model that we follow. A publisher*

Some literary festivals and book fairs are also helping to create strong connections within the sector.

The Christmas Book Fair is organised by Goethe-Zentrum Kampala/Ugandan German Cultural Society. It was founded in 2021, to promote and celebrate Ugandan writing. Another notable event, the Writivism Literary Festival was held annually until it took a hiatus in 2019. These literary festivals and book fairs, beyond celebrating authors and selling books, also make sustained and concerted efforts to draw attention to and question cultural and political issues that impact Africans.

The literary magazine, *Weganda Review*, collaborates with various venues across the capital city. For example, the Coterie Book Café has regular book events during which copies of the journal are introduced to new readers.

In terms of the distribution of e-books, connections are also essential, and many respondents work with Africanbooks.com and the African Books Collective to develop and distribute content on the continent and across UK/US markets. Similarly, connecting

with stakeholders in other African countries, Europe and the US is important in distributing physical titles to other markets. However, some respondents admit a lack of ability to forge useful connections abroad.

**We are yet to establish such useful contacts outside Uganda, but we are looking out for any opportunities that may arise.**  
A publisher

*We do not know how to go about it. For example, we recently noticed that our books would do very well in the Kenyan market (which is next door to Uganda) but we do not yet know how. We also visited Zambia and saw a great need for our products and services. We even had meetings with a few stakeholders in the publishing/ education sector, but did not know how to follow up after returning to Uganda. A publishing consultant*

There is some connection with Western markets. Individual publishers often work with British editors, publishers and organisations for a range of reasons. For some, foreign publishers provide access to additional skills and opportunities to connect via workshops, festival and book fairs.

*During Covid-19, we had an activity between Uganda, UK and Malaysia. So, we created virtual rooms where we had workshops with our members. A publisher*

Publishers also connect to sell their titles to foreign markets as seen with relationships with the African Book Collective. Andariya, Asante Capital Hub, Driberg Books Limited, Fountain Publishers, FEMRITE, Pelican Publishers, Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa, and the Uganda Martyrs University Book Series are the publishers in Uganda who currently work with the Collective.

Name	Frequency	Duration	Attendance (estimated)
Christmas Book Fair	Annually	One day	Over 200
The Uganda International Book Fair	Annually	Five days	Over 3000
The Kampala Book Market	Monthly	One day	Over 300

**Figure 20: Notable literary events in Uganda**

# How Publishing Contributes to the Creative Economy

A Culture and Development East Africa (CDEA) 2023 report 'Mapping the Current Landscape of the Culture and Creative Industries in Uganda' identifies five sub-sectors that make up the creative economy: fashion, creative technology, film, literature and publishing, music and performing arts and the visual arts and crafts. The report notes that there is no specific fund established by the Ugandan government to assist the creative industries operating in the country. Therefore, funding for creative spaces comes from the business sector, development partners, or individual creative entrepreneurs. In terms of employment, the report suggests that most jobs in the literature sector are with publishing houses. The report also reveals that many authors in the country are self-published and that some of the jobs in the sector have low pay, while others are part-time.

Publishers responding to this study tend to employ 5–6 people on a full- or part-time basis.

*We are a team of seven... we have a publishing arm. In the distribution arm, we have 4 full-time staff, and then in the publishing arm, I outsource editors, layout designers and typesetters so that I*

*work with a team of three people. A publisher*

*We are two full-time people and seven part-time (project-based) team members. A publishing consultant*

*We are a small outfit that is currently downsized to four full-time staff members, a CEO, publisher, administration and finance manager and a labs coordinator (training spaces). We work with a network of writers, editors and designers to meet our different needs. A publishing consultant*

## Skills Publishing Entrepreneurs need to succeed

Some respondents are of the view that formal education is less of a necessity and that more practical experience and application are needed for those looking to enter the sector.

I don't think you need to have a degree or certificate or what. I think if you can read, you can publish. But obviously, there are skills that entrepreneurs need generally... you have to be passionate... you have to be ambitious. A publisher

“

Many respondents also agree that editing, typesetting, designing, copywriting, book production and printing skills are essential to new entrants. Having a thorough knowledge of literature is also seen as key. Additionally, business and soft skills are also required to support the industry. Publishing entrepreneurs are expected to have creative skills, not only in the art of storytelling but also in how to navigate the industry. Problem-solving and communication are also seen as skills needed to succeed.

There are a handful of publishing and creative writing programmes offered in universities in Uganda. Makerere University, one of the leading universities in the country, offers the editing and publishing course as a module in the Bachelor of Arts with Communication Skills programme. Topics covered in this course include copy editing, proof reading, working with authors, making editorial decisions and developing skills

in critical reading. Bugema University's editing and publishing in Luganda module teaches students editing and publishing and introduces them to a range of skills needed in the industry, while also supporting indigenous language publishing in the country. The Islamic University of Uganda also offers a postgraduate module on the theory of editing and publishing. Makerere University offers an introduction to creative writing module at the undergraduate level.

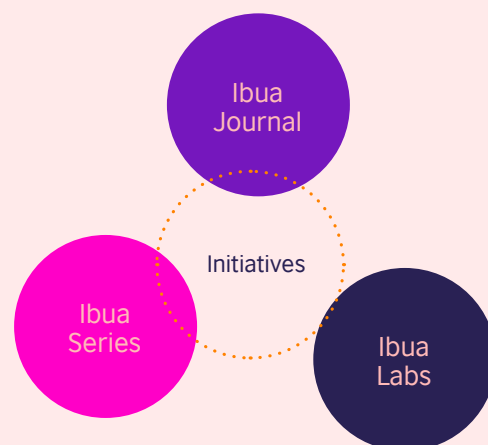
Author-led writing programmes have also been operating in the country. The writer Jackee Batanda founded Success Spark Brand Ltd, to provide writing, coaching, book writing, editing, and book marketing services to Ugandan authors. Through this company, Jackee runs an online book writing masterclass for new authors.



# UGANDA

## SPOTLIGHT Ibua Publishing

Founded in 2017, Ibua Publishing is an indigenous publishing house that was started by Lantern Meet Foundation, a cultural organisation in Uganda, with the support of DOEN Stitching. It works with African-based emerging and established writers, providing them with publishing opportunities. The organisation also creates spaces for writers to access training to improve their craft, linking emerging writers to professional editors and established writers. The aim of this is to contribute to the improvement of the editorial quality of the literary output from Africa.



**Figure 21: The three main initiatives of Ibua Publishing**

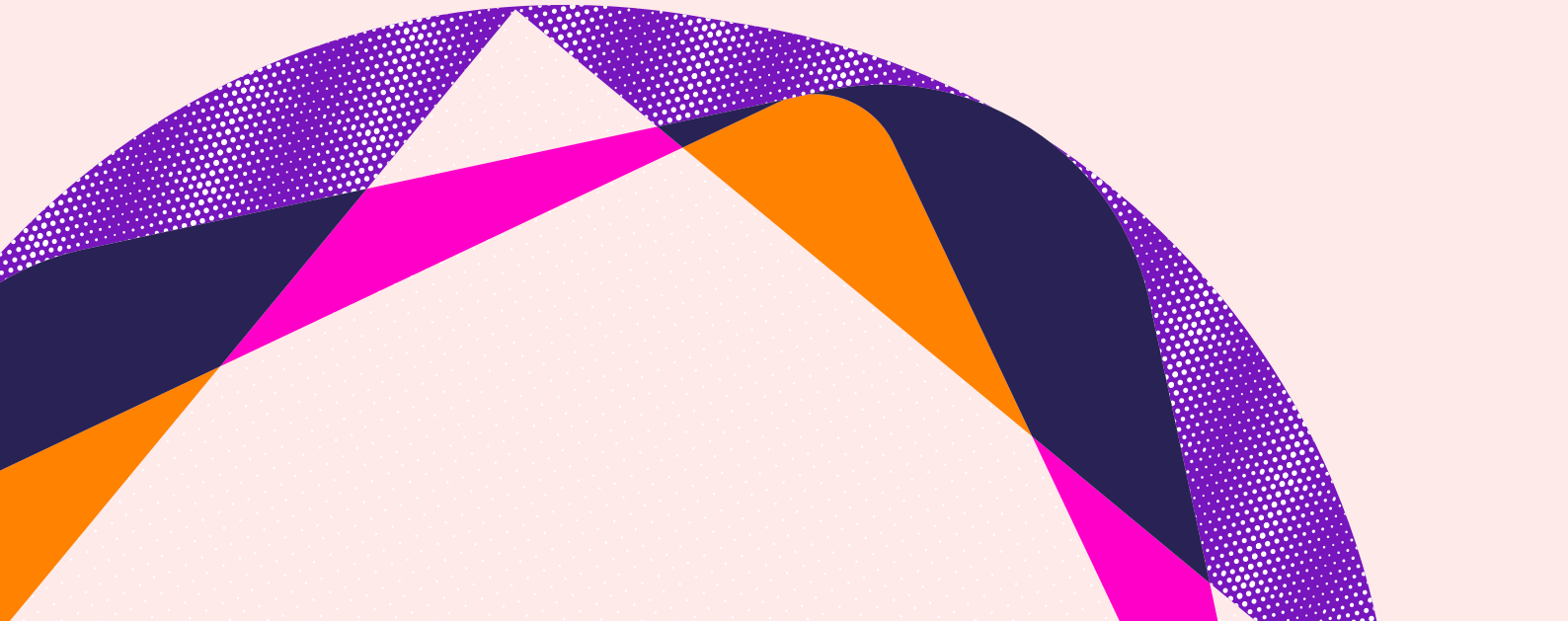
Ibua has four full-time staff members: a CEO, publisher, administration and finance manager and a labs coordinator responsible for training spaces. The company works with a network of writers, editors and designers to meet its different needs.

*The publishing sector in Uganda and East Africa is not as strong as we see in other regions on the continent let alone globally. That said, there are several opportunities*

*to enhance our production (output) and the structures necessary to accomplish this.* Karungi Charity Kwatampora, Publisher, Ibua Publishing

*Ibua Journal* is an online literary magazine that publishes essays, short stories, poetry, and book reviews. Ibua Labs provides training spaces for writers and editors, and Ibua Series is an imprint publishing children's books, poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction.





*We currently publish only in English given our limited funding and the attempts to maximise the potential market size for our products. However, we are keen to have some of our works translated as well as produce some work in local languages and are working towards that.* Karungi Charity Kwatampora, Publisher, Ibua Publishing

In 2023 *Ibua Journal* published *Raging Waters*, a new anthology of short stories and poems on climate change. The collection was based on entries from Ibua's BOLD call for submissions on the theme of climate change. According to a reviewer, the collection explores 'the ecological, social, and emotional dimensions of climate change on African lives, portraying stark reminders that as a continent we are particularly vulnerable to and bear the brunt of the adverse effects of climate change and are in desperate need of tangible resolutions to mitigate it.' (Ghosh, 2023b).

*Ibua Journal* has built a strong reputation over the years. In 2021 a short story 'Lucky' written by Ugandan author, Doreen Baingana, and first published by *Ibua Journal*, was shortlisted for the AKO Caine Prize. That year, organisers of the AKO Caine Prize decided to accept submissions via email for the first time in 21 years. Previously, a publisher had

to deliver six copies of the print issue to London (or six printed copies of the piece if it was published in an online magazine). Changing the rules of the prize enabled many 'homegrown' literary magazines and publishers in Africa to submit entries. Being shortlisted for a major prize was particularly encouraging for Ugandan literature.

The Ibua Lab offers writers an immersive experience that helps them improve their craft. The lab is split into online participation and intensive workshops. The organisation provides these courses at a subsidised rate. However, from the publisher's experience, many early-career individuals still struggle to afford these subsidised rates.

*Emerging writers on the continent need to appreciate the value of a structured editorial process. At the same time, editors need to have formal training to acquire minimum standards that guide their work. Without this, we will continue to see sub-par works coming out of the continent despite the increase in publishing opportunities for Africans wherever they may reside on the continent.* Karungi Charity Kwatampora, Publisher, Ibua Publishing

# ZIMBABWE



# Publishing Landscape

In 2024 a Shona language translation of *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga was released. Remarkably, the award-winning novel – first published in 1988 in English – had already been translated into several European languages, including Dutch, French, German, Italian and Spanish (Mushakavanhu, 2024a). The new Shona translation was released by a small publisher in Zimbabwe, House of Books, and was translated by Ignatius Mabasa. Mushakavanhu (2024a) suggests that *Nervous Conditions* is an important documentation of Zimbabwe’s history, and the translation finally makes it accessible to the masses.

Also in 2024, a group of Zimbabwean writers, led by Petina Gappah and Tinashe Muchuri, translated the classic, *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell, into Shona. This translation project marked another significant milestone for Shona literature. Firstly, the translation was carried out by a group of writers who are passionate about language and literature. Secondly, the translators use Orwell’s book as a way of providing a satiric commentary on their own country (Mushakavanhu, 2023).

Despite these recent successes, the publishing sector in Zimbabwe cannot be described as thriving. Over the past years, the nation’s socio-

political and economic downturn resulted in the establishment of an unfavourable business environment. Inflation became the biggest concern for the publishing industry. With the maximum bank withdrawal insufficient to purchase a book, the limited readership in the country dwindled.

The economic situation in the country forced many authors to look to the West or their neighbour, South Africa, for publication. Much new fiction about Zimbabwe is now being written, published and sold abroad. The Zimbabwe Book Publishers Association has less than 20 members, the majority of which are publishers of educational books. The country only has a handful of literary awards, as shown below.

The National Arts Merit Awards (NAMA Awards) are awarded by the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe in recognition of outstanding achievements in arts and culture. Prizes are given for Outstanding Fiction Book, Outstanding First Creative Published Work, Outstanding Children’s Book, Outstanding Poetry Book. The competition is an annual literary event seeking to promote original creative writing talent in English

According to the International Monetary Fund, Zimbabwe’s economy is showing resilience. Economic growth could increase to 6 per cent in 2025, due in part to ongoing capital projects in the country (IMF, 2024). It is hoped that as the economy improves, the publishing industry might thrive again.

Prize	Year founded	Genre	Frequency
National Arts Merit Awards	1998	Various	Annually
Intwasa Short Story Competition	2004	Short Story	Annually

**Figure 22: Notable literary awards in Zimbabwe**

## Some key players

The publishing and literature sectors in Zimbabwe have evolved substantially in the past two decades and continue to be a vital part of the country's cultural and educational landscape. Corporate publishers, such as Mambo Press, College Press and Longman Books, dominate the country's publishing scene, although they focus primarily on educational books.

.....

It's the school texts... the educational texts that are moving. Literature is not selling well. In fact, literature sales have gone down. The biggest movers are in the education sector...mainly books for primary schools which sell on average 20 to 30k units per learning area. A publisher

.....

Despite poor sales, there is still an interest in trade publishing and a recognition of the rich contribution that small publishers, who have a long and prestigious heritage in Zimbabwe, make to books and literature.

amaBooks is a small independent press that publishes novels, short story collections and poetry. It was established in 2000 by Jane Morris and Brian Jones. amaBooks is now based in the UK but remains committed to publishing Zimbabwean voices.

Carnelian Heart Publishing was established in the UK in 2020 by Samantha Rumbidzai Vazhure. The publishing company specialises in novels, short stories, poetry and memoirs. Vazhure started the company just to publish her own works and it was only after she became aware of how difficult publishing was, that she decided to use her platform to help others. Vazhure is the sole full-time employee of Carnelian Heart. Functions such as cover design are outsourced to contractors, of which there are between four and five.

House of Books started off as a simple bookshop in Harare, importing, collecting and selling a variety of trade and antique books in Zimbabwe. It operates bookstores in Harare and Victoria Falls International Airports with a focus on promoting Zimbabwean books to tourists visiting the country. House of Books is also an active publisher of fiction and non-fiction by Zimbabwean authors.

Self-publishing, a form of non-traditional publishing, has also emerged as one of the alternative options to publishing in Zimbabwe. Royalty Books, for instance, focuses on providing affordable professional editing, proofreading, typesetting and cover design services to authors who opt for self-publishing. Phoenix Publishing, founded by Faith Mudiwa Chipangura, also offers various editorial and publishing services to authors in the country.

Ngano Hub Consultants also helps authors who want to self-publish their books. It provides personalised services to help authors achieve their book-publishing goals. The business sees itself more as a consultant than as a publisher in any form. The Women's Writers Support Group also provides publishing services to women writers in the country.

## Rights and representation

Over the past years, a few publishers in Zimbabwe have sold the rights of their books or co-published them with publishers in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Canada, the UK and the US. Back in the 1980s, Baobab (now defunct) sold the rights of *Bones* by Chenjerai Hove to publishers around the world. This enabled the novel to be translated into Japanese, Dutch, German, French, Swedish and Norwegian. amaBooks has formed a working relationship with Parthian Books in the UK, and sold the rights to several of their titles, including the award-winning novel *The Maestro*, *The Magistrate* and *The Mathematician* by Tendai Huchu (Machirori, 2023).

Like much of Sub-Saharan Africa, no literary agency exists as a business in Zimbabwe. However, many Zimbabwean writers have been

represented by some UK- or US-based agents. For instance, the Wylie Agency, notable for its African client portfolio, represents NoViolet Bulawayo, to publish her works globally. In an interview, Bulawayo credits her agents and editors for the success of *Glory*. 'My agent and editors are my trusted dream team; for their critical but caring eyes, for being ready to say what must be said, no matter how difficult, for their generosity, and most importantly, for understanding me' (Poets and Writers, 2022).

Respondents to this study generally believe that buying and selling rights is tough for publishing entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe due to economic constraints.

*Buying rights is a problem for us...because publishers in Zimbabwe don't tend to have a lot of money and sales generally aren't that brilliant. We would like to be able to publish a book in Zimbabwe, and also elsewhere.* A publisher

Despite financial constraints, some of the respondents are versatile in negotiating rights. Sometimes they enter into an agreement and pay a licensing fee for the duration of the contract. Other respondents have been able to buy and sell rights by attending national and international festivals like the Frankfurt Book Fair.

*We've been on the invitation programme twice, which has been really, really helpful.* A Publisher

One respondent suggests that there is a clear need for publishers and authors in Zimbabwe to get together and explore subsidiary rights.

Given that some books when made into TV programmes raise a demand for the actual book, it is pertinent to look into film rights. I'm always saddened by the fact that we have that 70 per cent local content regulation and yet it is so poorly implemented. There is so much to be learnt from the streaming sites. There's something there to be learnt in terms of leveraging indigenous culture and creating demand, because a lot of those streaming sites show series that were once novels. A publishing consultant



## Distribution, marketing and sales

All the respondents in this study have a presence on social media - notably Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp - and use these platforms to drive sales. A few also have used newsletters, press releases and interviews with the authors to help raise awareness about a book.

Some respondents also explore book reviews to help amplify a book's reach among book clubs, bookshops and bloggers. These book reviews are mostly online – literary blogs and social media – and sometimes open doors to new and bigger audiences. Publishing consultants who work with self-published authors do not offer any of these publicity-related services.

.....

**We use a strict business model: bring your script, pay the money, and we perfect your book and give it back to you. And many of these authors will have to find ways of selling and distributing their books.** “

A publishing consultant

.....

Carnelian Heart is highly reliant on social media for marketing. A presence on X, Instagram and Facebook allows connection with a global audience. The publisher also employs newsletters and book reviews alongside interviews with authors. For physical books, more expense is involved. As a result, print editions are mainly distributed domestically in Zimbabwe with retailers such as Book Fantastics.

One respondent believes that publishing as a profession should be taken more seriously.

.....

I think as long as we are not treating publishing like a business, it will not be a business. So, I think we do need to treat it more like a business where we are setting deadlines and doing things that happen in a normal business. We need to ask questions like: What's the marketing strategy? What are the distribution channels?

A publisher

.....

## Funding

Publishing entrepreneurs in SSA exist to empower authors and content creators by adopting a variety of business models. Most of these businesses in Zimbabwe have no institutional backing. Although many respondents admit generating some income from their book sales, there is often a need to inject additional funding.

*Sometimes the business can generate a little bit of income to fund upcoming books, but I still have to inject a little capital.* A publisher

*When we publish a book, the money we raise from it goes into the next book.* A publisher

Some respondents have received funding from external bodies such as the Culture Fund of Zimbabwe Trust and Hivos. Others have opted not to accept external funding to avoid being influenced by investors.

.....

I think I've kind of just wanted the business to be purely independent because sometimes, when you receive funding, then you are influenced. A publisher

.....

## Publishing in indigenous languages

In both pre- and post-colonial Zimbabwe, Shona and Ndebele were acknowledged as the primary indigenous languages, while English was kept as the official language (Hikwa, 2015). The nation was thus divided along linguistic lines by the predominance of the three languages. In recent times, the government of Zimbabwe has actively promoted the use of other indigenous languages in the country. The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amended (No. 20) Act 2013 now recognises 16 official languages, namely: Chewa, Chibarwe, English, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, sign language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa (Hikwa, 2015).

Some corporate publishers have contributed immensely to the growth of indigenous publishing in Zimbabwe. College Press, for instance, although an education publisher, publishes literature texts that are part of the national curriculum. These texts are mostly poetry and prose in English, Shona and Ndebele. With their recent translations, House of Books are also encouraging the publication of works in indigenous languages. However, many respondents to this study, present a less optimistic view of indigenous language books. One publisher explains that it was challenging to publish such works on mainstream platforms such as Amazon. Indeed, e-books uploaded in languages that are not supported by Kindle devices would not show correctly and are therefore unavailable for purchase. Furthermore, producing literary works in these languages is often expensive for publishers in Zimbabwe and not financially rewarding.

---

It's very difficult to sell the books in native languages; I purely do them for the advocacy. **A bookseller**

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One respondent stated that they had only published titles in English and Shona. The Shona publications started due to pressure, mainly from authors they had previously worked with in English. These authors wanted their books to be accessible to ordinary people in the community.

Carnelian Heart mainly publishes in English and a small number of Shona titles. In fact, the first title it published was in Shona. The publisher has also considered publishing in Ndebele as this is spoken in South Africa and would therefore have a wider reach.

## General challenges

The challenges faced by publishers in Zimbabwe are largely linked to the economic issues such as persistent inflation, slow structural transformation and intermittent shocks like drought, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2023 the government tightened monetary policy to reduce inflation. Despite the government's good intentions, that same year, Weaver Press – arguably the most high-profile independent press in Zimbabwe – shut down after 25 years of publishing exciting literature. Weaver first published NoViolet Bulawayo's Caine Prize-winning story that later became *We Need New Names*, shortlisted for the Booker Prize. In an interview with the *Guardian*, Irene Staunton, publisher of Weaver, said publishing in Zimbabwe had become more difficult because of the economy (Dehghan, 2023).

Zimbabwean author and research fellow at University of Oxford, Dr Tinashe Mushakavanhu has described being trained and mentored at Weaver Press. According to him: 'The only way to learn was on-the-job training. Before the office building was completed, my workstation was the veranda. It was an ideal place to learn. In a small publishing house, the divisions of who does what are not very rigid; things have to get done and if you are the only pair of hands available, then you sometimes get to do them.' (Mushakavanhu, 2024b).

Weaver Press' closure is a devastating blow to the literary and publishing communities not just in Zimbabwe but across the continent.

Book distribution is becoming a major challenge for publishers who are still operating, as highlighted by the respondents. Distributors, who ought to handle the shipping and delivery as well as billing on the publishers' behalf, do not exist. Many respondents say they would rather focus on the business of publishing and leave distribution to other professionals. However, they are left with no choice but to take on their own distribution.

Piracy is also a big business in the country, according to some respondents. The legal instruments are available - such as the Copyright and Neighbouring Rights Act of Zimbabwe – but there is an apparent lack of enforcement. With advancements in technology, the pirates are also getting better at their craft, with the actual printing, scanning and production making them just as good as the original copy.

*So they are printing it to a similar quality, and with WhatsApp and Facebook, they are scanning books and turning them into a PDF and sharing them on platforms. That's difficult for us to control.* A bookseller

A study by Garwe (2014) found that book piracy in Zimbabwe includes the illegal reproduction of copyrighted works through various means such as scanning, photocopying, printing and electronic sharing and duplication of books. The study also observed that these illegal activities involved everyone from students to teachers.

## How Publishing Drives Innovation

A report by the World Bank finds that Zimbabwe's digital financial sector offers strong foundation for the development of the digital economy in the country. One of Zimbabwe's greatest assets is its extensively utilised digital payment system, which powers 96 per cent of all transactions in the country and is heavily utilised by the public sector (World Bank, 2021).

The publishing sector in Zimbabwe is taking advantage of various technological advances to meet the needs of the market. Some of the methods adopted by publishers and booksellers include digitising books and building online systems for ordering and selling both physical and e-books. Digital marketing and social media are also being leveraged to publicise books. Some publishers have designed interactive websites that permit readers to explore books in a more engaging manner. Weaver Press operated an online bookstore where books published by them were sold for a certain amount. The publishing company partnered with various payment platforms like PayPal, Visa, MasterCard, Maestro and others, to ensure a smooth payment process. Zimbabwe Publishing House also has an online presence on Facebook where it advertises its books and connects with readers.

Bookseller and publisher, House of Books, sells books across various destinations and delivers within Harare for free - customers simply order books using the online bookshop.

WhatsApp has emerged as a key social media tool that is opening up opportunities for writers, publishers and readers to market, sell and buy digital books in Zimbabwe. Through various

WhatsApp groups, authors are able to develop a loyal customer base for their books, whether they be physical or digital. People are often invited, through email, social media, or even word of mouth, to join these groups and engage with authors directly.

There are several WhatsApp groups in Zimbabwe for people who like reading and writing. In these groups, writers share snippets of their stories to entice readers. Members of the group interested in buying the shared work can then send a direct message to the author. Payment is often made through Ecocash, a mobile payment platform, and once transaction is completed, the stories are emailed directly to the buyer.

However, not all authors sell their books directly. Some use the WhatsApp groups for advertisement and direct buyers to other platforms where the books are sold. A respondent in this study describes how one particular author drives sales via his WhatsApp broadcast:

*Every Friday, he releases an excerpt from his book, and this is what has created demand in the market.* A publishing consultant.

Self-published authors and readers are drawn to WhatsApp because of its ease of use, capacity to reach many potential readers at once and lack of other operating expenses. As of 2017, WhatsApp had become the most popular internet app in Zimbabwe, accounting for up to 44 per cent of all mobile internet usage in the country (Karombo, 2017).

A report in the *Globe* tells the story of Alice Gochayi, a writer in Harare, who posts her work on Facebook and WhatsApp. She hadn't intended to become an author but when overwhelmed with frustration she took to Facebook to vent about a woman in pain. This post generated a lot of traction online and she moved into writing fiction (Munjenjema, 2018).

According to the study's respondents, audiences have responded favourably to these innovations. The WhatsApp model debunks the belief that African markets don't have ready readers. It also shows that the hunger for reading is so deep people want to read on their phones. Furthermore, the WhatsApp model supports the view that mobile devices serve many purposes, some highly useful to professionals, such as maintaining social networks and gathering and sharing information.

# How Publishing Creates Connections

Literary festivals and book fairs in Zimbabwe have for many years provided a platform for writers, poets, publishers and literature enthusiasts to celebrate and promote the literature and publishing sectors. These festivals often feature readings, workshops, panel discussions and performances, showcasing not only literary talent but also opportunities for collaboration.

There is a broad base of creatives who are very passionate about writing and expressing themselves and producing their own materials. All they need is the space and the facilities to get their works out there to the public. A festival director

LitFest Harare was established in 2014 by poet and curator, Chirikure Chirikure. The festival's events take place in various venues in central Harare, as well as online, and the events are usually spread over four days. The festival's main purpose is to enhance discussions, critiques and debates. Litfest offers workshops for young creatives and panel discussions with authors. In 2023, it celebrated a decade of running the festival in Harare with the theme 'Words Remember: A Decade of Story.' Festival participants came from Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa and Italy including poets, writers and academics.

The Zimbabwe International Book Fair was held for the first time in 1983 in Harare and in the 1990s this fair helped promote the publishing industry in SSA. In 1997, the Prince Claus Fund awarded it the Principal Award, praising the fair for growing into an important meeting place for publishers, writers, poets and translators. Irene Staunton, in an interview with *Johannesburg Review of Books*, praised the work the Zimbabwe International Book Fair was doing in the 1990s: 'Publishers came from all over Africa, the Caribbean, America, Europe and Scandinavia. There were probably over a hundred stands every year. And the excitement was tremendous because it was an African fair in Zimbabwe, taking place in our own way in the Harare Gardens... Publishers sold rights to their new titles, and we did it on our own terms. And we made friends from around the world' (Machirori, 2023).

In 2022 the first post-pandemic Zimbabwe International Book Fair was held in Harare, but critics said it fell short of expectation due to low attendance and a lack of funding (Mushava, 2022). The fair did not include popular events from earlier editions such as the Writers' Workshop, the Literary Evening (a spoken-word event) the Indaba (a talk session that featured famous people) (Mushava, 2022). Notable exhibitors at previous events such as Mambo Press, ZPH and College Press, were also not there (Mushava, 2022).

Many connections have also been forged at events in the UAE and the UK. In 2020, the University of East Anglia marked the 50th anniversary of the Creative Writing MA programme, the UK's first creative writing programme. The university selected Tsitsi Dangarembga to become their inaugural International Chair of Creative Writing. Supported by UEA colleagues, Tsitsi delivered a series of literary events, classes and workshops across SSA and the UK during the 2021/22 financial year.

Name	Frequency	Duration	Attendance (estimated)
Harare Open Book Festival	Annually	One day	Over 300
Litfest Harare	Annually	4 days	Over 200
Zimbabwe International Book Fair	Annually	4 days	Over 2000

Figure 23: Notable literary events in Zimbabwe

In 2023 the British Zimbabwe Society (BZS), in partnership with Royal Holloway, University of London, hosted its inaugural Zimbabwean Book Festival, a two-day event in London. The British Council in Zimbabwe offered its facilities to provide online connectivity support for festival participants based in Harare. The inaugural festival featured a book trade panel with Stephanie Kitchen, Director, African Book Collective, Tau Tawengwa, Editor, Harare Streets Publishing, Murray McCartney and Irene Staunton, Directors/Editors, Weaver Press as discussants.

Brain Garusa, founder of Book Fantastics, attended the International Booksellers Conference in Sharjah, UAE in 2022. The two-day event was curated by Sharjah Book Authority (SBA) to enhance the publishing industry. Garusa was able to gain insight into the function of bookselling outside of Zimbabwe and to understand developments that affect bookselling (Muleya, 2022).

A respondent in this study describes the significance of attending international festivals:

When I go to literary festivals or events and people come to my stall, the first thing they say is, ‘oh, I’m going to buy a Zimbabwean book, because I’ve never read anything from Zimbabwe’.

A publisher

Between 2022 and 2023 the University of Oxford held The Disruptive Dialogues project to address questions inspired by the work of celebrated

Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera. The event was based on a series of creative dialogues and builds on research by Dr Tinashe Mushakavanhu into Marechera’s archive and legacy. It featured interactive workshops for creative writing as well as panel discussions on topics related to the book trade.

# How Publishing Contributes to the Creative Economy

According to the ‘Baseline survey on the state of informality in the cultural and creative sectors in Zimbabwe’, the cultural and creative industries are a key contributor to the country’s economy (ILO, 2024). It was estimated to contribute 6.9 per cent of the country’s GDP (British Council, 2020). In the first quarter of 2023, the value of craft exports increased from US\$2.3 million to US\$3.3 million – an increase of 24 per cent (ILO, 2024). However, the success in the craft industry has not been as easily translated into the publishing sector which has experienced a decline since the early 2000s due to a harsh operating environment.

Despite challenges faced in the publishing sector, which has seen notable closures of independent publishing houses, there is still an abundance of talent in Zimbabwe. Various support mechanisms, which include writers and publishers’ associations as well as key events such as Zimbabwe International Book Fair and Literature Festival (LitFest), provide space for engagement and support.

In addition, there are various pathways for consideration:

Creation	Production	Dissemination	Transmission	Consumption
Writer/author, illustrator, photographer	Publisher, photographer, typist, printer, typesetter, graphic designer, editor, peer reviewer, proofreader, layout designer, copy editor, IP registrar, administrator	Marketer, distributor	Literature events curator, librarian, online and offline bookseller	Online and offline bookseller, librarian, events curator, critic, journalist

Figure 24: Jobs in the writing and publishing value chain. (Source: ILO, 2024)



The close link between innovation and technology is expected to change the face of the creative economy sector as the advance of technology has increased global reach through globalised networks and audiences – including both buyers and readers. This has increased visibility, ultimately changing the landscape of the cultural and creative economy sector.

### Skills publishing entrepreneurs need to succeed

As the publishing sector in Zimbabwe evolves, the respondents to this study believe it is critical for professionals to have editing, marketing, sales and organisational skills to succeed in the sector. Some of these skills can be learnt on the job while others are transferable from other sectors.

I come from an environment where “there’s a lot of pressure to produce a lot of work quickly. And it is high-quality work. So, I brought that to publishing. In just three-and-a-half years, I’ve published over 30 titles. I can work on multiple titles at the same time. And I can make sure that they are of good quality.

A publisher

Respondents also suggested that some roles in publishing require different skills and knowledge.

“I think you need to pick which part of the value chain you have the greatest impact in. I think, because my background is writing and editing, my greatest impact is in the development side of publishing. But there are other people who are excellent in proofing but can’t tell a story.”

A publisher

Only one notable institution in Zimbabwe offers a specialised course in publishing. In 2007 the Department of Publishing Studies was established at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), the second-largest public research university in Zimbabwe. It started as a course within the Department of Library and Information Science and the inaugural class had an enrolment of 15 students. NUST now runs a Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Publishing Media and Technology Studies. Mrs Ndaizienyi Irene Nyamakura, one of the co-founders of the programme has worked with several publishers in Zimbabwe.

The publishing studies degree covers many forms of publishing, such as textbooks, fiction, magazine, newspapers, corporate publishing and scholarly publishing. On the course students learn all the stages of publishing, including planning, acquisition, editing, design, production, marketing, distribution and publication management for both print and digital media. Specifically, the degree was established to prepare students on how to run a publishing business.

Creative writing modules are also offered at the undergraduate level at both the University of Zimbabwe and the Africa University.

# ZIMBABWE

## SPOTLIGHT Book Fantastics

Book Fantastics is one of the many new book distributors aiming to address issues around accessibility and connection within the publishing and literary ecosystem in Zimbabwe. The organisation was established in 2020 after the founders, Brain Garusa and Allen Kudzashe Mwanjekondo saw few books written by African authors stocked by existing

bookshops. During the pandemic, he decided to try to sell African literature to ascertain demand.

*Book Fantastics is a Pan-African bookshop. We may call it a literary activism that we started in 2020.* Brain Garusa, Founder, Book Fantastics

Book Fantastics started as a mobile and online bookshop, utilising social media and WhatsApp to communicate and trade with customers. The business now has a physical shop which allows the business to hold events connecting literature and other art forms such as spoken-word and music. Book Fantastics is constantly exploring new ways of making literature more accessible to the broader market.

*I belong to a WhatsApp platform of indie bookstores and publishers where we network and share opportunities. It has also allowed us even to fly out of this country on such initiatives.* Brain Garusa, Founder, Book Fantastics

Book titles sold include fiction, non-fiction and motivational books. Newly printed and pre-loved books are also supplied as this is a growing market for acquiring out-of-print titles.

*People trust our service. When someone wants a book that we don't normally stock, we take note of that title. We use those requests as a way of growing our list.* Brain Garusa, Founder, Book Fantastics

At present, there are no employees, other than the founder himself. Short-term staff are employed for pop-up shops.

Book Fantastics has broadened its activities by testing alternative methods for reaching potential and existing customers. Through the Harare Open Book Festival, which Book Fantastics started in 2022, the platform has bridged the gap between publishers, authors, readers and other actors in the industry. The festival provides a platform for discussions on book titles and the book sector overall.

*When we started Book Fantastics, we realised there was, and probably is, a gap*

*between the publisher, the author, the reader...and other stakeholders. One of our objectives is to bridge that gap using the festival... One of the greatest benefits of starting the store is that we keep meeting very amazing people who are willing to give ideas, who are willing to assist in whatever way. We have people who have managed to procure books on our behalf.* Brain Garusa, Founder, Book Fantastics

During the inaugural festival, a panel on publishing offered insights on traditional, digital and self-publishing among other opportunities and threats. Panellists agreed on the need for collaborative efforts with others in the community and a vibrant ecosystem that encourages growth.

Harare Open Book Festival has shown promise and created a stronger connection between booksellers, authors and readers. The festival has attracted interest from neighbouring countries such as Zambia and South Africa. Collaboration with analogous interests has become a core activity. Outside of the festival, events are held monthly to encourage collaboration. Most activities are based in Harare partly

because a high number of booksellers are based in the area.

The 2023 edition of the festival hosted two guests from Zambia and South Africa. Translation took centre stage that year, and the Zimbabwean author Petina Gappah had this to say: 'I loved that there was a lot of talk about what translation means, why we translate, and why it's important to read, teach, and write in local languages' (Muleya, 2023).

Harare Open Book Festival has more plans for the future.

*We are going to have a YouTube channel soon... During festive seasons like Valentine's Day, we intend to collaborate with musicians to do live music. So, we hope such initiatives will help us grow.* Brain Garus, Founder, Book Fantastics

# Conclusion



This research has examined the trade publishing and literature sectors in six Sub-Saharan African countries: Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe. In particular, the study explores the publishing landscape and highlights innovative practices in the sector. It also considers how publishing creates connections and contributes to the creative economy.

## Publishing Landscape

In Sub-Saharan Africa, publishing remains a sector that is powered by resilience and creativity. Publishing entrepreneurs – including publishers and booksellers – are constantly adjusting to an ever-changing political and economic landscape. Opinions on the current health of the sector vary according to source, segment and country. While many entrepreneurs view publishing as a labour of love, a few have been able to spot emerging trends and remain competitive and financially viable.

Publishing in Sub-Saharan Africa is more important and relevant than ever before. Across the six countries, entrepreneurs, against all odds, continue to provide readers and learners with relevant books. In doing so, they enhance literacy, promote culture and facilitate the exchange of ideas. In this regard, there are plenty of fascinating prospects for individuals who are passionate about the publishing sector and entrepreneurship.

While traditional publishers exist in all the six countries, self-publishing is seen as the main pathway for publishing in Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe. This is due largely to an absence

of trade publishers in these countries. Some authors also choose to self-publish in order to remain in control of their works. Although self-publishing has numerous benefits, there are drawbacks such as quality control. There remains a belief in the sector that self-published books are typically poorly written and poorly produced. For those that self-publish, managing the intricacies of marketing and distribution can be an intimidating task. Unlike traditional publishing houses, independent writers must wear multiple hats to ensure that readers notice their work. Given their growing popularity yet limited support, many printers and booksellers are offering unique services to these self-published authors, believing that everyone has a story to tell and helping them to tell it in the best way possible.

Traditional publishers can learn from these self-published authors and entrepreneurs. There is an abundance of low-cost publishing and distribution platforms that make it simple to create a book in a range of formats. There are low-cost marketing strategies that can be adopted to get the most out of any published book. There is a need to adjust marketing tactics by using the analytics tools that digital platforms frequently provide.

Challenges such as piracy are threatening the publishing ecosystem, particularly in countries where there are weak copyright laws and enforcement. Unemployment, ignorance of intellectual property and lax application of the law, are some of the causes of piracy. Emerging digital technologies have also made it possible for copyright-protected content to be easily reproduced and distributed. Curbing piracy would entail the implementation of a comprehensive anti-piracy programme such as public awareness campaigns and legal action against copyright offenders.



# Publishing and Innovation

Shifts in internet use, new digital policies, competition, changing consumer behaviour, sales and marketing priorities, and the influence of some funders have created an environment where publishers have had to innovate to survive. Innovation, particularly in digitisation, is therefore not just a possibility but also a necessity for many businesses that aspire to be significant players in the publishing sector. Indeed, new digital publication channels and content formats have become valuable components of a publishing house's product portfolio, coinciding with broader technological changes in other sectors of the economy. Importantly, innovation is not concentrated among a few organisations, but spread across the whole sector.

Publishing in SSA is not completely shifting to digital - rather, it is simply evolving. Publishing businesses that consider the current technical market problems and readers' preferences are benefiting more from digitalisation. Innovation is essential to the success of the global publishing industry, but it's especially true for small presses in SSA. This study finds a positive relationship between innovation and business growth. However, there isn't a single innovation strategy or set of intervention programmes that work for all kinds of publishing businesses. As Mushakavanhu (2024b) suggests, physical books can no longer be the focal point of publishing in the digital age. It's critical to test content on a variety of platforms, including podcasts, television and the internet, particularly in markets with young populations like SSA. Reading as an art has evolved.

Across SSA, mobile banking and mobile payments have changed how people handle their finances and pay for goods and services. Likewise, the opportunity to distribute books on mobile phones was once welcomed by publishers and authors as a unique way to diversify sources of revenue and strengthen their presence in the market. Years later, some of these early adopters no longer exist. In 2023 Okada Books, a Nigerian publisher that popularised reading on mobiles, closed down. When start-ups praised for 'disrupting' the publishing sector fail, the unintended

consequences affect not only the business owners but also the authors whose works they published.

As digital technologies continue to open up new pathways of global circulation, the publishing sector in SSA can reap massive benefits providing certain additional conditions are met. Businesses must be able to acquire the tools and skills required to put innovation into practice. Business leaders should ensure that their organisations can respond to disruptions related to the use of digital technology. Additionally, adequate policies must be in place to boost the e-commerce ecosystem.

## How Publishing Creates Connections

The number of literary festivals and book fairs in SSA has been growing at a considerable rate, amidst global discussions around arts funding. Each festival offers a different experience, with organisers investing a great deal of effort in planning and selecting concepts that celebrate literature and connect a community of booklovers. Out of the six countries highlighted in this study, Nigeria and South Africa have the most literary events. Most of the festivals operate as charities and non-profit organisations and therefore rely on external funding from corporate bodies and private donors.

The impact of festivals extends well beyond the number of physical attendees. Many of these events are also spread through social media and the internet, connecting even more people. Complementing physical activities with online marketing strategies is helping to deepen engagement with a larger audience. It is increasingly common for event organisers to use relevant hashtags on official social media accounts to increase the visibility of festivals.

While it might be possible to view literary festivals and book fairs as a tourism opportunity, these events are strongly influenced by the artistic vision of their founders and are cultural products in their own right. Importantly, the festivals play a big role within the local

communities of the hosting place, by promoting social cohesion. Volunteering at literary festivals offers further opportunity for increased community involvement and participation. Festival directors and curators have been able to establish strong partnerships with various industry stakeholder through which they share resources and ideas. Bookstores are also creating smaller creative spaces for publishers and writers to connect and collaborate. Beyond selling books, these retail businesses are supporting local writers by hosting book readings and launches. Book clubs have also emerged from these events, offering even more opportunities for deeper engagement between readers and books. Live-streaming of book reading sessions is also engaging those unable to attend in person.

In a previous study, Isong (2018) argued that collaboration is crucial to the creation and reception of African literature. Social networking platforms like Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) encourage the kind of collaboration that writers in Africa and throughout the world frequently engage in to produce new works. Readers and writers can also collaborate on numerous social media platforms by exchanging content and holding discussions on their works (Isong, 2018). This new research suggests that collaboration is still very much a feature of the publishing ecosystem in Sub-Saharan Africa, with publishing entrepreneurs regularly interacting and doing business on WhatsApp.

## Publishing and the Creative Economy

In the dynamic landscape of SSA publishing and literature sectors, the role of small publishers is of vital importance. These businesses continue to support a range of direct and indirect jobs, including writers, editors, translators and illustrators. For the most part, the business owners themselves are great at multi-tasking, single-handedly driving their firms to success by leveraging their distinctive skills and expertise. Remaining small allows them to have full control over their business.

The size of small publishers distinguishes them from their larger counterparts and requires different management approaches. Their directors are often efficient and agile – they can streamline their operations and make quick decisions on acquisitions or commissioning. But they often lack the financial resources to cover overhead expenses, expand their business, publish more authors or hire more people.

Additionally, socio-economic factors typically affect small businesses more than large ones. Small publishers can rarely survive errors or poor decisions due to these external threats. The closure of the Zimbabwe small publisher, Weaver Press, is a reminder of how an unfavourable economy can easily upend established businesses. What can small publishers do to overcome the problems posed by the economy? There are no quick fixes because not every enterprise is built for longevity. However, entrepreneurs can learn to ensure their businesses ride out the bad times – and make hay in the good times.

In some western markets, books serve as a key source of inspiration for popular plays, TV series and movies. Although there is a vibrant entertainment industry across Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Nigeria and South Africa, only few movies in these two countries have been adapted from books. There are plenty of opportunities in this area, given that many Nigerian and South African novels have been bestsellers. Essentially, an intellectual property's success in one medium can lead to even greater and phenomenal success in other forms.

# Recommendations

The following suggestions represent a mix of recommendations made by the study's respondents as well as those suggested by the research team which would support the continued growth and resilience of the publishing and wider literature sectors in the countries studied in this research.

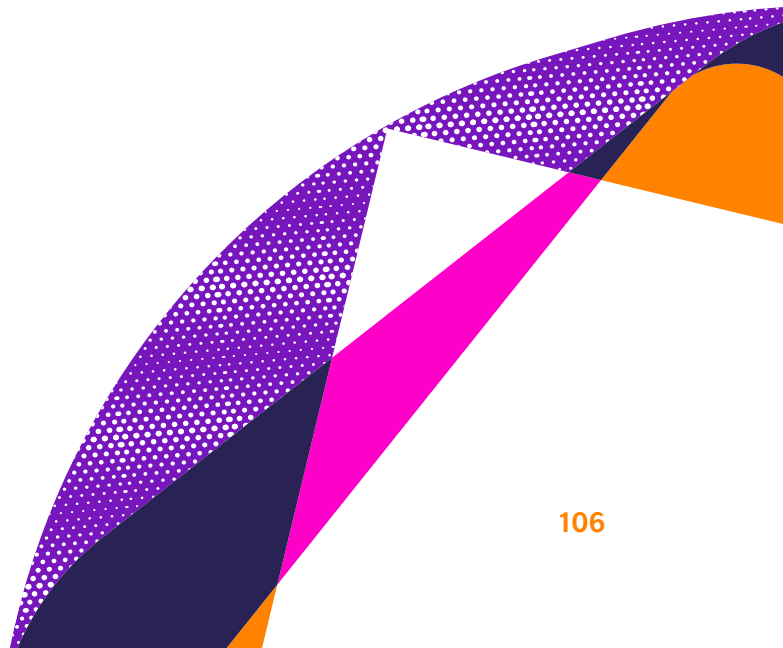
**Rights Catalogue:** The publication of a rights catalogue that promotes available rights within SSA is highly needed. Such a publication could be produced annually and launched prior to or during major book festivals in Africa and across the world. The rights catalogue could be a tool to help small publishers sell rights abroad – for publication, translation and licensing. Certain criteria must be met; for instance, a publisher must be owned by an African for their titles to be listed in the rights catalogue. The catalogue would also provide a unique insight into the variety of SSA's publishing industry.

**Curbing Piracy:** This research recommends promoting the use of security features by publishers and authors to curb piracy. The use of these features, particularly the hologram already in use in Uganda for physical books can be formalised and replicated in other countries. This will make it easier for relevant authorities to both investigate and prosecute those who have violated copyrights. Corporate or arts institutions could fund the printing of the holograms in some countries. They could also sponsor workshops around these security features so authors understand their value. With proper promotion, the public will be better informed on how to differentiate a genuine book from a pirated one.

**Support for Key Festivals:** More support is needed for the revival of literary festivals in Uganda and Zimbabwe, given the absence of notable book events in these countries. For instance, the Zimbabwe International Book Fair which was once the leading festival in Africa could be revived through adequate support. Kampala Book Market, the only notable book market identified in this study, could be supported to expand to other cities within Uganda, to foster a vibrant literary community. Furthermore, a mobility grant could be launched for small publishers to attend international trade book fairs and festivals in SSA, Europe and the Gulf to encourage skills sharing and connections.

**Support for self-publishing:** Help is needed in formalising and facilitating the self-publishing space/industry, having identified this as a common thread in many of the countries researched. Funding for some handpicked books where the authors can't fund their projects could also be explored. Self-published authors could also be encouraged to form a membership organisation that advises, campaigns for, and empowers like-minded authors.

**Statistics on the book sector:** The lack of reliable and up-to-date statistics on the publishing trade is hindering the development of the sector in SSA. This research recommends commissioning a specific project for data collection in the trade publishing sector. One way of doing this is to sponsor the curation of an annual bestseller list that would highlight the exact number of copies sold. Although there are some data on the number of books published in many African countries, such figures are often



not consistent and entirely reliable. The need for more reliable statistics is crucial to attract investors. It will also be useful in the formulation of public policy, allocation of government resources, and the creation of effective development strategies for the publishing sector.

**Publishing Cooperative Society:** To tackle funding issues, the publishing sector could be supported to establish a cooperative society. Across SSA, in various sectors of the economy, cooperative societies are gaining acceptance as a means of savings and investment. Cooperatives enhance access to finance. The cooperative model is considered safe and inclusive and is backed by the law. Indeed, publishing entrepreneurs can come together to form a Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO), a member-owned financial group operating on cooperative and mutual ownership principles. SACCOs can promote thrift, provide credit, and offer their members a range of financial services.

**Networking sessions:** Organisations with physical spaces and convening power could host monthly or quarterly networking sessions where the publishing community interacts with other creatives such as musicians, actors and filmmakers. Such an informal gathering could lead to unexpected connections. Potential sponsors and businesses interested in the creative economy could be invited to the sessions too.

**Publishing Course and Resource:** This research recommends commissioning and curating a training course on the study of publishing and writing that can be delivered at each of the six countries, not at universities but independently. Such a course should place an emphasis on innovation in publishing, in particular on building a strong ecosystem that works for each country. It is also worth developing a resource for publishing for those interested in writing and publishing, but don't know how to do so. This could entail publishing a booklet on how to publish books given that not many writers know how the structure works.

**Creative Writing Fellowship:** A funding organisation or charity could endow a Creative Writing Fellowship at some established universities like the University of Ibadan, University of Ghana, Makerere University, University of Nairobi, the University of Witwatersrand and the University of Zimbabwe. This could work as an artist-in-residence opportunity for promising writers to spend some time developing their writing in the company of peers and under the guidance of a faculty. In awarding fellowships, it would be worth considering the quality of the candidate's creative work, potential for growth and ability to contribute to and profit from the university writing workshops.

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# Appendix 1

## Respondents Interviewed

### Ghana (8)

Name	Type of business
Booksie	Online bookseller and library
Ghana Association of Writers	Trade association
Larajah	Publisher
Leti Arts	Publisher
Pan African Writers Association	Trade association
Vine and Verse	Book club
Word Playce	Bookseller
Writers Project of Ghana	Literary festival

### Kenya (11)

Name	Type of business
Avandu	Publisher
Book Bunk	Library
East African Educational Publishers	Publisher
Ekitabu	Distributor and bookseller
Half Price Books	Bookseller
Moran	Publisher
Nuria Books	Bookseller
Oxford University Press	Publisher
Soma Nami Books	Bookseller
Storymoja	Publisher
Writers Guild of Kenya	Trade association

## Nigeria (14)

Name	Type of business
Agbowo	Online magazine
Ake Festival	Literary festival
Association of Nigerian Authors	Trade association
Comic Republic	Publisher
Ebedi	Writers' residency
Hausa International Book Festival	Literary festival
Narrative Landscape Press	Publisher
Noirledge	Publisher
Olongo	Online magazine
Ouida	Publisher
Panaramic	Publisher
Rovingheights	Bookseller
Sevhage	Publisher
Uyo Book Club	Book club

## South Africa (9)

Name	Type of business
Book Circle Capital	Bookseller
Boutique Books	Publishing consultancy
Impepho	Publisher
Inkani	Publisher
Jacana Media	Publisher
Modjaji Books	Publisher
Uhlanga	Publisher
University of Wits	University
Xarra	Bookseller

## Uganda (11)

Name	Type of business
African Sellers Bookstore	Bookseller
Femrite	Trade association
Growth Lane	Book club
Honey Badger	Publishing consultancy
Ibua	Digital publisher
Kampala Book Market	Book fair
Leap Publishers	Publisher
Oasis Book Project	Publishing consultancy
Scribe House	Publishing consultancy
Weganda Review	Literary journal
Zaaz Press	Publishing consultancy

## Zimbabwe (10)

Name	Type of business
Ama Books	Publisher
Book Fantastics	Bookseller
Carnelian Heart	Publisher
Harare Open Festival	Literary festival
Lit Fest	Literary festival
Macmillan	Publisher
Ngano Hub Consultants	Publishing consultancy
Phoenix Publishing	Publishing consultancy
Royalty Books (Pvt) Ltd.	Publishing consultancy
Women's Writers Support Group	Advocacy group

## International (3)

Name	Type of business
Accord Literary	Literary and talent agency
African Books Collective	Distributor
African Literary Agency	Literary agency

# Biographies of report team

**Ogugua Ajayi** is a Nigerian author, screenwriter, producer and entrepreneur. She has published two novellas - *Blessings in the Dark* and *Full Circle*. She also has a successful debut movie under her belt titled *Just The Two of Us* which she wrote and produced. Ogugua holds a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Ibadan, and a Master's degree in Creative Writing (with Distinction) from the University of Kent, United Kingdom.

**Margaret Chideme** is an author and a businesswoman from Zimbabwe. She has a BSc Honors in Psychology and an EMBA. She has a blog called Maggie's Diary and is an author of the book *First Thirty* which is a collection of a woman's poems about love and lust, pain and abuse, womanhood, divorce, searching and rediscovery. The Lifeline Narrative, founded by Margaret, is an organisation that builds bridges for African narratives to reach a global audience. It provides African authors and writers with an authentic platform to express their unique stories.

**Adedamola Fagbamigbe** holds a B.A. in Communication and Language Arts and an LLB, both with second-class (upper division) honours from the University of Ibadan. She graduated from the Nigerian Law School, Lagos Campus, with a BL (second class upper) and was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2024. A detailed and efficient legal practitioner, Adedamola is also an astute researcher with extensive experience in conducting research for national and international projects.

**Kolade Olanrewaju Freedom** is a seasoned editor, writer and arts administrator. Kolade holds a Bachelor's degree in Communication and Language Arts from the University of Ibadan where he served as the founding editor of the AFAS Review in 2016. As a publishing expert, Kolade has worked on high-profile publications from several publishing houses such as Premium Times Books and Pan-African University Press. He is the production editor of Carleton University's Institute of African Studies Newsletter and the Nokoko Journal.

**Sola Imoru** is a well-travelled journalist and editor. He started his career at The Punch newspapers in Nigeria where he later became a member of the Editorial Board and Editorial Page Editor before joining Adekunle Ajasin University. Imoru holds a Bachelor's degree in Language Arts and a Master of Arts in English Language from the Universities of Ibadan and Ilorin respectively. He also holds a Certificate in Newspaper Management from the International Institute for Journalism, IJJ, Berlin, Germany.

**Dr Anietie Isong** is a researcher and novelist. His debut novel, *Radio Sunrise*, won the Mckitterick Prize, and was listed for other prizes including the 9mobile Prize for Literature. The book has also been adapted into a movie. Isong's second novel, *News at Noon*, was longlisted for the Diverse Book Awards. His collection of short stories, *Someone Like Me*, won the inaugural Headlight Review Chapbook Prize for Prose Fiction. His essay is included in the anthology, *Of This Our Country* (published by Borough Press), a collection of essays by acclaimed Nigerian writers. Isong holds a PhD in New Media and Writing.

**Racheal Kizza** is a cultural practitioner and host of the Meet Your Author podcast based in Kampala, Uganda. She has previously worked as a Cultural Coordinator at Goethe-Zentrum Kampala/Ugandan German Cultural Society. She worked as a series coordinator at Ibua Publishing where she oversaw the publication of a children's book, *Mighty Angwech and Other Stories* (2023) by Christine Butegwa. Racheal has also worked as a project coordinator at the African Writers Trust where she led the publication of an anthology, *Threads and Spaces: Stories on Identity and Belonging* (2022).

**James Murua** is a blogger, journalist and podcaster who has written for many media outlets in a career spanning print and web. In the last decade, he has focused on the literary arts space in Africa - the continent and the diaspora. His online space WritingAfrica.com, founded in 2013 as JamesMurua.com, focuses on literary news and is today's number one blog on African literature. While running this publication, he has interviewed some of the leading names in African literature. He was the 2020 Caine Prize for African Writing judge.

**Nolwazi Nene** is a South African literary editor, curator and content creator. She is driven by a deep interest in international Black literature, sound, and exploring freedom through creative expression and imagination. Nolwazi holds a Bachelor of Social Science in Spanish and Politics from the University of Cape Town and has been freelancing as a copywriter and editor since 2018. She co-curated the 2023 Time of the Writer Festival in Durban, South Africa.

**Tolu Ogunlesi** is a Nigerian journalist, poet, photographer, fiction writer, and blogger. He also holds a 2004 Bachelor of Pharmacy (B. Pharm) degree from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and an MA in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia. As a creative writer, he is the author of a collection of poetry, *Listen to the Geckos Singing from a Balcony* (Bewrite Books, 2004), and a novella, *Conquest & Conviviality* (Hodder Murray, 2008). In 2006 he was awarded a Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg poetry prize, in 2008 the Nordic Africa Institute Guest Writer Fellowship, and in 2009 a Cadbury Visiting Fellowship by the University of Birmingham.

**Dr Charles Okwuowulu** is a film scholar, researcher and filmmaker. He is a senior lecturer at Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Nigeria, where he was the Head of Theatre and Film Studies (2018-2023). His research interests are in film and multimedia studies, an area in which he has published many international and local articles. As a filmmaker, he has produced, edited and directed many Nollywood films, musical videos and documentaries which have been shown on major terrestrial and cable television stations across Nigeria and Africa. He sits on the juries of many national and International Film Festivals.

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**Inibong Umoh** has created and written novellas, short stories and articles that span across a heterogeneous audience and he ghostwrites and consults for brands. He has worked as a blogger and gained experience in web publishing, search engine optimisation, social media engagement and marketing. He has a vast interest in research and his goal is to add value to any brand he is associated with. He loves every opportunity to explore, learn and create.







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