African language publishing for children: where next?

Viv Edwards
Jacob Marriote Ngwaru
## Contents

Acknowledgements          ii
Executive Summary          iii
Introduction

The extent of African language publishing in South Africa  2
  Age bands  2
  Genres  3
  Languages  5
  Date of publication  5
  Improved efficiency  5
The schools market  7
  Imbalance in resources  8
Education policy  9
Access to finance  11
  Marketing  12
  Distribution  13
  Procurement  14
The trade market  16
  Developing a culture of reading  16
    Content  17
    Marketing and distribution  18
    Pricing  19
Other challenges for publishers  20
  Developing writers  20
  The role of translation  22
    Challenges for translators  24
      Knowledge of children’s literature  24
      Standardisation  25
    Related roles  27
    How many language versions?  28
Ways forward  31
  Minimising risk  31
New markets  31
  Imaginative partnerships  32
An ongoing process of development  32
Recommendations  34
References  37
Acknowledgments

This two-year study of African language publishing for children in South Africa was undertaken by Viv Edwards and Jacob Marriote Ngwaru of the University of Reading, UK, as part of a project funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

The findings are based on:

• an analysis of the materials included in the 2007 PASA Writing in Nine Tongues catalogue and its 2008 and 2009 supplements and the 2008 Catalogue of South African Literature published by the Department of Arts and Culture
• interviews with key players in the book industry, including a wide range of publishers, writers, authors, translators, educationalists, book distributors, booksellers and organizations involved in book promotion
• feedback and discussion at a workshop held at Museum Africa, Johannesburg, as part of National Book Week, September 2010.

We would like to thank Neville Alexander and Carole Bloch of PRAESA, Arabella Koopman of Wordcentric, Elitha van der Sandt of SABDC and Dudley Schroeder of PASA and for sensitizing us to issues of policy and practice in South Africa and for putting us in contact with people whose experience has proved invaluable in helping us to understand the current situation. We are equally grateful to all those who gave so generously of their time both in interviews and in commenting on drafts of this report.
Executive summary

African language publishing in South Africa has been the subject of some controversy in recent years. Public figures such as Pallo Jordan when Minister of Arts and Culture have been highly critical of the lack of vision and commitment of the publishing industry; publishers, for their part, have countered by producing catalogues which showcase their African language materials.

This report offers an independent perspective on the state of African language publishing for children in South Africa today based on an analysis of current resources. It synthesises the views of key players in the book value chain on both opportunities for and obstacles to further development.

The extent of African language publishing in South Africa

The main sources of information on African publishing for children are the PASA (2007) Writing in Nine Tongues catalogue and the 2008 and 2009 supplements, which together list some 5000 titles, and the 2008 Department of Arts and Culture Catalogue of South African Literature which includes almost 4000 African language titles. The higher profile of African languages achieved by these catalogues is to be applauded. Their publication marks an important first step in providing centralised sources of information for education departments, teachers, librarians and bookshops. The catalogues can also be used to help publishers and policy makers identify potential gaps in provision.

Closer examination, however, suggests that African language publishing is not as vibrant as it might first appear and the amount of material is often limited, even in the more widely spoken languages. In addition, aspects of the organization of the catalogues limit their usefulness. Arguments are made for the standardisation of age bands and genres, and for publishers to submit information on resources to an online database, thus increasing accuracy and reducing costs.

Our analysis raises a number of issues for publishers and policy makers, including the dearth of materials for very young children and huge variations in the numbers of books available for speakers of different African languages.

The schools market

Education is by far the most important market sector for publishers: most orders come from education departments, Section 20 schools with the authority to make purchases, libraries and NGOs involved in book distribution.

Imbalance between textbooks and supplementary reading materials

Textbooks remain the main learning resources. At foundation level, they usually take the form of readers. With older children, the main market is for set texts as part of the African literature curriculum. However, reflecting international developments in pedagogy, a growing number of ‘real books’, also
sometimes known as ‘supplementary reading materials’, are found alongside textbooks. The sales of set books and readers cross-subsidize other kinds of publishing.

**Education policy**

One of the major obstacles to the expansion of African language publishing for the schools market is the failure to implement the language-in-education policy. At the international level, the arguments for mother-tongue based bilingual education are well rehearsed: students who have a sound foundation in the mother tongue participate more actively, feel more confident about their learning and outperform peers who operate only through the medium of a second language. While language-in-education policy in South Africa is supportive of this policy, the rate of implementation is extremely slow and, in the absence of bilingual provision, parents veer to education in English, the language of highest status. A further consequence is that publishers are reluctant to invest without a market-spend large enough to make African language publishing viable. The absence of teaching materials in turn affects the willingness of teachers to use African languages as the medium of instruction.

**Challenges for small publishers**

Financial institutions often fail to appreciate the seasonal nature of educational publishing, whereby most orders are received and processed in just four or five months of the year. The length of time required for a return on investment – up to two years – is also problematic. Access to capital to ensure cash flow is an important issue for smaller companies servicing the schools market, with implications for marketing, distribution and compliance with complex procurement procedures.

Publishers able to place copies in the hands of those making choices are likely to do best. There are two main ways of marketing to schools – through visits from the sales team and through the mailing of sample copies to schools with postal addresses. Because marketing is capital intensive, small publishers inevitably find themselves at a disadvantage in both cases.

Large companies often have regional distribution centres or are able to take advantage of vertical integration, calling on specialist sister companies. Small publishers experience difficulties in servicing schools in rural areas responsible for buying their own materials when small numbers of books have to be delivered across large areas.

Complaints about the book procurement process are widespread in the industry but small companies are affected disproportionately. Responsibility for procurement has been divided between provincial and national levels. The process has been complicated by the fact that different provinces operate different systems. Calls for submissions are costly and come at different times, making it difficult to respond. There is a good deal of support for shifting responsibility from the provinces to the national level, providing that this process is both robust and transparent.

**The trade market**

The current book buying public of South Africa is estimated to be 50,000 out of a total population of 48 million people. Increasing this constituency by even a modest proportion would be highly advantageous for the book value chain; it would also make it possible to reduce the price of books to more realistic levels. Blue skies thinking about ways of expanding the trade market may offer a way out of the current impasse in which publishers complain that booksellers do not stock African language books and booksellers counter that this is because they do not sell.
There are many indications in fact that Africans do read when the content is affordable, accessible and of interest. Isolezwe, the daily Zulu newspaper in Durban, for instance, has a circulation of more than 95,000, outperforming the English-language dailies from the same publisher. The issue, it would seem, is relevance and there is undoubtedly a need to explore genres and themes that speak to a much broader range of interests. Publishers therefore need to look critically at the limitations of current approaches, paying particular attention to content, alternative ways of reaching untapped markets and pricing strategies.

Bookazines for the young adult market currently not catered for and highly illustrated, comic style short stories aimed at newly independent readers are just two examples of recent initiatives aimed at making low price books available through reading clubs and door-to-door sales to people who don’t visit bookshops.

Other challenges for publishers

Some challenges apply specifically to children’s publishing irrespective of language; others – including the development of writers and translation – apply specifically to African language publishing.

Developing writers

Very few African authors write in their first languages and manuscripts submitted to publishers are usually in English. They tend to target older readers and are often of very poor quality. Publishers, then, need to nurture potential authors. Empowerment deals offer one source of support; other strategies include competitions, workshops, mentorship and grants.

The role of translation

Translation has emerged as a controversial issue in South Africa. Some people feel that it is detrimental to the development of original literature in African languages; others feel that it is a valuable form of cultural sharing with the potential to greatly increase the amount of reading materials in African languages with minimal effort.

By analyzing a sample of the books currently available it was possible to show that a large proportion were in fact originated in African languages, and that most of the translations are targeted at the early childhood market. This would suggest that concerns about the negative impact on original writing in African languages are ill founded.

Translators working in this field need not only to be proficient linguists but also to have an in depth knowledge of what makes a successful book for children. There is a serious shortage of people with the relevant breadth of experience. Because African languages are still in the process of standardization, translation is more challenging; translators working with European languages are expected to average roughly 2,500 words per day; the norm for African languages is less than half this number. Although it will require time to develop the relevant expertise, advances in IT will help to shorten the process.

Because the translation of children’s books into African languages is a very recent development, people are inevitably feeling their way. Good translations are often the result of teamwork and negotiation. However, the need within African cultures to show respect to elders, sometimes poses problems when junior members of a team feel unable to disagree with more senior colleagues. There is often a
reluctance to accept that translation is a process of trial and error and – as has been the case in Afrikaans and many other languages – that it will require time to develop the relevant expertise.

High turnover publishers tend to send texts for translation to specialist agencies. Low turnover publishers and NGOs sometimes handle translation in house if they are working with a small number of languages with which they are familiar; increasingly, however, this work is outsourced. One of the advantages of agency translation is the anonymity of translators, editors and proofreaders who work independently, making it possible to by-pass issues of respect for elders and disagreements within a team.

Various co-publishing initiatives involving different languages have demonstrated that, by combining orders, larger print runs are able to achieve impressive economies of scale. Why, then, are South African publishers failing to fully exploit translation as a means of rapidly increasing the volume of African language literature available for children?

Decisions about which languages to translate are driven by potential sales. Most books are translated into isiXhosa, isiZulu and Afrikaans; smaller languages such as isiNdebele and Tshivenda are frequently overlooked. The same educational rationale for making languages available in the larger languages, however, applies to these smaller languages, raising issue of equality of opportunity.

Some publishers explain their reluctance to expand across all the official languages in terms of frustrations around authors and translation. Others feel that this is simply an excuse and take a more strategic view. As part of their commitment of multilingual publishing, they prepare camera-ready versions in a range of languages ready to submit for approval and promotional purposes while minimizing risk by printing only when the orders come through.

Ways forward

The slow start in the implementation of mother-tongue-based bilingual education has had a serious effect on the willingness risk-averse publishers to produce African language materials. Although some high turnover publishers have responded to the perceived market for readers and set texts in all the official languages, other kinds of books have been produced in the main for the larger isiZulu and isiXhosa markets. This has repercussions for equality of opportunity for the children from these groups. The gradual introduction of bilingual education would not only help to achieve improved educational outcomes but would also provide an invaluable boost for the book value chain.

Publishers need to move beyond their very heavy dependence on the schools market to explore ways of producing books with content of interest to those who do not read for pleasure and ways of reaching them at prices they can afford. The blue skies thinking of some new entrants to the industry points to the potential of methods such as direct marketing through book clubs and door-to-door sales and distribution via magazine outlets.

High turnover companies have been slow to recognize that the promotion of African languages is an effective way of implementing affirmative action within the framework of BEE. Some companies are already involved in the mentoring of writers and illustrators, either on an informal basis or as part of empowerment deals. Others have the potential to contribute through the mentoring of smaller competitors in areas such as marketing. Workshops offered by the South African Book Development Council (SABDC) on various topics of interest to SMEs provide a useful framework for moving forward.
There is a temptation for publishers to use the very real challenges for writers and translators as an excuse for limiting still further their exposure to risk-taking around African language publishing. This attitude overlooks the fact that both the standardization of English and Afrikaans and the development of children’s literature in these languages have taken place over long periods of time. It also fails to recognize that the emergence of children’s literature in African languages is a work in progress and that the first steps in resolving problems have already been taken.
Although the new political dispensation in South Africa heralded many new possibilities for African language publishing, various commentators, including Pallo Jordan when Minister of Arts and Culture, have attacked the South African publishing industry for its lack of vision and commitment. Many publishers, for their part reject this criticism pointing, for example, to the various catalogues which showcase resources in African languages.

One of the aims of this report is to examine the evidence for both claims and counter claims by looking closely at the materials currently available. The other is to deepen understanding of the conditions necessary for African language publishing for children to thrive. We have set about this task by interviewing key players in the book value chain – publishers, writers, authors, translators, educationalists, book distributors, booksellers and organizations involved in book promotion. We have also drawn on feedback and discussion from events organized as part of National Book Week.

This report offers an independent perspective on the state of African language publishing for children in South Africa today, based on an analysis of current resources. It synthesises the views of key players in the book value chain on both opportunities for and obstacles to further developments. And it highlights ways in which a more imaginative approach to expanding the trade market is likely to have a beneficial impact in both educational and economic terms.
The extent of African language publishing in South Africa

The first issue to be examined is the extent of African language publishing for children. Is it as limited as is sometimes suggested? Or are publishers justified in their claims that they are meeting current needs?

The Publishers’ Association of South Africa (PASA) Annual Industry Surveys provide overviews of trends, including those affecting African language publishing. The 2008 Report, for instance shows that just 27.74% of the sales of all locally produced books were in African languages, compared with 48.33% in English and 23.93% in Afrikaans.¹

For a more nuanced view of what is happening in the sphere of publishing for children, however, we need to turn to the 2007 PASA (Publishers’ Association of South Africa) Writing in Nine Tongues catalogue and its 2008 and 2009 supplements, and the 2008 Catalogue of South African Literature published by the Department of Arts and Culture. Writing in Nine Tongues includes well over 5000 different titles in isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, Sepedi, Setswana, SiSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga. The Catalogue of South African Literature includes almost 4000 titles, many of which overlap with Writing in Nine Tongues. However, its coverage is wider: listings are also in English, Afrikaans and Khoi San.

While publishing in African languages in South Africa might seem at first sight to be vibrant, it is important to look beyond the total numbers of books included in these catalogues. For instance, although most of the titles have been published since 2005, they include output over a much longer time period. In addition, they are divided among nine languages in the case of Writing in nine tongues and twelve languages in the case of the Catalogue of South African Literature. The numbers of books available in any given language are much more limited.

Nonetheless, the PASA and Department of Arts and Culture sources provide a very useful starting point for discussing African language books for children in South Africa. The analyses which follow are intended to give a flavour of the challenges and to point to ways forward for the more systematic and efficient collection of data.

Age bands

The different age ranges used across the catalogues make accurate generalisations difficult. Writing in Nine Tongues, for instance, has well over 40 different age bands.² The Catalogue of South African Literature uses a much simpler classification: child, teenage and adult. But, although it has the merit of simplicity, it could be argued that it is too broad to be helpful to those involved in book selection.

¹ Galloway et al. (2009)
² 3–7/8/9; 4–7; 5–6/7/10; 6–8/9/10/12; 7–9/10/11/12; 8–10/11/12/13; 9–10/11/12/15/16; 10–11/12/13/14/15; 10+; 11–12/13; 12–14/16/17/18; 13–14/17/18; 14–16/17/18; 15/16/17–18.
For the purposes of our analysis of the Writing in Nine Tongues catalogue, we decided on a three-tier classification system: Pre-school (0–6), Middle years (7–12) and Early Adult (12+). This means that books which fell across these age bands were double counted.

The analysis of the 2007 Writing in Nine Tongues catalogue and the 2008 supplement (see figure 1) shows that the largest numbers of books are published for early adult readers, followed by the middle years and early childhood.

Figure 1: Proportion of books by age bands

The dearth of books for very young children clearly reflects the dependence of publishers on the schools market in a country where schooling is compulsory only from Grade 1. This pattern of provision has damaging implications for educational outcomes. The importance of early exposure to books is widely recognized in both international research and in educational policy. Comparative international studies also highlight the unsatisfactory patterns of reading achievement in South African schools and point, in particular, to the plight of poor children who have limited access to pre-school education and are less likely to read books at home or have access to libraries.

Genres

The discussion of genres also poses problems. The Catalogue of South African Literature uses 57 different categories for publications in English and 34 for isiXhosa. This discrepancy is a function in part at least of the fact that publications in African languages cover a much narrower range of genres than in English. But there would also seem to be inconsistency across the languages. For example, the English category ‘adventure and fun’ corresponds to two separate categories in isiXhosa – ‘adventure’ and ‘fantasy and fun’. Writing in Nine Tongues uses far fewer categories – novels, traditional literature, short stories, drama, essays and prose, poetry, non-fiction and dictionaries.

The novel category in Writing in Nine Tongues is particularly unsatisfactory since it is used not only in the conventional sense of a fictional prose work of substantial length, but also for picture books and readers, defined in this report as series of books of increasing levels of difficulty written expressly for the purpose of teaching children to read. Figure 2 shows an analysis of the 2007 catalogue by genre, in which novels form by far the largest category:

---

3 Children entering grade 1 are aged five, turning six, by 30 June in the year of admission.
4 See, for instance, Gopnik et al. (2000); National Early Literacy Panel (2008)
5 Howie et al. (2007)
Figure 2: Number of books by genres (PASA, 2007)

The analysis of genre by age in figure 3 below throws further light on this issue. Contrary to what might be expected, the smallest number of novels is targeted at early adults, and by far the largest at middle childhood. Equally unexpected, a substantial proportion of ‘novels’ are written for the early childhood market.

Figure 3: Number of novels by age (PASA, 2007; 2008)

In short, the current classification systems are unsatisfactory. Some labels include too wide a range of genres to be useful; in addition, categories are inconsistent across catalogues. The labelling of readers as ‘novels’ is particularly problematic and has caused concern for publishers who made a deliberate decision to exclude their own readers from this category. In order to identify gaps in provision, it will be important to both rationalise and standardise the categories used.
Languages

The proportions of books in the various languages mirror the proportions of speakers of those languages in the population as a whole. Figure 4, based on analyses of the 2007 *Writing in nine tongues* catalogue and the 2008 supplement, clearly shows this pattern.

![Figure 4: Proportion of books in African languages by population](image)

The very small numbers of books available in less widely used languages such as Tshivenda and isiNdebele can be explained in terms of the limited markets. However, this dearth of materials has serious implications for equality of opportunity. Very few books are published in all nine languages in spite of publishing models operated elsewhere\(^6\) which demonstrate the economies of scale achievable through multilingual versioning for very little extra investment.

Date of publication

Both sources conflate titles produced over a number of years, making it difficult to assess whether output in African languages is increasing, stable or decreasing. This judgment is problematic in the case of *Writing in Nine Tongues*, which gives no information on the date of publication. There are also problems in knowing whether books remain in print.

Improved efficiency

The organisational weaknesses of current sources of information on African language publishing, however, are relatively easy to address. An obvious way forward would be to develop an online database to be housed on the PASA, SABDC or the Departments of Arts and Culture website, with links between the three. Publishers would be asked to submit information on new publications online, thus reducing costs and increasing accuracy. Maintenance costs would be minimal after modest initial

---

\(^6\) Edwards (2007)
output on the design of the database and the automated tasks (fields; passwords and user names; invitations to enter new publications and reminder emails).

This approach would confer multiple benefits, including the ability to offer up-to-date information on resources; to monitor output from year to year; to identify gaps in coverage of particular genres, age ranges and languages; to remove titles which are out of print; and to reduce costs and increase efficiency through the automation of tasks. It would also be possible to generate print catalogues from the database if required.

The higher profile of African languages achieved by *Writing in Nine Tongues* and the *Catalogue of South African Literature* is to be applauded. Their publication marks an important first step in providing centralized sources of information for education departments, teachers, librarians and bookshops. They can also be used to help publishers and policy makers identify potential gaps in provision.

Closer examination, however, suggests that African language publishing is not as vibrant as it might first appear. Our analysis also raises a number of issues for publishers and policy makers, including the dearth of materials for pre-school children and for speakers of smaller languages. In addition, aspects of organization, such as the use of age bands and the classification into genres limit the usefulness of the catalogues. Such weaknesses are easy to address. Improved efficiency could also be achieved by developing an online database with publishers submitting information on their own publications.
The schools market

One of the defining characteristics of publishing for children across Africa is the very heavy dependence on the schools market. In South Africa, where the large majority of orders comes from education departments, Section 20 schools with the authority to make purchases, libraries and NGOs involved in book distribution, 74 per cent of all locally published books are for the schools market.

Figures 5 and 6 below underline the dominance of English. Sales of English books make up 73.2% of book sales to schools despite the fact that English is spoken as a first language by only 8.2% of the population. This compares with 9.89% of sales of Afrikaans, spoken by 13.3% of the population, and 16.62% of sales of the other African languages combined, speakers of which make up 78.5% of South Africans (see figure 5).

Figure 5: Net turnover of local book sales to schools according to language

Figure 6: Title production for the education sub-market by language

---

7 Wafawarowa (2006)
8 OECD (2008: 178)
9 Source: Galloway et al. (2009)
10 Source: Galloway et al. (2009)
However, when we look at the number of titles produced for the schools market by publishers providing data on language, the picture becomes rather more complex (see figure 6). African language books in 2007 made up the largest number of new titles (47.92%), followed by English (39.77%) and Afrikaans (12.31%). This higher proportion of African language titles suggests awareness on the part of publishers of the economic importance of a market supported, in principle at least, by government policy. It may also reflect attempts to address the serious lag in production of books in African languages.11

Imbalance in resources

One of the main differences between the schools market in the North12 and other parts of the world is the balance between textbooks and supplementary reading materials or ‘real books’. In African classrooms, textbooks are the main – and in many cases – the only learning resources. At the foundation level, they usually take the form of workbooks and readers – series of books of increasing levels of difficulty written expressly for the purpose of teaching children to read. With older children, textbooks are either based around subject curricula – and are overwhelmingly in English – or, in the case of African language literature, take the form of set books.

In the North, developments in pedagogy have led to a far greater emphasis on reading for enjoyment. Traditionally, literacy was seen as a set of discrete skills to be acquired and orchestrated through decontextualized exercises which offered practice in relevant skills. More recently, there has been a move to more holistic approaches, which require children to behave like readers and writers in order to learn, read and produce real and meaningful texts. These changes have resulted in a shift in balance in teaching materials from readers to ‘real books’ – well produced, attractive stories which avoid the weaknesses of earlier artificial texts, constructed to teach key vocabulary or particular sounds. The same principles applied to African contexts logically require the use of local languages which allow children to use their knowledge of life and language to make meaning of, rather than simply decoding, the text.

Initiatives such as the Culture of Reading project13 attest to the relevance of these developments in a South African context. ‘Real books’ are found increasingly in schools, assisted by national and provincial book promotion campaigns such as the 100 books in every classroom and Run home to read. Nonetheless English textbooks still predominate and their sales are used to cross-subsidize other kinds of publishing. The following comment from one of our interviewees was typical:

Publishers actually stopped producing literature because there was no way they could generate profits from it. And only when [the curriculum for] Grade 10, 11 and 12 was implemented ... was there a revival in literature and the production of African language literature ... The sales of African language literature in general shops are not good and it’s profits from the sales of literature set books that help us to publish more of them.

From a publishing perspective, then, the main problem would appear to be the lack of spend on supplementary materials by the main client, the government. Speculating on why this might be the case, one interviewee pointed to a number of possible causes:

(1) a lack of policy implementation (which itself, may of course be due to a myriad of other issues ranging from a lack of prioritising of support for the development of African languages

11 Kruger (2009)
12 Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand
in all spheres of life to lack of capacity in financial terms as well as sufficient people ‘in the know’ in positions of authority (2) low levels of retention of textbooks in schools which necessitates government spending large amounts on textbooks annually instead of being able to allocate some of the available funds for supplementary materials. These low retention levels might be necessitated by continuous curriculum ‘tinkering’ but also appears to be linked to the baffling inability of schools to keep textbooks in circulation for any reasonable length of time.\textsuperscript{14}

In South Africa, supplementary materials are difficult to find outside large cities and expensive; only a small proportion of schools have a library of any kind.\textsuperscript{15}

**Education policy**

One of the major obstacles to the expansion of African language publishing for the schools market is the slow implementation of language-in-education policy. Growing criticism has been aimed at the ‘forked tongue’\textsuperscript{16} approach that promotes multilingualism on the level of rhetoric, but has yet to ratify the 2003 South African Languages Bill.

Although English has grown rather than diminished in importance in the post apartheid era,\textsuperscript{17} it remains the home language of only 8.1 per cent of the population\textsuperscript{18} and is poorly understood by the majority, particularly in rural areas.\textsuperscript{19} Its continued use, to the exclusion of the African languages spoken by the majority, inevitably has the effect of disenfranchising most Black South Africans. Competence in the colonial language is associated with an educated elite,\textsuperscript{20} a group reduced in number by significant levels of emigration of the 25–44 year age group with the highest levels of proficiency.

Various South African policies and legislative tools, including the 1996 Constitution, the 1996 South Africa Schools Act, the Language in Education Policy\textsuperscript{21} and the 2001 National Curriculum Statement, provide support for the move towards mother-tongue-based bilingual education. So, too, do the findings of international research: students who have a sound foundation in the mother tongue outperform peers who operate only through the medium of a second language; their achievement in the second language is at least as good as those educated only in the second language, while their performance in the first language is superior.\textsuperscript{22} In addition, students in bilingual programs participate more actively and feel more confident about their learning.\textsuperscript{23}

In order to improve academic outcomes, such interventions need to be sustained. Children attending programmes that continue teaching partly through the mother tongue for at least six years consistently outperform those involved in shorter programmes that use the mother tongue only for the purposes of transition to the socially dominant language.\textsuperscript{24} The more sustained programmes result in *additive* bilingualism, whereby the second language is acquired in addition to the first; transitional

\textsuperscript{14} See OECD (2008: 184–5) for further discussion of non-retrieval of school-owned books.

\textsuperscript{15} Estimated in 2008 at 9000 out of more than 25000 schools OECD (2008: 186)

\textsuperscript{16} Kaschula (2001); Kruger (2009)

\textsuperscript{17} Heugh (2007)

\textsuperscript{18} Statistics (2001)

\textsuperscript{19} PanSALB (2000).

\textsuperscript{20} Heugh (2007; Trudell (2010),

\textsuperscript{21} DoE (1997)

\textsuperscript{22} Baker (2006); Edwards (2009).

\textsuperscript{23} Benson (2004); Bloch & Alexander (2003)

\textsuperscript{24} Ramirez et al. (1991); Thomas and Collier (2004).
programmes lead to subtractive bilingualism in which children’s home languages are replaced by the
language of the school.

Parents in South Africa have the right to choose the language of learning and teaching for their
children in any of the eleven official languages. Provincial departments of education are charged to
provide education through the language requested by at least 40 learners in grades 1 to 6 or 35 in
grades 7 to 12. Governing bodies have responsibility for the implementation of policies and
programmes to redress disadvantages associated with African languages. However, the failure to
recognize the centrality of language policy for the social and economic development of the country
and the concomitant low level of resourcing for language planning initiatives serve as obstacles to
achieving additive multilingualism.25 Not surprisingly, the failure to implement mother-tongue-based
bilingual education has been accompanied by falling levels of literacy and academic performance.26

The current situation was summed up in October 2009 by Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic
Education:

Where African languages are used as languages of learning and teaching, they are used only
in the Foundation Phase in schools serving predominantly ‘African’ learners, after which
English takes over as the medium of instruction. The transition to English as the language of
learning and teaching in these schools often happens too abruptly and often before learners
have fully developed the necessary cognitive skills in their home languages. It is against this
background that the Language Colloquium, which was hosted by the then Minister of
Education in 2006, recommended the use of mother tongue instruction up to grade six. In
response to this recommendation, two provinces have initiated pilot projects to implement
mother tongue instruction from grade one to six, namely, the Western Cape (sixteen (16)
schools) and the Eastern Cape (one (1) school).27

Those people we interviewed with responsibility for developing and implementing policy on the
ground expressed frustration at the low levels of resourcing provided for all aspects of development in
the pilot schools. Although the majority of parents (88 per cent) have expressed a preference for what
would be, in effect, mother-tongue-based bilingual education,28 in the absence of such provision they
inevitably veer to education in the language of highest status. The fact that the majority of learners
continue to be taught through the medium of English as a second language is certainly a deterrent to
publishing in African languages. Heugh (2007: 209) outlines two important consequences for
education:

Publishers cannot and (will not) risk producing educational materials in African languages
without guaranteed sales. Teachers cannot risk teaching more effectively through African
languages because there is no material support for this... Parents from the more or less 75%
majority recognize the current lack of educational materials in their language and try to move
their children into the best resourced English medium state schools (approximately 6% of
schools) or the 2% of privately funded schools.

The failure to firmly establish African languages as the main medium of instruction in even the first
three years of school has far reaching implications for publishing, summed up by one of the people we
interviewed in the following terms:

25 Sookrajh & Joshua (2009)
26 Heugh (2007)
27 DBE (2009)
28 PanSALB (2000)
Publishers want to know whether there is market out there for their books – that’s how they make their money. Government hasn’t said, ‘We will buy those books for those schools’. So the ones that have published have taken a huge risk.

According to one source, ‘There is not a publishing house in this country that is not sitting with warehouses full of books in African languages’.

In the light of this experience and without the prospect of definite orders, risk-averse publishers are not prepared to commit. For example, materials for use in the Western Cape pilot schools have been developed by two publishers for just two learning areas. This failure to commit has implications for the overall success of this project. While teachers, overloaded with the need to translate their own teaching materials, are not opposed to the principle of mother tongue-based bilingual education, it is not difficult to see why they might feel that implementation is a burden.

There is also evidence of a lack of ‘joined-up thinking’. For instance, the high profile Ithuba programme, supported by USAID, has developed materials for the intermediate phase in nine African languages, at a time where isiXhosa alone is being used as the medium of instruction with children of this age. There is thus a serious disjuncture between educational policy and materials development.

At the international level, the arguments for mother-tongue based bilingual education are well rehearsed: students who have a sound foundation in the mother tongue participate more actively, feel more confident about their learning and outperform peers who operate only through the medium of a second language. While language-in-education policy in South Africa is supportive of this policy, the rate of implementation is extremely slow and, in the absence of bilingual provision, parents veer to education in English, the language of highest status. A further consequence is that publishers are reluctant to invest in African language publishing without guaranteed sales. The absence of teaching materials in turn affects the willingness of teachers to use African languages as the medium of instruction.

Access to finance

Publishers also face a range of other challenges in servicing the schools market. Some apply to all sectors of the industry; others relate to the size of the company, with smaller publishers experiencing disproportionate levels of disadvantage. In an age of globalization, this uneven playing field affects publishers in many different countries – the struggles of small independents relative to large multinational companies are well documented. However, the history of publishing in South Africa serves only to accentuate the differences between big and small players, requiring imaginative solutions if the desired redistribution of wealth is to be achieved.

Access to finance in order to ensure cash flow is an ongoing challenge for the smaller companies. The end of the apartheid era created potential opportunities for new entrants into publishing in South Africa. Many, however, have fallen along the way. Several people commented, for instance, on the length of time required for a return on investment:

---

29 Taxel (2010)
From the time one gets capital to the time one gets the return can be as long as two years. That is why every time there is a new curriculum it wipes out a couple of publishers.

The upfront spend is quite high; you know, submitting the books and getting them approved is quite a long process. So often the books that we developed two or three years ago are only now starting to get on the list. So you start with stock holding and all the development costs and often that’s a barrier from entry into the industry.

A limited understanding of the book industry on the part of financial institutions exacerbates the problems faced by small independents. The seasonal nature of educational publishing, whereby most orders are received and processed in just four or five months of the year, is often not appreciated. As one small publisher commented:

Even if you go to a financial institution and you look for funding, they say: ‘What do you do?’ And you say: ‘We make books’. And they say: ‘Books?’ We really struggled when we wanted to get funding... We are all struggling – struggling big time.

Access to finance is thus an ongoing challenge with implications for marketing, distribution and compliance with complex procurement procedures.

**Marketing**

There are two main ways of reaching schools – through visits from the sales team and through the mailing of sample copies. In both cases, small publishers find themselves at a serious advantage.

The distribution of samples is seen as a key strategy: publishers able to place copies in the hands of those making choices are likely to do best. As the managing director of one high turnover company explained:

We printed and reprinted quite large quantities of our set works and we gave them away free to schools saying that, if they see our book, there is a very good chance that they will buy our book and that will lead to multiple copy sales. And it was an amazingly simple, expensive, but good strategy. We had an example of a book that was 15 years old and in its entire history had only sold approximately 300 copies. Then, after we did that, it sold something like 30,000 copies.

Small turnover companies, then, are faced with an uneven playing field. The Department of Arts and Culture\(^30\) acknowledges that small publishers are hugely disadvantaged and recommends, for instance, that publishers should be allowed to provide only sample chapters for evaluation purposes. In the absence of mandatory measures, however, there is no evidence that larger competitors are willing to give ground on this issue.

The alternative to visits from sales representatives is the mailing of sample copies. In the Western Cape, Gauteng and the urban areas, postal services are very efficient. This is not an option in provinces such as the Eastern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal, where many schools do not even have a postal address.

Marketing requires large amounts of capital. Because of difficulties in accessing finance, low turnover companies established in the post apartheid era are only able to draw on small sales teams and cannot afford to produce large numbers of free samples. They therefore tend to focus on relatively small territories. One of the small publishers we interviewed concentrates on Kwa-Zulu Natal, the province

\(^{30}\) SABDC (undated)
where they are based. Within this area, the main effort is put into teacher training – ‘giving teachers the confidence to be able to use one’s materials well’ – supplemented by small-scale advertising in newspapers and on regional African language radio stations. It is simply not possible to sustain this effort beyond a small geographical area.

Because marketing is capital intensive, small publishers find themselves at a disadvantage. There are two main ways of reaching schools – through visits from the sales team and through the mailing of sample copies. Publishers able to place copies in the hands of those making choices are likely to do best. The alternative to visits from sales representatives is the mailing of sample copies. This is not an option in provinces where many schools do not even have a postal address.

**Distribution**

From the perspective of infrastructure, South Africa is by far the best placed country in Sub-Saharan Africa. The distribution challenge varies according to the purchase models operated by different provinces. In Limpopo, North West and Mpumalanga, for instance, all schools have Section 20 status and are required to buy through a central requisition process. From the publishers’ perspective, this is straightforward: orders can be delivered in bulk to a small number of warehouses. The problem arises with Section 21 schools in rural areas responsible for buying their own books: here small numbers of books need to be delivered across large areas. In some cases, booksellers buy the books from publishers and then distribute to schools; in other cases, publishers need to make their own arrangements for getting the books into schools, especially in remote areas.

Large companies often have regional distribution centres or are able to take advantage of vertical integration, calling on specialist sister companies. Small publishers sometimes outsource distribution to specialist companies though, wherever possible, they deal with orders themselves: ‘When we get a big order, if we can, we try and do it from the Joburg office because 10% for a big order is a lot of money to us’. Some small publishers focus on the area surrounding their main market:

> We’ve got three bakkies in-house... that deliver across the province... We don’t courier, we just deliver because that’s where our biggest market is. But then outside the province we use courier services. It costs us an arm and a leg.

For orders from provinces further afield, they sometimes wait until other items are added to the order: ‘At times you need to wait, until an order is bigger so that you make profit. Otherwise if you send as orders come through, you find that you don’t really make any profit’.

In provinces where all schools buy through a central requisition process, orders can be delivered in bulk to a small number of warehouses. Problems arise, however, in schools in rural areas responsible for buying their own books when small numbers of books have to be delivered across large areas. In some cases, booksellers buy the books from publishers and then distribute to schools; in other cases, publishers need to make their own arrangements for getting the books into schools, especially in remote areas.
**Book procurement**

Book procurement in South Africa is complex, with responsibility at provincial level for the earlier years of school, while texts for the last three years are selected from a nationally approval list. This situation is further complicated by the fact that different provinces operate different systems. The provincial system was seen as offering just one advantage: if you fail to get a book approved in, say, Kwa-Zulu Natal or the Eastern Cape, it may still be possible to publish for Limpopo. There are, however, many disadvantages, particularly for small publishers. Calls for submissions come at different times, making it difficult to respond:

This year we had a case where we were given less than two months for [a submission to] Mpumalanga province. And we’ve got so many books that we wanted to submit. You find that you start naturally focussing not on the quality but on the quantity.

There are also cost implications for submissions to different provinces:

We had to submit five of each title and then pay a fee on top of that. So for a small publisher, it’s five of each title and R7000 or R8000 to submit your titles in the hope long term of getting orders in. So yes, it’s a big challenge.

Another longstanding source of dissatisfaction concerns the failure to regularly review and update approved lists. Our attention was drawn to several books that had continued to be included in one provincial list even when they were out of print. In a similar vein, an African language publisher recalled how she had used the same book herself as a student in Grades 10, 11 and 12 and had then been required to use it again as a teacher. However, some progress has been made in addressing these concerns. The comprehensive lists compiled by the National Education Department for Grades 10 and 11 met widespread approval and the anticipated regular reviews were seen as likely to encourage a ‘flurry of publishing’. There was also support for shifting responsibility for approved lists from the provinces, starting with Grade R and working through the grades. A national system would have the additional advantage of allowing publishers to estimate the size of print runs more accurately and simplify stock control.

A national book procurement process could also potentially act as a stimulus for African language publishing. Some publishers already prepare different language versions but wait for approval before printing. The coordination of the approvals process and a centralised placement of orders would make it possible to include languages other than English and Afrikaans in the same print run, thus reducing the unit cost of some of the less widely spoken languages. This approach would serve as a powerful incentive for publishers to produce books in a wider range of languages.

Enthusiasm for the move towards a national system, however, was tempered by concern about possible corruption: international experience points to the potential for personal gain for those involved in the approval of books for schools.31 There was consensus, therefore, that the procedures for book procurement should be both transparent and robust in line with the Department of Arts and Culture recommendation32 that firms should be required to disclose conflicts of interest relating to vertical integration firms and that government should specify a set of verifiable criteria for book

---

31 Leighton, Feynmann & Hutchings (1992); Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (1999)
32 SABDC (2007)
selection decisions; it has also been recommended that textbook evaluation and approval panels should have no ties to curriculum groups, authors, publishers or printers.\textsuperscript{33}

\begin{quote}
Responsibility for book procurement is divided between provincial and national level. The process is complicated by the fact that different provinces operate different systems. Calls for submissions are costly and come at different times, making it difficult to respond. There is a good deal of support for shifting responsibility from the provinces to the national level, providing that this process is both robust and transparent.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} OECD (2008: 178)
The trade market

Industry statistics on trade publishing have limited usefulness in discussions of publishing for children because they do not differentiate between books written for adults and children. Data on the breakdown of sales by language, however, point to the failure of African language publishing to penetrate the trade market. English books make up 60.1% of the sales, compared with 34.45% for Afrikaans and a mere 5.02% for other African languages combined.

This situation is usually explained in terms of the absence of a culture of reading, a matter of widespread concern in South Africa, as witnessed by a proliferation of initiatives on the part of both government and NGOs to promote an enjoyment of books. In this section, we look critically at the arguments and suggest that, while the obstacles are very real, blue skies thinking about ways of expanding the trade market may offer a way out of the current impasse.

Developing a culture of reading

The absence of a culture of reading is a very real issue for families with little disposable income and low levels of literacy. A question of particular concern is how to promote reading with pre-school children. While books purchased by Education Departments reach children of school age, younger children are largely dependent on the efforts of NGOs; opportunities to engage with books are very limited. And it is not simply a matter of putting books into children’s hands: adults have an important role to play. As Carole Bloch, Director of the Early Literacy Unit at PRAESA34 points out: ‘It’s not the books initially, it’s the contact with the significant adult who pulls them in. They could be singing or doing rhymes – anything – but it happens to be from books. And then the books take over’.

The highly didactic, skills-based approach to reading which remains a widespread feature of South African classrooms does little to promote the notion of reading for fun. The emergence of reading clubs for children is an interesting development in this respect. The Vulindlela book clubs in Cape Town (organized by PRAESA and run by volunteers) regularly attract 100 or more children and are a case in point. The aim of the sessions from 10–12 on a Saturday morning is to create an atmosphere very different from school. The sessions start with circle games and singing. The children then divide into three different age-related groups to listen to stories and to stretch out or cuddle up with a book. The emphasis, then, is on reading as an enjoyable activity. English and isiXhosa are used in the Reading Club on alternate weeks.35

While the promotion of a culture of reading remains a priority, it is important to avoid placing all responsibility on parents and children. Publishers also need to look critically at the content of the materials they are producing, their methods of reaching huge untapped markets and their pricing strategies.

34 PRAESA (Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa) is an independent research and development unit attached to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Cape Town.
35 A DVD, Vulindlela reading clubs, is available from PRAESA: edu-praes@uct.ac.za, +27 21 650 4013
There is ample evidence most Africans do not engage with books and that those who do prefer reading in English. Discussion of why this might be the case tends to focus on issues such as the historical importance of oral culture, lack of disposable income and low levels of literacy, all of which clearly play a role. Assumptions about the reading behaviours of African adults, however, are often overly simplistic. As one of the publishers we interviewed remarked: ‘People often say Black people don’t read. A lot of rubbish! Of course they read, but for some reason they don’t buy books’. The lack of reading culture would seem to relate – in part at least – to the failure of books to speak to the interests of potential readers.

There are many indications that Africans do read when the content is affordable, accessible and of interest. Vukani, the weekly bilingual English and local African language newspaper, is distributed in the Cape Town townships; Isolezwe, the daily Zulu newspaper in Durban, has a circulation of more than 95,000, outperforming the English-language dailies from the same publisher. Evaluations of a Soul City health promotion initiative show that high-quality glossy African language booklets distributed as inserts not only reached large numbers of the target audience receiving the newspapers but were also shared with others. The enthusiastic public debate on radio about which books constitute ‘classics’ in the lead up to the launch of the Reprint of African Language Classics project at the Centre for the Book also suggests that there is indeed an interest in African language books, though the extent of their appeal is unclear.

The issue, it would seem, is relevance. The content of books for younger readers is less problematic. The growing number of South African authors, such as Carole Bloch, Niki Daly, Phindi Dlamini and Gcina Mhlope, has ensured that children’s books now speak to the everyday realities of a broad range of South African children. Much African language publishing for older readers, however, fails to meet this criterion. It is hard to disagree with the following assessment offered by one of the publishers we interviewed:

Most of the African languages publishing has been aimed at set work adaptations where the perception of the publishers is that they have to uncover serious themes, lots of characterisation, lots of meaty stuff to study. I ask myself do I read that sort of book? I read a lot but I don’t ever read that sort of book outside my work environment because it would bore me to death. I don’t go and read Dickens for pleasure, I don’t read Shakespeare for pleasure although I read them both when I studied at university. If you look at African language literature, you don’t find things like Wilbur Smith where there’s lots of action, easy reading and you can associate with the hero. Make it more light hearted, more action, more fun!

There is undoubtedly a need to explore which genres and themes speak to the interests of Africans. One promising example is the Nollybooks chic-lit romance fiction aimed at the young adult black market which is currently not catered for. Their publications are more accurately described as ‘bookazines’ – texts of around 30,000 words followed by suggestions for talking points, quizzes and a celebrity spot. BK publishing has identified another gap in the market in the form of highly illustrated short stories aimed at recently independent readers making the transition to longer texts which require more stamina. In the case of both Nollybooks and BK Publishing, the emphasis is on recreational reading in English, but there is no reason why this principle should not be extended to African language books.
The normal way of reaching the trade market is through bookshops. The reluctance of the main retailers to stock African language books was a widespread complaint. Booksellers tend to attribute this reluctance to the lack of reading culture and the preference of Africans who do read for books in English: ‘People think: I can appreciate a Zulu book but when it comes to buying I’m still going buy the English one’. Publishers, for their part, talked in similar terms about the difficulties they faced in persuading bookshops to stock and sell their African language books:

They will probably tell you that this is not worth shelving space. I mean people don’t buy them because the person who goes to [shops in the X chain] is not your average person who is interested in African languages.

We obviously visit shops and we would try and coax them to keep our African language set works literature and books that we think are of general appeal. And very often they don’t want to and then – when they do accept – with some of them the feedback we get is that they don’t sell … if you sell 20 you find 18 come back after a year. A very large number of our African population simply haven’t got enough spare money, and that’s an obvious major thing.

The depressing circularity in discussions of retailers’ reluctance to stock African language books invites blue skies thinking. We encountered three such examples.

§ Nollybooks

This strategy of Nollybooks is that, since their target audience doesn’t currently enter books shops they need to take the book to the reader, making their titles available at magazine retail outlets and direct sales agents. Working very much like Tupperware parties, agents are able to introduce readers to the brand and make commission on sales.

§ BK Publishing

This new entrant to publishing is developing a range of highly innovative strategies, including door-to-door sales in townships and book promotion competitions in schools. Considerable emphasis is being placed on entrepreneurship and using books as tools for poverty alleviation and community upliftment. For instance, through a partnership with an NGO working in disadvantaged communities they facilitated workshops which enabled over 50 youths to start their own bookselling ventures. During the workshop participants were each supplied with 10 copies of a children’s book as start-up stock and were required to develop a marketing strategy. All participants managed to sell all their copies within two weeks using personal networks, market stalls and other means.

Other marketing strategies include book related competitions and book launches in township schools as well as fund-raising events which help to subsidise books so that they can be sold for R5.00 in poverty stricken areas.

§ Garage booksellers

Garage booksellers are small-scale book suppliers without permanent premises and often based in rural areas that submit tenders to service the schools ordering system. The CEO of a high turnover publishing company suggested the talents of garage booksellers might be harnessed more effectively:
Now, if we can somehow get them to have a small selection of books available to the local community where they can come and look and perhaps buy or even lend like a library system where they can pay a nominal fee to get a book... [Garage booksellers] visit a network of the really rural, the really unreachable towns and communities. And they are people who might want to support their own languages.

**Pricing**

The final ingredient in bringing books to a much larger market is pricing. One very obvious reason why many South Africans don’t buy books is that they have little or no disposable income. As Loreto Trok, publishing director for the NGO, Room to Read, commented:

Books are expensive, they cannot buy books, and they are poor... You think they are interested in buying a book when there is no mealie meal at home? No, they will not buy a book if there is no mealie meal at home or if there is no bread or the children don’t have shoes or they can’t even afford to pay school fees.

Pricing, then, is a major issue. In this respect, it is interesting to note that newcomers on the publishing scene such as Nollybooks and BK publishing are making a concerted effort to lower prices, with Nollybooks retailing at R50 and the BK *Metz and Bop* titles at R30, which compares with a retail price of around R100 for most books of comparable length.

A basic requirement for changing attitudes towards books and reading, then, is to ensure easy access to good quality, culturally appropriate books. The current book buying public of South Africa is estimated to be 50,000 out of a total population of 48 million people. Increasing this constituency by even a modest proportion would be highly advantageous for the book value chain; it would also allow them to reduce the price of books to more realistic levels. This, in turn, would have a very beneficial effect in promoting a culture of reading, with obvious implications for levels of literacy and educational outcomes. Blue skies thinking of this kind offers a very promising way out of the current impasse.

It is indisputable that most Africans do not buy books, and those who do often show a preference for English. However, when the content is affordable, accessible and relevant, there are clear indications that Africans do read. The basic requirement for changing attitudes towards books and reading is to ensure easy access culturally appropriate, affordable books, a process that invites blue skies thinking not only about content but also about ways of taking books to potential readers who currently do not visit bookshops.
While the main imperative for publishing in South Africa, irrespective of language, is to extend beyond the schools market, two challenges apply specifically to African language publishing: the development of writers and translation.

Developing writers

Children’s literature in English has been available since the seventeenth century and, until the 1970s, English titles were imported. Children’s books in Afrikaans have been thriving since the 1950s. However, the emergence of ‘real books’ in African languages is a recent development. Very few African authors write in their first languages and manuscripts submitted to publishers are usually in English. They tend to target older readers and are often of very poor quality. While the drive to produce more titles in African languages offers new opportunities for local writers, it also creates new challenges.

One of the fundamental problems in developing African language materials is that there is no established tradition of writing for children. Storytelling and story writing require very different skills. Illustrations are a central feature of children’s storybooks. As such, the story needs to work in tandem with the artwork. It must ‘talk’ to the pictures on the same page; there are also constraints on the length of the text. Writing for children in African languages is very much a case of work in progress. As one editor pointed out: “You can’t write the rules until you’ve done the work”.

The challenge for publishers, then, is to nurture potential authors of children’s books in African languages. Empowerment deals offer a potential source of support: one of the publishers we interviewed reported that their parent company had recently set up an authors’ trust to develop new talent with 5 per cent of company shares. Other strategies currently in use include competitions, workshops and grants.

Competitions have offered a useful mechanism for widening the net to reach new and aspiring authors. Publishers use awards both to generate new books via the submission of manuscripts and also to provide an incentive to write. Although, for understandable reasons, the quality of entries tends to be poor, they serve a useful function by making explicit what publishers seek in materials for children.

First Words in Print, one of the projects at the Centre for the Book, was among the first to use writing competitions as the starting point for developing new books for distribution to children. Similarly, Room to Read, an NGO that sets up libraries in schools and trains volunteer teachers to run them, has since 2008 been using competitions, publicized through libraries, local community newspapers, schools and word of mouth, to source new material in African languages. The first year generated some 220 manuscripts, of which 14 were shortlisted and five ultimately selected for publication. Subsequently, writing workshops were held with the shortlisted authors to help develop their writing skills.
Various other groups also organize workshops for writers and illustrators, including individual publishers, the Centre for the Book and NGOs such as PRAESA. Like competitions, workshops usually have two main aims: to generate stories for publication; and to make potential authors and illustrators more aware of what is involved in producing a story of publishable quality. An editor with extensive experience of African language publishing explains the challenges thus:

People don’t know how to put a portfolio together... We’ll get submissions for things which are incredibly inappropriate for us. Why? People don’t know when you are submitting to a publishing house that you need to go to a website. There is a lack of understanding of how submission works. You need to go to the book shop and see what books that publisher publishes and decide which one you think your material is best suited to. They don’t know how to pitch.

There are indications that writers who have taken part in these workshops have derived considerable benefit. isiXhosa speakers who participated in PRAESA workshops talked in terms of the confidence they now had in themselves as authors and the special contribution which they were able to make as African language writers with easy access to situations and experiences meaningful for African children. They particularly enjoyed the opportunities for sharing and feedback. But while workshops are a valuable tool in helping nurture writers, questions remain concerning sustainability. This is clearly a very complex issue, not only in an African context but also more generally: few authors are able to make a living from their writing.

Finally, two initiatives – the Community Publishing Project (CPP) at the Centre for the Book and the Indigenous Publishing Programme run by the South African Book Development Council (SABDC) – offer support for writers in the form of writers’ grants towards the publication of African language books, including children’s titles. CPP, based at the Centre for the Book, has created a range of opportunities for new writers or writers’ groups. Successful applicants receive mentoring from editors at NB Publishers and a grant to cover the costs of a small print run. Money generated from the sales of the books can be put towards a second edition, or financing a new book. By working as small publishers, writers come to understand the relationships between the various actors in the book value chain and the critical importance of marketing and distribution.

CPP is open to writers in all official languages, although growing numbers are submitted in African languages. However, IPP, which is open to South-African-owned and -controlled publishing companies, focuses specifically on the nine African languages. It aims ‘to increase indigenous-language publishing and to support the ongoing production of South-African-authored books in local languages’.

While the drive to produce more titles in African languages offers new opportunities for local writers, it also creates new challenges. Very few African authors write in their first languages and manuscripts submitted to publishers are usually in English. They tend to target older readers and are often of very poor quality. The challenge for publishers, then, is to nurture potential authors of children’s books in African languages. Possible ways forward include mentorship through empowerment deals, competitions, workshops and grants.

36 SABDC (2009)
The role of translation

In the words of Nelson Mandela: ‘If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.’ The boom in translation followed immediately on the new dispensation in 1994 and, since that time, children’s publishing has provided a regular flow of work for translators. By no means all children’s books, however, are translated across all the official languages. Of those which are, most originate in English. As we have seen, the demand for translation is related to the language: more titles are translated into isiZulu, isiXhosa, Setswana and Sesotho than into smaller languages like isiNdebele, Sepedi, siSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga.37

Translation has emerged as a controversial issue in South Africa, with strong arguments both for and against. Those who oppose the use of translation do so on two main grounds. The first concerns the failure of some material to cross languages. As one African language publisher commented:

We realised that, more often than not, translations don’t really reflect the aspirations and the concerns of the very target groups that we try to develop these materials for. So we would rather now go for original texts than translations.

The second relates to concerns that translation is detrimental to the development of original literature in African languages, a view implicit, for instance, in the Ithuba Project38 which insists that materials are generated in the mother tongue. It should be noted, however, that this reason was not cited by any of those interviewed for the present study.

Those in favour of translation also advance two main arguments. The first relates to the dearth of reading material currently available in African languages and the potential of translation to greatly increase output with minimal effort. The strategy is, as Neville Alexander explained in relation to the publishing programme at PRAESA, ‘to use what’s good wherever it is’, ‘to develop as quickly as possible a body of material that everyone can share’.39 The second is based on a broader view of translation as a form of cultural sharing which has shaped all societies across the centuries. Translation allows sharing and reciprocal development between readers and writers of different languages: as pointed out in another context: “Western Europe owes its civilization to translators”.40

It is very difficult to build an accurate picture of the role of translation in African language publishing for children in South Africa. Neither Writing in nine tongues nor the Catalogue of South African Literature gives information on whether a title was originated in the language in question. Analyses need therefore to be based on indirect evidence. Authors’ names often give an indication: English and Afrikaans names are easily distinguished; it is also often possible to distinguish, for instance, between Nguni and Sotho names, though finer differentiation is more difficult. Another – albeit tedious method – is to identify different versions of a book by looking at the jacket illustration; however, not all entries include jackets.

Two sample analyses give an indication of the trends. The first (see figure 7) is based on the 2007 Writing in nine tongues catalogue.41 It shows that, with the exception of Setswana, the number of original works exceeds the number of translations.

37 For further in-depth analysis of translation in PASA (20070, see Kruger (2009)
38 A project sponsored by USAID in collaboration with the Department of Education, the University of Texas, Read Educational Trust and the Molteno Project to develop learning materials in all official languages.
41 The data are extrapolated from an analysis undertaken by Clive Gillitt
Figure 7: Numbers of original and translated books by language in PASA (2007)

The second (see Figure 8) is based on an analysis by age of original and translated titles in the 2009 supplement to Writing in nine tongues and throws further light on what is happening.

Figure 8: Numbers of original and translated readers by age group

A large proportion of the titles, then, were in fact originated in African languages; the majority of translations are targeted at the early and middle childhood market. This would suggest that translation is being used as a cost effective means of meeting the perceived need to provide books in African languages at the lower levels. With older readers, where the emphasis is more on literary value than on the development of reading skills and strategies, almost all titles are originated in African languages. Translation, it would seem, is not currently a threat to original writing.
Translation has emerged as a controversial issue in South Africa. Those who oppose its use argue that not all materials developed for an English-speaking market speak to the experiences of African children; and that translation is detrimental to the development of original literature in African languages. Those in favour consider that translation has the potential to greatly increase the amount of reading material in African languages with minimal effort; and that it represents a valuable form of cultural sharing. Analysis of samples of existing titles suggests that the majority of African language books are originated in African language and that most translations are targeted at younger rather than older children. Translation, it would seem, is not currently a threat to original writing.

Challenges for translators

The pool of people available to undertake translation is small and complaints about the quality of translation are frequent. Ongoing challenges include the high level of specialism required for working with children’s literature and issues around standardization.

Knowledge of children’s literature

Translators working in this field need not only to be proficient linguists but also to have an in depth knowledge of books for children. In spite of the growing demand, there is a serious shortage of African language speaking translators with the relevant breadth of experience. This situation is, of course, by no means limited to African languages. A similar situation has been described, for instance, in relation to the problems experienced in producing Asian language translations of children’s books in the UK.42

Because the translation of children’s books into African languages is a very recent development, people are inevitably feeling their way. One of the translators we interviewed explained: ‘I am learning these things by doing it and looking at edited stuff, experienced writers and translators’. Good translations are often the result of teamwork and negotiation. Because of the need within African cultures to show respect to elders, this process is not always straightforward. Two junior members of a translation team described how they find themselves deferring at various points to the senior member:

She [the senior translator] certainly knows the language... So sometimes she would say the word order is not right – this is maybe how we should be writing it. Whereas we came from the story side, we know the stories, we know how young children learn....

Given the current stage of development, quality control is an important issue. Large publishers tend to send texts for translation to specialist agencies. Small publishers and NGOs sometimes handle translation in-house if they are working with a small number of familiar languages; increasingly, however, this work is outsourced. One of the advantages of agency translation is the anonymity it affords. According to the director of a translation agency:

[In ideal circumstances] before it goes to quality control, it goes through three phases with us... translation, editing and proof reading, by three different people working independently.

They don’t know each other, they work together in a forum, talking to each other but not knowing it’s Nick, or whoever... The thing is, as soon as you do that, it could be all about “She said Professor whatever ...”, and you get the status thing... So they work ... with each other without knowing who the other person is.

The professionalisation of translators with the relevant specialist skills is an ongoing process. Neville Alexander describes the development over eight and more years of Xhosa colleagues in the PRAESA Early Literacy Unit. Through extensive experience of using good quality books with children in schools and reading clubs, they can now legitimately consider themselves experts in both isiXhosa and children’s literature, with a feel not only for whether the words are grammatically correct but for the aesthetics of whether or not they work in isiXhosa. People such as these are laying a strong foundation on which others can build. He stresses the importance of a developmental perspective:

People are not willing to accept that this is a process of trial and error and it’s going to take possibly generations – certainly a number of years – until we get to the point where in each of the language families or language groups, there is sufficient expertise so that you don’t require that process any more... People somehow think it’s an admission of African inferiority when you insist on this sort of thing. And it’s nonsense! Every other language has done that [including] Afrikaans. We can shorten the process now because we have the technology – we’ve got the computers and translation programmes – but you can’t evade it.

The first steps towards quality translation, however, are already in place.

Translators working in this field need not only to be proficient linguists but also to have an in depth knowledge of what makes a successful book for children. Because the translation of children’s books into African languages is a very recent development, people are inevitably feeling their way. There is, however, a reluctance to accept that this is a process of trial and error and that – as has been the case for Afrikaans and many other languages – it will require time to develop the relevant expertise. Developments in IT will help to shorten the process and there is evidence that the first steps towards quality translation are already in place.

Standardisation

Two competing trends can be detected in African linguistics: diversification and homogenisation. According to some estimates, in the region of 2000 languages are spoken in Africa. Kwasi Prah of the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society contends that 75 to 80 percent of all sub-Saharan Africans speak one of no more than between 15 and 17 ‘core’ languages.43

The nine official languages of South African (other than English and Afrikaans) are the same languages that were used for educational and administrative purposes in the various Bantustans under apartheid. These, in turn, are the product of the pioneering work of Europeans to commit speech to writing. Competition between missionaries resulted in the arbitrary fragmentation of the linguistic

43 Prah (2009)
landscape. In reality, we are dealing with linguistic continua and not separate languages: speakers at adjacent points on a continuum are able to understand each other; those at the furthest points may experience difficulties. Thus, instead of having one Nguni language, South Africans today talk in terms of isiZulu, isXhosa, isiSwati, and isiNdebele as separate languages; instead of treating Setswana, Sepedi, and Sesotho as varieties of Sotho, they are considered distinct.

The legacy of the different orthographies developed by missionaries has wide ranging implications for African publishing today. On the one hand, there can be no doubt about the high levels of mutual intelligibility among different varieties. Neville Alexander, director of PRAESA, cites the example of a Johannesburg man who, when asked which language he spoke, replied isiZulu but who, according to various criteria, was actually speaking isiXhosa. On some occasions, this closeness gives rise to practical problems. One publisher, for instance, talked about the confusion of warehouse staff in dealing with Sepedi and Setswana versions of a book on herding cattle where the titles were differentiated only by a diacritic on one of the letters.

One the other hand, even small differences are associated with particular identities. Missionaries who had invested considerable time and effort in developing orthographies were predictably anxious to defend their intellectual property. Similarly, those who have a personal investment in learning a particular orthography demonstrate strong loyalty. Publishers were very aware of the resulting tensions:

If we develop materials in Setswana, you will find that people, say in Kimberly or areas outside the Hurutsi, look at those materials and say: ‘Ah, this isn’t proper Setswana, this isn’t my Setswana, this is Hurutsi Setswana’. And it’s true of all our languages – isiXhosa, isiZulu, whatever you would like to mention. There are in some instances quite significant variations that are considered unacceptable by other speakers of the same language.

The Zulu spoken in Gauteng … will not be regarded as the proper Zulu in the province of KwaZulu. So when we were doing our Life Skills in Grade 3 books … if the translator happened to be a Zulu speaking person from Gauteng, we would get somebody to double check it … from KwaZulu. They would often disagree. I mean – to put it mildly – they would have some flat out fights about what was the right language.

Differences of this kind also limit the opportunities for cross-border publishing in isiNdebele, isiSwati, Sesotho and Setswana.

Interestingly, Afrikaans offers an outstanding example of what can be achieved in the field of language planning with adequate support. It was successfully transformed over a relatively short period of time from a low status, largely spoken variety to the vehicle of a vibrant literature. The post-1994 government, in an attempt to provide similar support for other African languages, established the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) and the various language bodies. While the struggle for Afrikaans was fuelled by grass roots activism and subsidised by private enterprise, attitudes towards other African languages are more complex and many speakers attach more credence to English than their mother tongues as the route to progress. In establishing separate bodies for each of the languages, the emphasis has been on fragmentation and important opportunities for harmonization have been missed. Equally pertinent, levels of government funding for PANSALB are woefully inadequate.

One of the functions of PANSALB is to develop terminology through nine national centres so that African languages can be used at all stages of education. Much of the work in the development of
The work that remains to be done in the area of terminology has important implications for the economics of translation. As the director of an agency explained:

\[\text{[In] European languages you can average roughly 2,500 words per day. African languages, you cut it down to 1,100 per day, so less than half ... if there’s not a term, it needs to be described. There’s a lot more thinking going into developing the languages.}\]

One positive step being taken by agencies in addressing issues of efficiency is the upgrading of the computer literacy skills of freelance African language translators in an industry which has become increasingly dependent on IT.

European missionaries were responsible for committing speech to writing in Africa. Competition between missionaries resulted in the arbitrary fragmentation into the nine languages recognized in the South African constitution. In reality, however, the four languages in the Nguni cluster are mutually intelligible, as are the three languages in the Sotho cluster. The historic legacy of this competition has wide ranging implications for African publishing today. Even small differences are associated with particular identities. The Zulu used in Gauteng, for instance, may not be acceptable as the written norm in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Similarly, these differences restrict the possibilities for cross-border publishing in isiNdebele, siSwati, Sesotho and Setswana.

In an attempt to provide support for other African languages similar to that provided by the National Party for Afrikaans, the post-1994 government established the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) and the various language bodies. However, levels of government funding for PANSALB are making it impossible to fulfil this role. The work that remains to be done has important knock-on effect for economics of translation. Translators working with African languages are able to achieve only half the output of those working with standardized European languages.

Related roles

Issues around translation concern others involved in multilingual publishing, including proofreaders, commissioning editors and project managers. In an industry historically dominated by speakers of English and Afrikaans, the ability of the people performing these roles to judge the appropriateness or effectiveness of texts is limited. Of the English-heritage publishing executives we interviewed, one was able to communicate in six African languages; such linguistic competence, however, is rare. The training, mentorship and appointment of African language speakers to these roles will therefore play a critical part in improving the situation.

---

44 See Heugh (2006) for a discussion of the relatively small investment which is required in terminology development.
While the ability of an isiXhosa speaking editor to respond to, say, an isiNdebele text may be limited, the mutual intelligibility of different members of the same family is such that speakers of one language have a good ‘feel’ for related varieties; such speakers are clearly far better placed than those whose repertoire is limited to English and Afrikaans:

Our publishers in charge of [African] literature ... have a sensitivity for the language and hopefully know what good literature is. I mean I can’t read, it doesn’t make sense for a person who can’t read a language publishing it ... most of our African language publishers can speak more than one African language so they would know at least whether the translation looked reasonable or not.

Being a native speaker does not, of course, remove the need for editorial support. A Zulu publisher who also writes for children stressed the need for others to comment on her work.

I’ve had to make my team understand that when I get into the shoes of an author, I’m an author period. You can critique my work ... So I don’t edit my books. I say: Make it as red as you can!

**How many language versions?**

Co-publishing initiatives involving European minority languages\(^{46}\) have demonstrated that by simply changing the language on the fourth time through the presses, larger print runs are able to achieve impressive economies of scale. Just one of the small turnover publishers we interviewed was engaged in cross-border publishing of this kind. He explained the benefits thus:

With our print run of say 20,000 the savings are massive. To take an example of a book we did earlier, the production costs were going to be 52 US cents. But when we brought in other countries we ended up with a cost of 28 US cents a book, which is a huge saving. We transferred these savings to the market not because we are philanthropic capitalists but because we have to make sure that the price you come up with is viable.

Why, then, are other South African publishers failing to fully exploit translation as a means of rapidly increasing the volume of African language literature available for children?

Given the centrality of textbooks in South African education, the main opportunities for sales in African language publishing are readers at the Foundation level and set texts for years 12-13 for African language subject curricula. Predictably, readers are the genre most frequently translated across all languages; set books relate to the curricula for specific languages and there is therefore no demand for translation. Why, though, is translation of other genres not more common?

Small publishers tend to be committed in principle to publishing in all the official languages, but have difficulty in raising the necessary funds. In one case, the cost of marketing outside the company headquarters in KwaZulu-Natal made it unrealistic to consider producing books in languages other than isiXhosa and isiZulu. Another small publisher acknowledged that the company’s ability to publish across all official languages was dependent on obtaining orders from NGOs such as the book distribution charity, Biblionef.

Publishers’ comments leave little doubt that decisions about which languages to translate are driven by potential sales. Most books are translated into isiXhosa, isiZulu and Afrikaans; smaller languages such as isiNdebele and Tshivenda are frequently overlooked. The same educational rationale for

---

\(^{46}\) Edwards (2007)
making languages available in the larger languages, however, applies to these smaller languages. One of the small companies that publishes wherever possible in all official languages was highly critical of the evident reluctance to translate demonstrated by many larger companies:

What a lot of the bigger publishers don’t do is to spread the costs of the smaller language groups across the project... if you’re looking at a language like IsiNdebele, you might only ever print 200 copies of that title, so it will never be in your interests or worthwhile to do it...
To do them in all the 11 languages, I think, is a moral responsibility.

While the publisher in question admits that her commitment to translation owes more to her personal passion than to income generation, this course of action has not entailed financial loss, particularly when titles are approved by education departments and orders begin to arrive:

We got some fabulous orders in from Gauteng last year on the smaller language groups. In Xitsonga we had an order of 900 books, which is unusual. The support is starting to come through, we’ve seen trickles of orders starting to come through in Setswana and Sesotho as well.

Some publishers explained their reluctance to expand across all the official languages in terms of their frustrations around the translation process, which was sometimes perceived to be as costly as originating materials in African languages. Others were critical of this viewpoint:

There are those who feel they have to have an authority who will tell them whether something is correct or incorrect: ‘There’s no established orthography, so it can’t be done’...
To me this is simply an excuse to get out of doing what you can right now. It becomes a way of explaining why you don’t do something.

Two of the publishers we interviewed took a more strategic view. The Stories Across Africa project, for instance, has already prepared 26 languages versions of its Little Hands in anticipation of future orders:

Why can’t one get material to print ready stage, sitting there so that when you get orders you print? And then you can then piggyback the languages. The thing is to conceptualize material so that it works for various languages, and [other publishers] don’t seem to be really doing that.

One multinational company operating in South Africa is already beginning to work along these lines:

Often now we do a translation, we get the books ready but we don’t necessarily print in those languages. But we have the books ready so that we can submit promotional copies and then print when the orders come through.

http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/praesa/elu.html
Decisions about which languages to translate are driven by potential sales. Most books are translated into isiXhosa, isiZulu and Afrikaans; smaller languages such as isiNdebele and Tshivenda are frequently overlooked. The same educational rationale for making languages available in the larger languages, however, applies to these smaller languages, raising issue of equality of opportunity.

Some publishers explain their reluctance to expand across all the official languages in terms of frustrations around the translation process, which was sometimes perceived to be as costly as originating materials in African languages. Others felt that this was simply an excuse and took a more strategic view. As part of their commitment of multilingual publishing, they prepare camera-ready versions in a range of languages ready to submit for approval and promotional purposes while minimizing risk by printing only when orders are received.
Ways forward

The debate around African publishing in recent years has been heated, with criticisms of both government and the publishing industry. In taking things forward it is important to recognize the responsibility of government for minimising the risks of publishers highly dependent on the education market. But by the same token, publishers need to understand that they need to be more proactive.

Minimising the risk

Official policies highly supportive of societal multilingualism remain largely at the level of rhetoric. The slow start in the implementation of mother-tongue-based bilingual education in South Africa has had serious consequences for African language publishing. Risk-averse publishers have responded enthusiastically when sales are guaranteed, as in the case of set texts for older students, and readers for young children; other kinds of books, however, are produced mainly for the larger isiZulu and isiXhosa markets.

This pattern of publishing has a number of implications for education. The international research shows clearly that the best outcomes are associated with a strong foundation in the mother tongue. The fact that publishers are producing fewer titles for speakers of smaller languages therefore has repercussions for equality of opportunity for the children from these groups. By the same token, teachers will not be prepared to teach more effectively through African languages without the support of good quality materials.

The gradual introduction of bilingual education would help to achieve improved educational outcomes; it would also provide an invaluable boost for the book value chain.

New markets

It is not reasonable to place all responsibility for change on government. Publishers also have a role to play. South Africa has a very sophisticated, world-class book industry that currently caters for about ten per cent of the population. The progress made to date in increasing the quantity and quality of books in African languages is encouraging. Far more work, however, remains to be done in identifying and producing materials of interest to the other 90 per cent. Such efforts need to focus not only on appropriate content but on ways of making books affordable and accessible to those readers who currently do not visit bookshops.

The blue skies thinking of new entrants to the industry points to the potential of direct marketing through book clubs and door-to-door sales and distribution via magazine outlets in breaking out from the current impasse. The harnessing of these new markets will also make it possible to reduce prices to realistic levels. Established publishers will no doubt be monitoring progress with considerable interest.
**Imaginative partnerships**

Political change in South Africa has created many opportunities for new entrants – entrepreneurs, editors, writers in African languages, translators and booksellers – to the publishing industry. These opportunities are counterbalanced by huge challenges. In an age of globalization, some of these problems relate to size: small independent companies throughout the world find themselves competing on an uneven playing field where multinationals call the shots. The situation in South Africa, however, is particularly complex and cannot be reduced to a David versus Goliath struggle.

One of the legacies of poor quality Bantu education is the need for capacity building across the sector. As Neville Alexander, Director of PRAESA, observed:

> You can’t on the one hand say that apartheid was calculated to diminish peoples’ minds, prevent them from having skills and then pretend that the day after apartheid has gone they’re all competent. You’ve got to have mentorship and apprenticeship.

High turnover companies that accumulated wealth during the apartheid period era have been slow to recognize that the promotion of African languages is an effective way of implementing affirmative action within the framework of BEE (Black Economic Empowerment). Some companies are already involved in the mentoring of writers and illustrators, either on an informal basis or as part of empowerment deals. Others have the potential to contribute through the mentoring of smaller competitors in areas such as marketing. Workshops offered by the South African Book Development Council (SABDC) on various topics of interest to SMEs provide a useful framework for moving forward. The importance of such mentoring and training cannot be underestimated. As one small publisher commented: ‘Now we are beginning to see that there’s so much out there that we haven’t been able to tap into because – number one – we didn’t know and – number two – we didn’t have the skills’.

It will also be important to develop other kinds of cooperation between longer-established companies and new entrants. India offers a possible model. A publisher specializing in books in Indian languages, describes an innovative partnership with multinational Penguin Books:

> Together we do four books a year that are originated by Zubaan [an indigenous publishing house], edited by us, jointly produced, and then marketed and sold by Penguin and we have found a way of sharing the costs and the profits. For us, this arrangement represented an unusual step: it enables us to see whether our books could sell more or not; it enabled us to interact as equals with a much bigger, much richer, much more powerful partner because the arrangement had something in it for both of us; and it enabled us to get our authors known in a wider circle.47

**An ongoing process of development**

There is a temptation for publishers to use the very real issues around writers and translators as an excuse for limiting still further their exposure to risk-taking around African language publishing. This attitude overlooks the fact that both the standardization of English and Afrikaans and the development of children’s literature in these languages have taken place over long periods of time. In

---

47 Butalia (2009)
short, it fails to understand that the emergence of children’s literature in African languages is a work in progress. The director of a translation agency summed up the situation thus:

The reality is that English has been around for eons and eons whereas African languages in their written form have only been around for the past hundred years. The market expects them to be at the same level. So I would like to challenge those people [that criticize] in asking them whether they’ve got the money to support the development of the genre.

While the problems are incontestable, they cannot be used as an excuse for refusing to move forward. It is also important not to lose sight of the fact that the first steps in resolving these problems have already been taken.
Recommendations

In order to increase the pool of reading materials in African languages, action from government is required in the following areas:

Policy implementation

§ The gradual implementation of mother-tongue-based bilingual education will not only improve academic outcomes but will also provide guaranteed markets which, in turn, will incentivize risk-averse publishers.

§ The pilot projects in the Western and Eastern Cape are to be applauded. In order to build on the learning of the pilots schools, however, far higher levels of resourcing will be required both for language advocacy to ensure the ‘buy in’ of parents and teachers and for the professional development of teachers.

§ Given the evidence of the poor levels of literacy achieved by South African children, access to books by the very young is essential in helping to develop behaviours fundamental to future success in reading. Special attention therefore needs to be paid to ensuring that pre-school children are able to interact with books.

Book procurement procedures

§ The current procurement procedures are complex and expensive for publishers. It is important to move as rapidly as possible towards a national system which will reduce costs and allow publishers both to estimate the size of print runs more accurately and to simplify stock control.

§ The books included in approved lists need to be regularly reviewed in order to provide a stimulus for publishing.

§ A centralised system is open to abuse. To gain the confidence of publishers, the book procurement process must be transparent and robust, with verifiable criteria for book selection decisions.

Action from publishers is required in the following areas:

Centralised information on African language books

§ While attempts to catalogue African language books are to be applauded, it is important to address serious flaws in their current organization.

§ An online database should be housed on the PASA, SABDC or the Departments of Arts and Culture website, with links between the three. Publishers would be asked to submit information on new
publications online, thus reducing costs and increasing accuracy. This approach would confer multiple benefits, including the ability to:

- offer up-to-date information on resources
- monitor output from year to year
- identify gaps in coverage of particular genres, age ranges and languages
- remove titles which are out of print
- generate print catalogues if required.

Publishers need to standardise categories such as age and genre in order to increase the usefulness of the database.

New markets

While most African readers do not buy books, the popularity of African language newspapers clearly indicates their willingness to read material that they perceive as relevant, affordable and accessible. In order to increase sales, publishers need to:

- reduce their dependency on the schools market
- be more proactive in identifying subject matter of interest to a much wider audience
- take the book to the reader using techniques such as direct marketing in an attempt to attract customers who would not normally enter bookshops
- harness the talents and interests of entrepreneurs such as garage booksellers
- grow markets still further by using higher volumes of sales to reduce prices

Capacity building

Publishers need to be encouraged to view the promotion of African languages as an effective way of implementing affirmative action within the framework of BEE, through the mentoring of writers, editors and marketing staff.

Translation

The use of specialist agencies should be encouraged as a way of professionalizing translation into African languages and delivering quality assurance. By working independently and at a distance, translators, editors and proofreaders are able to by-pass cultural issues, such as the need to defer to elders.

Investment in the IT training should be encouraged as a way of increasing speed and efficiency. Responsibility for providing this training should fall on the translation agencies.

The lack of standardization has economic implications: translation into African languages takes twice as long as translation into European languages. More support is therefore required for the corpus planning activities of PANSALB and the various language bodies which are currently seriously under-resourced. In the absence of adequate levels of funding, consideration might be given to harmonizing the efforts of the various language bodies.

The fact that publishers are producing far fewer titles for speakers of less widely spoken languages has repercussions for equality of opportunity for the children from these groups. It is essential that translations should be undertaken in all nine tongues and not only the larger ones that guarantee higher levels of sales.
Publishers should be encouraged to spread costs across the languages. In order to maximise returns they need to take advantage of advances in IT to produce camera-ready translations for promotional and approval purposes, printing only when orders are received.

Moving forward

The stakeholders in African language books for children include the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, publishers, NGOs, language planning organizations and educators. In order to ensure coherent policy and practice, cooperation between these various parties is essential.

A committee drawing on these stakeholders needs to take forward the recommendations contained this report. It should include representatives from:

- the Ministries of Education and Culture
- SABDC
- PASA
- the Centre for the Book
- NGOs such as PRAESA and PUKU, centrally concerned with children’s literature and literacy learning.
References


