



**AFRICA
*SPEAKS**

**THE SECOND
ROUNDTABLE
CONSULTATION
2024**

5th -9th March
Nairobi, Kenya

A circular graphic containing a stylized map of Africa. The map is divided into regions, each filled with a different pattern and color: green with a leaf pattern, red with a dot pattern, yellow with a dot pattern, green with a leaf pattern, and brown with a dot pattern. To the right of the map is a smaller version of the 'AFRICA *SPEAKS' logo. Below the map and logo, the text 'THE SECOND ROUNDTABLE CONSULTATION 2024' is written in red, and '5th -9th March Nairobi, Kenya' is written in red and grey.

www.africaspeaks.global/asroco



**THE SECOND
ROUNDTABLE
CONSULTATION
2024**

5th -9th March
Nairobi, Kenya

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CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Mrs. Modupe Ehirim

Chairperson, Board of Trustees



Embracing Our Call: The Inspiring Journey of Africa Speaks

Dear Members of the Africa Speaks Community and Friends,

I'm honored to address you as the Chair of the Board of Africa Speaks 2018 Trust.

In March 2018, an international network of publishing professionals from around the globe came together at a conference in Bannockburn, Illinois, USA. They were united in a common goal: to promote a viable, flourishing and sustainable Christian publishing industry in Africa and grow into a thriving professional network.

From that conference came the Africa Speaks 2018 Trust. Since our start in 2018, our journey has been nothing short of a divine calling, urging us to be good stewards of the written word, a gift from God. Our mission is clear: to use the power of publishing to share the heart and hope of Africa.

As we gather in 2024 at the 2nd Africa Speaks Roundtable Conference ASROCO, our focus is not just on our past but on the promising future ahead.

We believe that publishing can be a force for good, nurturing the church, influencing society, and shaping culture with biblical values. However, we know there's work to be done. The need for great Christian content in Africa is huge, and doing things the same old way won't cut it anymore.

Over the next couple of days, we will have honest, heart to heart conversations on three important issues that the Christian Publishing Industry in Africa is grappling with:

- Discoverability of African Authors
- Book Distribution Beyond Borders in Africa
- Raising Faithful Publishing Professionals

Our objective is to seek actionable solutions to these systemic challenges during these conversations. Together, let us commit to making a change, closing the gap between what currently exists and what needs to be in place.

Prayer is at the heart of our commitment. We believe that with God's guidance, our journey will be more fruitful. Let's create an environment that encourages prayer for our industry, understanding that we need divine help to make a lasting impact.

Let's strengthen our connections, have conversations that inspire, and build trust. When one of us does well, we all do well. Let's encourage reading and writing, passing on the torch to the next generation while respecting our rich storytelling traditions.

Together, we'll figure out what's needed, create meaningful content, and make sure it reaches as many people as possible. We'll tackle challenges, strive for excellence, and build organizations that can stand on their own financially.

Our journey isn't just about books; it's about changing lives and making a difference in communities. In 2024, we're recommitting ourselves to this mission, inviting others to join us in building a strong Christian publishing industry in Africa.

May our efforts create a ripple effect of hope and truth, spreading across Africa and beyond.

Modupe Ehirim

Chair of the Board,

Africa Speaks 2018 Trust

The Africa Speaks Board of Trustees



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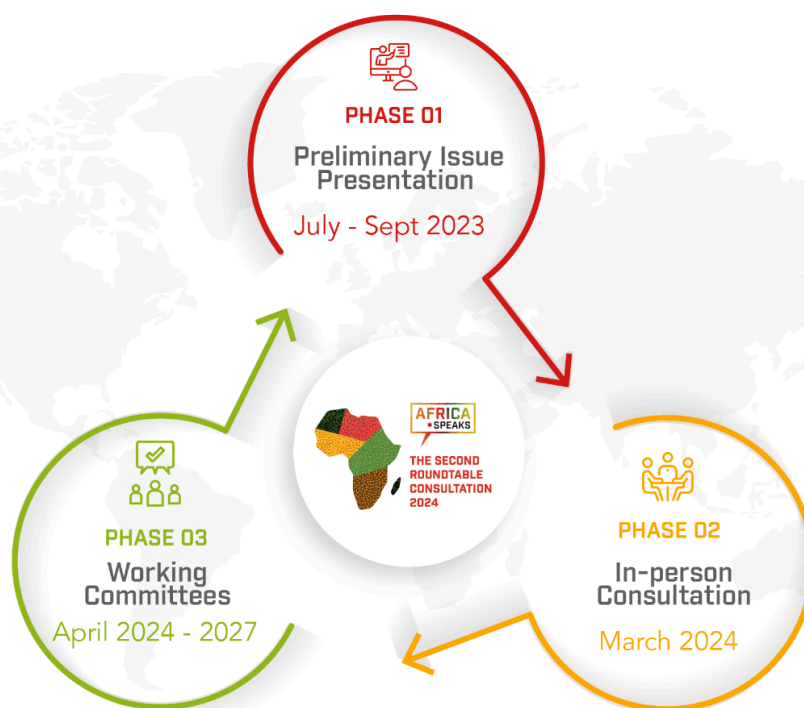


The Africa Speaks Roundtable Consultation

The Africa Speaks Roundtable Consultation (ASROCO) is an initiative by Africa Speaks to seek actionable solutions to systemic industry challenges facing the Christian publishing industry in Africa. It is designed as a three-phased cycle that includes:

- Preliminary issue presentations,
- An in-person consultation of leading Christian publishing professionals,
- A formation of working committees to tackle the issues raised.

This is in line with the AFRICA SPEAKS ACCORD signed in the first gathering in 2018 with the vision of seeing flourishing of a Christian publishing industry in Africa.



Phase One

Preliminary Issue Presentation: Articulation of three Issues by three leading Christian publishers via a position paper presented virtually to members.

Phase Two

In-person Consultation: Leading Christian publishing practitioners will gather physically at an African City to deliberate on the issues and propose solutions.

Phase Three

Working Committees: Three working committees implement the proposals agreed at the gathering and will report in the next ASROCO.

Each consultation will have a maximum of three pressing issues to be tabled for discussion. Thereafter, we will launch a working committee to oversee the implementation of the proposed solutions. The working committees will become the connection points for publishers based on the problems they identify and attempt to solve.



AFRICA SPEAKS ACCORD

—
We have come together as an informal, international network of professionals committed to a flourishing Christian publishing industry in Africa.

—
We thank God for his gift of the written word. We believe publishing—in its broadest sense—is a powerful tool to give voice to the heart and hope of Africa.

—
We believe a flourishing Christian publishing industry in Africa is an important component of fulfilling the mission of God and will benefit the people of Africa and the whole world.

—
We believe in the strategic role of publishing as a means of transforming lives, nurturing the church, influencing society, and shaping culture with biblical truth and values.

—
We acknowledge that we are not keeping pace with the need for excellent, contextual Christian content to serve the African continent's growing church and to provide hungry readers with a message of hope and Good News. For us it can no longer be "business as usual."

THEREFORE, IN A SPIRIT OF COLLABORATION, WE COMMIT:

- a. To pray for one another and foster an environment that encourages prayer for the publishing industry.
- b. To maintain conversation with one another for mutual encouragement and collaboration.
- c. To foster strong relationships of trust, mutual encouragement, and collaboration between publishers throughout Africa. When one of us is strengthened, all are stronger.
- d. To foster a love of reading among our young people and within our families, communities, and churches while respecting and building on the rich culture of orality.
- e. To foster a culture of writing by providing strong encouragement and support for African authors.
- f. To expand the number and quality of publications by African authors.
- g. To identify needs of the many and diverse market segments, language groups, and cultural contexts throughout the continent in order to develop appropriate content to address those needs.

- h. To develop and promote excellent, relevant, well-researched, contextual, biblically sound content by authors who speak wisely and knowledgeably to the hearts and minds of readers.
- i. To distribute our authors' works as broadly as possible by exploring cooperation with distributors and publishers in other nations and languages.
- j. To address logistical challenges by pursuing solutions such as shared shipping, offset printing on the continent, and print on demand.
- k. To encourage the continuous improvement of and training in publishing processes, including content acquisition, editing, designing, typesetting, production, marketing, sales, distribution, finance, and accounting.
- l. To build healthy, financially self-sustaining publishing organizations that effectively serve their intended audience.
- m. To bring books and other resources to market at prices that fit within the economic realities of various African contexts.
- n. To pursue excellence in our work and products out of love and respect for our readers and as a testimony to our Lord.
- o. To support our bookshop partners and also to explore new ways of reaching the millions of readers who do not have easy access to bookshops.
- p. To explore and implement various uses of electronic and social media to accomplish widespread distribution of our messages.
- q. To share with one another principles, practices, and technologies that have been tested and evaluated as most effective.
- r. To implement effective business practices that are consistent with our commitment to living out our Christian faith in our business dealings with others both inside and outside our organizations.
- s. To pursue fairness and integrity in developing contracts and paying appropriate royalties.
- t. To develop a means of tracking and providing continually updated information on African publishers, printers, available titles, and other resources.

We hereby recommit ourselves to the ministry of the published word for the cause of Christ, and we call others to join with us in strengthening a flourishing Christian publishing industry in Africa.



**CONFERENCE
PAPERS**

DISCOVERABILITY OF CHRISTIAN AUTHORS' BOOKS

Presented by: Mirembe Pira

Leap Publishers & AfricanBooks.com

July 2023

Presented to: 2nd Africa Speaks Roundtable
Consultation ASROCO2024 July 2023



Abstract

This paper delves into the complexities and opportunities within the global publishing arena for African authors and publishers. Focusing on African literature, particularly in the Christian publishing sector, it examines historical challenges, the role of traditional Western publishers, and the decline of prominent platforms like the African Writers Series. Through a comparative lens, it highlights disparities between traditional and self-publishing models, emphasising hurdles faced by African authors. Moreover, it addresses distribution challenges within Africa, including piracy and funding limitations, while showcasing initiatives aimed at improvement. In the realm of Christian publishing, unique obstacles hinder African authors' access to international recognition and global distribution. Yet, the paper underscores the potential for collaboration and adaptation to enhance visibility. Ultimately, it advocates for collective action and infrastructure investment to navigate challenges and seize opportunities, empowering African Christian voices to enrich the global literary landscape.

Key Words; Discoverability, Visibility, Traditional Publishing, Self-publishing, Christian Publishing, African Literature, eBook, Print Book, (Book) Distribution

INTRODUCTION

The issue of African books and their visibility in global markets has been a longstanding concern for African authors, publishers, and readers spanning multiple generations. With the onset of independence across Africa in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a new wave of renowned African writers emerged. However, Africa's publishing industry has only existed for about six or seven decades¹ as a whole continent, lagging nearly a century behind its Western counterparts in establishing comprehensive publishing, distribution, and promotion systems.

As indigenous African writers took up the pen, it quickly became apparent that the necessary infrastructure for typesetting, printing, publishing, and distributing books to global readers was largely unavailable within Africa. Consequently, writers on the continent sought external avenues. The now celebrated figures of African literature gained popularity and exposure through non-African channels, choosing traditional publishing contracts with Western-based² publishing houses to become household names. These publishers, many established in the 1800s and early 1900s, eagerly sought fresh and novel content from a world largely unfamiliar to their Western readers.

FAMOUS AFRICAN AUTHORS & THE PUBLISHERS BEHIND THEM



Argumentatively, Africa's greatest pioneering novelist to achieve global popularity was Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian author of "Things Fall Apart." In 1957, Achebe possessed a single handwritten copy of his now-famous book. Faced with the absence of typing services in Nigeria, he dispatched his handwritten work along with £22 to a typing service in London, requesting them to transcribe the manuscript. However, after receiving no response, he entrusted a colleague travelling to London to follow up on the manuscript and secure the typed version. Once typed, Achebe submitted the manuscript to a literary agent he was recommended to in London. Despite facing multiple rejections, the manuscript eventually found its way into the hands of executives at Heinemann Publishing, who agreed to publish the work. On 17 June 1958, the first 2,000 hardcover copies were printed. The book received a positive reception from the British press, sparking a burgeoning interest in African literature.^{1 2}

Subsequently, Heinemann Publishing established what came to be known as the African Writers Series, which became the foremost publisher of African literature, traditionally releasing over 300 titles by African authors. As their inaugural African writer, Chinua Achebe played a pivotal role in paving the way for other authors to follow suit, establishing a direct connection between African authors and Heinemann for publishing and distribution. With their enduring presence in the publishing industry, Heinemann effectively introduced African literature to the global market for nearly four decades. Consequently, they propelled many African writers into the limelight, elevating their status above others. Some notable authors who benefited from Heinemann's support and published extensively under their imprint include:

- Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Kenyan) – 11 books published by Heinemann ⁴
- Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria) – 10 books published by Heinemann ⁵
- Chinua Achebe (Nigerian) – 9 books published by Heinemann ⁶
- Bessie Head (S. Africa) – 8 Books published by Heinemann ⁷
- Cyprian Ekwensi (Nigerian) – 7 books published by Heinemann ⁸
- John Munonye (Nigerian) – All 6 books published by Heinemann ⁹

- Aluko, T.M – 6 books published by Heinemann ¹⁰
- Mongo Beti (Cameron) – 5 books published by Heinemann ¹¹
- Ousmane Sembene (Senegal) – 5 Books published by Heinemann ¹²
- Nuruddin Farah (Somali) – 4 books published by Heinemann ¹³
- Syl Cheney-Coker (Sierra Leone) – 4 books published by Heinemann ¹⁴
- Steve Chimombo (Malawi) – 4 books published by Heinemann ¹⁵
- Alex La Guma (S. Africa) – 4 Books published by Heinemann ¹⁶
- Taban Lo Liyong (S.Sudan) – 4 Books published by Heinemann ¹⁷
- Nelson Mandela's – 'No Easy Walk to Freedom' published by Heinemann ¹⁸
- Jomo Kenyatta's – 'Facing Mount Kenya' published by Heinemann ¹⁹
- Kwame Nkrumah's – 'Neo-Colonialism' published by Heinemann ²⁰

1. Haglund, David (2013). The Amazing Story Behind Things Fall Apart: <https://slate.com/culture/2013/03/things-fall-apart-by-chinua-achebe-was-almost-lost-by-london-typists-the-amazing-story-of-the-handwritten-manuscript.html>
2. LitLovers. Things Fall Apart (Achebe): <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/1036-things-fall-apart-achebe?start=1>
3. Heinemann African Writers Series: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinemann_African_Writers_Series
4. Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ngūgĩ_wa_Thiong'o
5. Buchi Emecheta: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buchi_Emecheta
6. Chinua Achebe: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinua_Achebe
7. Bessie Head: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bessie_Head
8. Cyprian Ekwensi: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyprian_Ekwensi
9. John Munonye: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Munonye
10. T.M. Aluko: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T._M._Aluko
11. Mongo Beti: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongo_Beti
12. Ousmane Sembene: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ousmane_Sembene
13. Nuruddin Farah: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuruddin_Farah
14. Syl Cheney-Coker: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syl_Cheney-Coker
15. Steve Chimombo: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Chimombo
16. Alex La Guma: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alex_La_Guma
17. Taban Lo Liyong: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taban_Lo_Liyong
18. Heinemann African Writers Series: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinemann_African_Writers_Series
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20. Heinemann African Writers Series: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinemann_African_Writers_Series
21. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chimamanda_Ngozi_Adichie
22. Ben Okri: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Okri
23. Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jennifer_Nansubuga_Makumbi
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As members of the esteemed Heinemann fraternity, many of these authors garnered nominations and received prestigious literary awards and acclaim worldwide. This recognition expanded the reach of their books and propelled them to become household names.

In addition, notable African authors, including Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigerian)²¹, Ben Okri (Nigerian/British)²² and Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi (Uganda/British)²³, were granted the opportunity to have their works traditionally published by Western publishers. This propelled them onto the global stage at the onset of their literary careers, providing them with exposure to international audiences and granting them access to literary awards and recognition not typically prevalent among self-published African writers.

In his essay titled "African Publishing Minefields and Woes of the African Writer," esteemed Kenyan author Stanley Gazemba highlights a significant void resulting from the decline of Heinemann's African Writers Series (AWS) in the mid-1980s. Gazemba suggests that this decline may have contributed to the overall regression of Africa's presence in the global book market. According to him, AWS's success was attributed, in part, to Heinemann's extensive physical network in major capitals across the Commonwealth, facilitating seamless movement of its writers across international borders, supported by substantial financial resources.²⁴

TRADITIONAL VS. SELF-PUBLISHING

It is evident that the vast majority, if not all, of the African literature known and recognised globally as "Bestselling African Books" or "Bestselling African Authors" have been published through traditional means, predominantly utilising Western-based publishing houses in the UK or the USA for publicity, promotion, and distribution. Notably, Chinua Achebe remains the sole African author to appear on the list of bestselling books of all time, with his acclaimed novel "Things Fall Apart" selling a remarkable 20 million copies.

In contrast, self-publishing authors face a distinct reality, with only a handful managing to attain widespread distribution and sales on par with the achievements of traditionally published works. While notable self-publishing successes like Robert Kiyosaki's "Rich Dad, Poor Dad," Andy Weir's "The Martian," and E.L. James'

"Fifty Shades of Grey"²⁸ exist, such instances remain relatively uncommon. Importantly, this level of self-publishing success is yet to be witnessed among African authors, regardless of whether their works fall within secular or Christian genres.

Among Christian-based self-published books, only one work stands out for achieving large scale distribution and selling over 20 million copies: "The Shack" by Canadian author William Young.²⁹ Originally self-published in 2008 with just 15 copies, it went on to achieve remarkable success.

When analysing the implications of these statistics, it is essential to consider the distribution and sales perspective. According to Tiffany Hawk, a book publishing coach and agent, traditional publishing offers authors access to extensive distribution channels, including brick-and-mortar bookstores, airports, book displays, online platforms and libraries. On the other hand, self-published authors primarily rely on online platforms such as eBook platforms, small consignments with local bookshops, print-on-demand paperbacks, or their own personal websites and social media pages for distribution.

In terms of average costs and royalties, traditional publishing options outweigh those of self-publishing and are often more suitable for African authors who may lack the necessary resources for self-publication. Traditionally published authors typically receive first-time advances ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000 and can expect to earn approximately \$3,360 per year in annual earnings. Conversely, self-publishing authors should anticipate upfront costs of roughly \$2,000 to \$4,000 and an average return of \$1,000 to \$1,951 if they actively market and distribute their books after publication.³² A survey by The Guardian reveals even more challenging self-publishing statistics, with 77% of all self-published writers earning less than \$1,000 a year.

Based on my observations as a self-publishing publisher within Africa, it is evident that the majority of African authors opt for self-publishing. However, those who achieve sales of 3,000 copies or more possess distinctive characteristics that set them apart:

- **Commitment to Quality and International Book Standards:** These authors invest time and resources into perfecting their cover design, typesetting, editing, and book blurbs. Their books exhibit a level of quality that allows them to compete with traditionally pub-



lished works.

- **Consistent and Captivating Marketing:**

Successful self-published authors in Africa are dedicated to ongoing and consistent online and offline marketing efforts. They organise book launches, network with friends and peers, utilise their books as platforms for speaking engagements, teaching opportunities, and public appearances. Moreover, they invest time in designing and promoting advertisements, signage, videos, blogs, and social media campaigns to effectively promote their books.

- **Large Networks:** Achieving success in the self-publishing arena in Africa often requires authors to not only demonstrate the qualities mentioned above but also possess strong networks and connections that extend beyond their immediate community. These individuals may have ties to the African diaspora, international travel experience, or work in multinational spaces. Furthermore, they establish connections with marketers, reporters, television personalities, or well-known figures who can leverage their influence to further propel the book's reach.

SECULAR VERSUS CHRISTIAN PUBLISHING

Now that we have gained an overview of the broader publishing landscape for African authors and publishers let us delve into Christian Publishing specifically. Christian publishing traces its roots back to the mid-1400s with the advent of the Gutenberg press. In actuality, penetrating the realm of Christian book publishing and attaining bestseller status proves considerably more formidable than in the secular domain. Among the 150 all-time bestselling books, excluding the Bible, only one Christian book secured a spot—Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Life with an impressive 33 million copies sold. Likewise, within the list of 150 bestselling book series, merely two Christian authors are featured: C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia with a remarkable 120 million copies sold, and Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins' The Left Behind Series with a notable 65 million copies sold.⁴⁰ These figures corroborate the notion that Christian books backed by renowned authors associated with robust evangelical doctrine and promoted through strong traditionally Christian publishing houses, as well as those falling within popular Christian fiction genres, tend to thrive in the market.

It is important to acknowledge that most book statistics are rough estimates rather than precise

figures, as book publishing statistics are not readily available in all countries, particularly in Africa.

AFRICAN LITERATURE & STATISTICS

In the mid-1980s, AWS underwent a transition to independent African ownership. This shift was initially celebrated as a source of pride, empowering Africans to control their own affairs and benefit from the financial gains within the continent. Yet, author Stanley Gazemba, in his essay on African publishing, astutely observes that the aftermath of this transition revealed a different reality. The new generation of entrepreneurs focused more on safeguarding their individual interests within limited territories rather than nurturing the crucial cross-turf and cross-border networks that Heinemann had painstakingly established.

A study conducted by UNESCO and the International Publishers Association in Nigeria indicates that the African literature industry is enjoying steady growth, with a diverse range of writers and publishers creating content across various genres, both fiction and non-fiction. Interestingly, fiction remains the most widely read genre, even within Africa. According to a 2015 UNESCO report on Book Publishing, South Africa emerges as the leading publisher on the continent, followed by Egypt, Nigeria, and Kenya. Collectively, these four countries contribute over 50% of all published books, demonstrating consistent annual growth of 6.5%. Despite this progress, the African book market represents a mere 1% of the global publishing revenue, underscoring its relatively modest position within the global book industry.

While global statistics clearly show that fiction is the preferred genre among Christian writers worldwide, it is important to recognize that the majority of African Christian writers gravitate towards non-fiction genres. These genres encompass various topics, including Christian living, self-help, motivational/inspirational literature, pastoral teachings, biographies-memoirs, and African Christian history. As a result, this divergence from global reader preferences significantly impacts the sales and distribution of African Christian authors' works. Often, their reach is confined to personal networks of friends and family, who support their books based on their personal relationships with the authors.

BOOK COSTS & DISTRIBUTION

As per an article in Quartz Africa, the average cost of a book in Africa stands at approximately \$15, which surpasses the global average of \$10.43. This disparity can be attributed to inflated paper and production costs within the continent, as well as a significant reliance on book imports from Western countries. BBC reports that in specific cases, such as Uganda, book prices can reach the equivalent of an individual's monthly salary, leading many people to seek alternative means of accessing reading material.⁴⁴ This issue is not exclusive to Uganda but prevalent across the African continent, resulting in copyright infringement, illegal distribution channels, and financial losses for authors and publishers. Nonetheless, dedicated efforts are underway to address these challenges and promote the legitimate distribution and popularity of African books both regionally and globally.

AFRICAN INITIATIVES IMPROVING PUBLISHING & DISTRIBUTION:

- **Literary Festivals, Conferences & Expos:**

Literary events play a crucial role in improving distribution by providing authors and publishers with visibility. Prominent annual events include the Gaborone Book Festival (Botswana), the Open Book Festival (Cape Town, South Africa), the Kaduna Book & Arts Festival (Nigeria), the Lagos Book & Art Festival (Nigeria), Litfest Harare (Zimbabwe), Mawondo Literary Festival (Kenya), Pa Gya! Literary Festival (Ghana), Mogadishu Book Fair (Somalia), Time of the Writer Festival (South Africa), Cairo International Book Fair (Egypt), and the Nigeria International Book Fair (Lagos), among others.⁴⁵

- **Book Awards & Author Recognition Programs:**

As the popularity of writing continues to grow, efforts are underway across the continent to enhance the overall quality of literature produced in Africa. With a majority of authors choosing self-publishing, there has been a noticeable deficiency in the overall standard of work, resulting in reduced international appeal, lower sales, and diminished interest in locally produced books, as African readers often turn to Western alternatives. To address this, the emergence of book awards and recognition programs aims to honour those whose work meets current international standards. Notable examples include The Annual Vine Awards (a Christian Book Impact Award in Uganda), The ACABA Awards (African Christian Authors Book Awards in Kenya), The Nigeria Prize for Literature (a non-Christian financial award), AKO Caine Prize for African Writing (a financial award),

the Nommo Awards (for fiction writers), The South Africa Literary Awards (SALA), and The Safal-Cornell Kiswahili Prize for African Literature (a financial prize), among others.

- **Publishing Degrees & Scholarship Funds:**

Efforts are being made to address the prevalent issue of subpar quality and standards in the majority of books published on the continent. Numerous individuals and organisations are actively engaged in educating publishers and other stakeholders involved in the book production and supply chain, with the aim of raising the overall standards to a higher level. Notably, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology in Ghana offers a pioneering program in Publishing Studies, the first of its kind in West Africa.⁴⁷ Additionally, other institutions such as the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg⁴⁸ and the University of Pretoria in South Africa⁴⁹ also provide relevant programs in this field. In line with promoting quality writing, the Miles Morland Foundation Writing Scholarship operates as a grant fund rather than an educational program. This prestigious scholarship is awarded to exceptional writers with compelling book ideas that have the potential to be developed into full-length non-fiction or fictional novels.⁵⁰ Through such initiatives, there is a concerted effort to uplift the standards of African literature and empower talented writers to produce impactful and engaging works.

- **Digital Sales & Print Distribution:**

Over the past few years, African writers and publishers have increasingly embraced digital sales platforms to enhance the visibility of their products among potential buyers. These platforms typically function as digital marketplaces where customers can place orders online, with physical products subsequently shipped to their locations. While these platforms have succeeded in promoting local authors and their books, they still encounter obstacles in terms of achieving widespread global distribution. Some notable platforms facilitating this digital and print distribution include African Books Collective (for Publisher-exclusive distribution), Jumia (Several African locations), Mahiri Books (Uganda), Christian Literature Communications (Kenya), and others.

- **eBook & Audiobook Distribution:**

One of the latest trends in book distribution in Africa is the rise of eBook platforms and eReaders. In Uganda, AfricanBooks.com has been at the forefront of this development, providing a platform for digital book distribution. Similarly, in Nigeria, eBook platforms have gained popularity. However, due to challenges related to payment processing both within and outside of Nigeria, these platforms primarily cater to authors and readers within the country.



CHALLENGES TO WIDESPREAD DISTRIBUTION WITHIN AFRICA:

When it comes to the distribution of African literature on a global scale, several key challenges have impeded its widespread growth. These challenges include:

- **Plagiarism** – With many authors self-publishing their works, there is a lack of oversight and monitoring, resulting in inadequate permissions and improper citation of content. This raises concerns for international distributors who are wary of potential legal repercussions associated with publishing African content.

- **Piracy & Copyright Infringement** – Piracy and copyright infringement are significant challenges within the African publishing industry. These issues manifest in various contexts, including educational institutions such as schools and universities, as well as online platforms like Telegram and WhatsApp. These unauthorised practices result in the theft of content and the distribution of copyrighted material without proper permissions. As a consequence, authors and publishers are deprived of their rightful earnings

- **Lack of Inter-continental Collaboration & Networks** – The absence of collaboration and networking among the 54 countries in Africa hinders the improvement of overall book distribution and awareness. Efforts are being made to address this issue, with platforms like AfricanBooks.com working towards establishing intercontinental collaboration in book sales and featuring authors from over ten countries. Similarly, Africa Speaks is actively engaged in connecting publishers across state boundaries. However, there remains a need for greater cooperation in creating a unified list of content, such as an African wide ISBN Database, a Continent-wide copyright protection authority, as well as developing comprehensive distribution channels and networks that span the entire continent

- **Limited access to Global Distribution Networks:** As previously discussed in our analysis of traditional publishing versus self-publishing and the associated distribution networks, many African publishers rely on external networks to promote their works. Organisations like African Books Collective offer a collection of 3,000 books by African-based publishers, but this represents only a fraction of the vast number of books produced in Africa. Furthermore, these entities primarily collaborate with traditional publishers and often require the relinquishment of distribution

rights for most Western nations, thereby further constraining the ability of African publishers to distribute their works effectively. Moreover, prominent Christian distribution networks and publishing houses in the Western world, such as Zondervan, Thomas Nelson, Tyndale House, Intervarsity Press, David C. Cook, and Faithwords Publishing, generally do not accept unsolicited submissions. This poses a challenge for African authors seeking participation in these networks, limiting their opportunities for wider distribution and recognition. Addressing these limitations in accessing global distribution networks is crucial for African publishers and authors to expand their reach and gain exposure on a global scale.

- **Insufficient Funding for Large-scale Publishing and Distribution Infrastructure:** Western-based publishers have invested considerable time and resources into developing comprehensive distribution networks encompassing physical bookstores, online retailers, libraries, and book clubs, ensuring maximum visibility and accessibility of their publications. These networks include extensive shipping systems, well-curated book catalogues, easily accessible book review platforms, national book records, and more. In contrast, the African continent is still in the early stages of exploring and implementing such infrastructure in 2023. As a positive step forward, in June 2023, the Uganda National Library took the significant initiative of making its ISBN catalogue available online for searches and reference purposes, marking a milestone in digital accessibility. Additionally, other African libraries, such as the National Libraries of South Africa and Kenya, have embraced digitisation to enhance their services. However, the lack of sufficient funding remains a major obstacle to establishing robust publishing and distribution infrastructure across the continent. African publishers and authors face challenges in accessing the necessary financial resources to develop and maintain sophisticated networks similar to those established by their Western counterparts. Adequate funding is

crucial for Africa to build comprehensive systems that facilitate widespread distribution, ensure broad access to literature, and support the growth and visibility of African literature on a global scale.

CHRISTIAN AUTHORS EXTENDING THEIR INFLUENCE BEYOND AFRICA

The representation of African Christian authors who have successfully extended their literary influence beyond the continent's borders remains limited. Conducting an online search yields scarce results in identifying such accomplished authors. Nonetheless, it is notable that pastors, particularly those with international networks, appear to have higher prospects for success in this regard. A compelling example is Ps. Muriithi Wanjau, founder of the Mavuno Church Movement (Headquartered in Kenya). His debut book titled *Mizizi* has achieved global recognition with widespread sales. The book's impact was significant enough to warrant an adaptation into a USA-Version titled *Rooted*.⁵¹

While Ps. Muriithi Wanjau serves as a prominent example, there is a need for further exploration to identify additional Christian authors from Africa who have made a significant mark on the global literary stage. Uncovering more such success stories will shed light on the potential and talent of African Christian authors in expanding Africa's literary contributions to a wider international audience.

CONCLUSION

The global publishing landscape shows a significant disparity between secular and Christian content, with secular works outnumbering Christian works by a ratio of ten to one. This discrepancy can be attributed to the alignment of secular content with popular reading trends and genres that garner higher sales. In contrast, Christian content predominantly focuses on non-fiction genres that have limited appeal to a broader readership. To thrive in the book distribution industry, Christian authors must adapt their writing and messages to genres that resonate with a wider audience.

Moreover, the challenges of discoverability and distribution of African content extend beyond the African Christian writing community and affect the entire African writing community. The authors who have achieved global success did not solely rely on their religious affiliation but benefited from the support of traditional international publishers dedicated to showcasing, promoting, marketing, and distributing African-based stories. Globally, around nine out of ten renowned authors owe their fame to traditional

publishing models backed by the collective efforts of the industry.

For African Christian authors and publishers dedicated to promoting African Christian content on a global scale, it is evident that the establishment of robust systems, structures, and networks is imperative. These endeavours will not only create opportunities and foster partnerships but also enable access to larger international distribution channels, addressing the existing gap in African publishing while avoiding the mistakes of the past. Elevating the standards and quality of writing among indigenous Christian authors is essential to gain a competitive edge in the global market. Collaboration and unity across the continent play a vital role, as statistics indicate that individual ventures rarely yield significant breakthroughs in the highly competitive book industry. By working together, African Christian authors and publishers can enhance their impact and reach a broader audience with their valuable content.

DISTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIAN BOOKS BEYOND BORDERS IN AFRICA

(Translated from the paper originally written in French)

Written and Presented by: Vincent-de-Paul LELE

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Presented to: 2nd Africa Speaks Roundtable Consultation (for ASROCO2024) on 23rd August 2023



1.

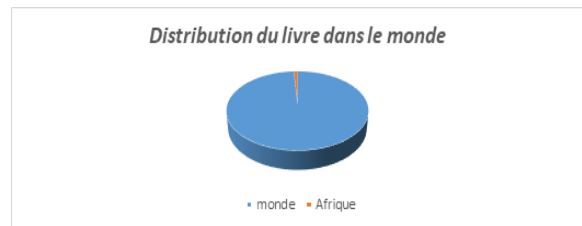
Summary:

The aim of this brief reflection is to understand how the distribution of books, particularly Christian books, works across borders in Africa. By tracing the history of the book in general and analysing the socio-economic conditions of book life in Africa, in comparison with conditions in the West, new avenues, notably the exploitation of technological means and training, are mapped out to boost the circulation of Christian books on the African continent.

Keywords: Distribution, book, bookshops, eBook, book circuit

INTRODUCTION

Books circulate well all over the world, except in Africa. The question of book distribution is likely the most haunting of the problems of the book circuit in this part of the world. Indeed, when you visit several African capitals, you can count the number of bookshops and libraries on your fingertips, as opposed, for example, to the beverage outlets that abound on every street corner in the same cities. In 2022, it was estimated that the book market would reach 4.3 billion euros, of which only 1% would be distributed in Africa. This is an insignificant share of the global flow of books.



Book distribution in the world

For any company to set up efficiently, it's essential to ask questions about the purpose and flow of production. What's the point of producing books if they won't reach the end reader? The question of distribution is a crucial concern for the life of the book in Africa, all the more so as writing and publishing seem to be in a better position. However, many African authors, unable to find a better home for their works on the continent, prefer to be published in the West.

Compared with the West: Europe, America and even Asia, Africa is lagging far behind in terms of distribution capacity. After all, distribution basically means bringing the product to the end consumer, which presupposes efficient transport infrastructure, and postal services. Generally speaking, books are not visible in Africa. And if this is the case for non-Christian books, which naturally have a larger audience, it's understandable that the fate of Christian books is far more serious.

The aim of this little reflection is to understand the problems undermining book distribution in

Africa in general, and to outline possible solutions, especially for Christian books.

By drawing comparisons between what is done in the West and what we see in Africa today, and by pointing out the difficulties of the strategies currently deployed in Africa, we will come up with some concrete proposals for improving book distribution in Africa.

Hence the following outline:

1. Global explanations for the gap
2. Traditional book distribution
3. Electronic distribution methods
4. Book distribution initiatives in Africa
5. Proposals for a better circulation of Christian books in Africa.

GLOBAL EXPLANATIONS FOR THE GAP

The West boasts a rich history and tradition of reading, in stark contrast to Africa, which has long been characterized by an oral culture. Evidence indicates that writing and reading flourished in Europe as early as the 4th millennium BC, dating back 3000 years before Christ. In contrast, Africa, predominantly an oral continent, flirted with writing mainly through contact with settlers in the 19th century. This is with the exception of Egypt, which pioneered the use of papyrus 4,000 years ago, influencing ancient Greece.

It should also be pointed out that books written in widely spoken languages are distributed easier. As far as writing is concerned, many African countries have written languages: Amharic in Ethiopia, Swahili in East Africa, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi in Rwanda and Burundi... But these languages have only recently been written and are not widely used, so they don't have the scope to feed a book large market, unlike books written in languages from the West like English and French, which are widely spoken internationally, thus providing a large international market. It's one thing to have a script and another to have people capable of reading it.

In Europe, the book industry dates back to the invention of printing in the 15th century, whereas in most African countries there is no record of real historical infrastructure to support local book production and distribution until later centuries. Obviously, the level of progress of this industry varies not only according to colonial his-

tory, but also to the national initiatives taken by each country. For example, the state of the publishing industries in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, two neighbouring countries, is not the same.

The existence of infrastructure and communication routes, especially better roads in the West, favours the circulation of books, whereas in Africa it's not easy to reach the capitals of two neighbouring countries by road. Take Yaoundé and Libreville, for example; the road in between is badly degraded, and travellers often feel like they have to bribe their way through the heavy police control stationed along the road to avoid further inconveniences.

The literacy rate is also an important factor. Today, Africa is still trying to close the literacy gap, whereas since the 19th century, vast literacy campaigns have raised the rate to over 90% in the West. Though some African countries like Seychelles, Equatorial Guinea and Namibia have high literacy rates similar to those in Western countries, most others, like Chad and Mali have literacy rates as low as 40%.

In the West, policies and regulations are incentive-based and inclusive, whereas in Africa, borders are often difficult to cross. Customs barriers are a real hindrance in shipping books across borders.

The level of development of the country is a key factor, because the standard of living of the population influences the situation of the book circuit. Is it feasible, for example, to emphasise policies in favour of book production and distribution in a country where the population lacks vital needs such as food and water?

Without going into too much detail, let's take a look at how the traditional book sales circuit works.

TRADITIONAL BOOK DISTRIBUTION

What does distribution entail? It involves listing, stocking, shipping, returning, invoicing, and selling. When a publisher has finished producing a book, all the stock is entrusted to a distributor, who carries out all the necessary operations to ensure that the book is sold everywhere. The distributor will pay the publisher the amount of sales calculated according to the percentage agreed in the contract. For example, the book may be assigned to a distributor at 50% or 55%.

The book distribution circuit includes:



- Bookstores in the broadest sense, including book clubs, newsagents and newsstands;
- Cultural superstores;
- Food superstores.

In France, distribution is well developed. There are around a hundred distributors. All the major publishing houses have developed their own distribution subsidiaries: Le Seuil has Volumen, Gallimard Sodis, Hachette Livre International Hachette, Flammarion Union, and so on.

Bookshops and reading points are spread throughout the country. There are between 20,000 and 25,000 book sales outlets in France.

In other Western countries, the status quo is much the same, and infrastructures are just as well developed. In the United States and the United Kingdom, after the all-too-quickly proclaimed death of the book in the face of internet competition and the post-COVID era, we are seeing a renewed enthusiasm for reading, particularly among young people. The number of independent bookshops is increasing year on year.

On the other hand, bookshops and libraries are rare in Africa. In a city like Yaoundé, capital of a country with over 25,000,000 inhabitants, there are no real bookshops worthy of the name. There are about three (Librairie Saint-Paul, Peuples Noirs, Clé-Equinoxe) places that don't pay much for books. This is the case in many other French-speaking countries, where there is only one real bookshop in the capital, often owned by expatriates. Such is also the case of the Librairie de France in Abidjan. In English-speaking countries, the situation is certainly less dramatic. South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya for example, are doing better in terms of distribution. It's easy to see why, as Lena Mirembe pointed out in her presentation on Discoverability of African Christian books, these countries account for around 50% of the continent's production.

DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

In addition to traditional channels, information and communication technologies have given a tremendous boost to the dissemination and distribution of books. On the internet, websites and various platforms have been developed to promote and sell physical books. While the eBook is also being developed to facilitate access to digital versions of books. Between the two forms,

there's an intermediate option provided by Print on Demand. We sell before we print.

As far as the eBook is concerned, if the technological infrastructure (low-cost high-speed internet, reliable and secure electrical system, accessible reading terminals) can cover a market of at least 16% of the world's book buyers, it will be possible to sell it. This is not the case in Africa, where such facilities are lacking.

An initiative such as Paperright, launched by Arthur Atwell, aims to further simplify the distribution of eBooks through a system of photocopying in remote African towns, while protecting the rights of authors and publishers.

"We negotiate printing rights with rights holders and offer a payment tool that enables any photocopy store, NGO, school or library with a printer or similar device to distribute legal copies of books(5)."

Apart from providing platforms to sell eBooks, the internet is also a means of promoting and distributing hard copies. Physical books can be distributed in a variety of ways.

1. With Storage

Either the publisher himself promotes the book online via his website and various social media channels, and takes care of invoicing and sales as in the traditional channel,

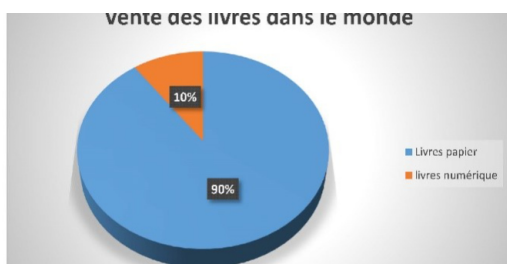
or the publisher sub-contracts a large online distributor / bookseller such as Amazon.

NB: Shipping costs can be high if the customer is too far from the storage location.

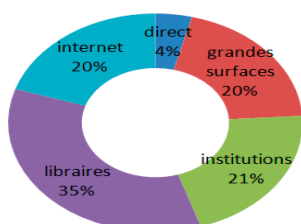
Much as digital innovations have disrupted traditional book distribution models, their use is yet to be reinforced in Africa because buyers (and online sellers) in Africa often have difficulties accessing secure online payment systems.

2. POD

Print on demand (POD) means that the book is sold (online) before being printed. The advantages are: no inventory management burden, no returns. But POD units need to be located not too far from the target customers, otherwise shipping costs will always weigh heavily on the book's circulation.



réseaux de distribution du livre



After outlining the existing distribution possibilities, both traditional and electronic, let's take a look at some of the initiatives taken in Africa to bring books to life within and beyond its borders.

BOOK DISTRIBUTION INITIATIVES IN AFRICA

There have been a number of initiatives on the continent aimed at resolving the problems of dissemination and distribution. We're going to take a look at some of them here, while pointing out their limitations.

Book Caravans

An initiative of the Association Internationale des Libraires Francophones, the caravan has been criss-crossing Africa since 2004, visiting schools, high schools and colleges in various towns across a country, with cultural events organized around them. Based on the peddler model, the idea is to take books to their final destination at reduced prices. Each country can organize its own caravan, and even each publisher or distributor. The impact is real: in 2007, in West Africa, 10 countries crossed, 43 towns, 60,000 people reached, 38,532 books bought, worth 165,088 euros.

However, these initiatives have their limits: mobilizing authors, organizing literary and poetry competitions, and travel costs are not always covered. Hence the support of French organizations such as the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), the Centre National de la Lecture (CNL), MAEE... which sell mainly books by French publishers, even if most of the authors are African.



Book Fairs and Exhibitions in Africa

For example:

- Salon International du Livre Africain (SILA) - Abidjan
- Dakar International Book Festival (FILDAK) - Dakar
- Ouagadougou International Book Festival (FILO) - Ouagadougou
- Lagos Book and Art Festival (LABAF)
- South African (Cape Town) Book Fair

Granted, most of these fairs have their problems: firstly, financing the event (irregular in Cameroon), and secondly, their often national approach. But these are initiatives to be encouraged!

African Literary Prizes

Numerous prizes have been set up in Africa to encourage book promotion and distribution, such as:

The Noma Prize for Publication in Africa, funded by the Japanese Shoichi Noma Foundation (part of the Kodansha publishing group). The First Edition, winner was Mariama Bâ, *Une si Longue Lettre*, published by Nouvelles Éditions Africaines (NEA, Senegal). The book was subsequently translated into 14 languages worldwide.

The Grand Prix Littéraire d'Afrique Noire, launched by ADELFF - Association Des Écrivains de Langue Française – to promote writers from around the world who express themselves in French. The winners are always Africans, although they are increasingly published in France.

The Prix Littéraire les Afriques created in 2015, by the readers' association La CÈNE Littéraire. the Prix littéraire Les AFRIQUES is awarded once



a year to an African or Afrodescendant writer of fiction.

The Caine Prize Awards, an annual literary prize for the best African writer of English-language short stories.

In short, while the awards help to promote authors, books still circulate more in the West than in Africa. In Cameroon, few people know of Imbolo Mbue, winner of the Prix Les Afriques 2022, who sells hundreds of thousands of copies in the USA. What's more, the awarding of these prizes benefits the publishers who published them. Encouraging the free transfer of reproduction rights to African publishers for the African market can help book distribution in Africa.

PROMOTIONAL STRUCTURES

Numerous promotional structures, often subsidized by international organizations, exist and have met with mixed fortunes. Here are a few examples.

The "Terres Solidaires" initiative of the International Alliance of Independent Publishers was launched in 2007 to promote the circulation of books in the French-speaking world. Essentially based in Africa, the publishing houses taking part in this collection rely above all on co-publishing to make texts by African authors already published in France, and now by authors first discovered by African publishing houses, accessible to African readers (at an average price of 3500 Fcfa). This is the case for *Munyal, les Larmes de la Patience*, by Djaili Amadou Amal, the 13th title in the collection, originally published in 2017 by Proximité Editions based in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The book's revival by Emmanuelle Collas in France brought it international recognition. While it's undeniable that African authors benefit from this spotlight, does it really benefit publishers and the circulation of books in Africa?

Afrilivres is an association of French-speaking publishers whose aim is to facilitate the circulation of books in Africa by means of a cyber-catalogue showcase at www.afrilivres.net. The aim is "to de-compartmentalize African publishing, to structure orders, to ensure that the production of African publishing houses is known to Africans, to work in synergy with the entire book chain and to federate promotional actions". The project supported by the French Institute was intended

to function as a distribution centre. But most new strategies to date have failed to bear fruit.

A group of seventeen publishers, all active in sub-Saharan Africa, met in London in 1985 and set up African Books Collective in 1989 in the UK, to then market and distribute their titles in Northern markets, mainly in Europe and the USA, and more widely in all non-African countries. Today there are more than 50 of them, with 1,700 titles in stock. It's a question of attacking the markets that are profitable.

The Centre Régional d'Édition et de Publication du Livre en Afrique (CREPLA), based in Cameroon but created by several African countries, initially supported by Unesco, is a project has since been abandoned by other countries.

Digital Promotion Platforms

Young start-ups have also sprung up with the ambition of distributing books on the internet and having the purchased books shipped by conventional means. These include <http://www.bookconekt.com/> in Benin and Hidiculture.com in Togo, which specialize in children's books. Indeed, to tackle the issue of illiteracy and the lack of a reading culture as obstacles to book development in Africa, we need to prepare the nursery of readers from an early age. Teach parents to give books as birthday presents, rather than toys of any kind.

Rafu Books in Kenya has the same ambition, and already covers Uganda and Tanzania.

NENA in Senegal does the same for ebooks: www.librairienumeriqueafricaine.com

Africanbooks.com, founded in Uganda by Lena Mirembe, is a platform to sell eBooks from all African countries.

Unfortunately, despite all these innovations, distribution of both print and eBooks within and beyond African countries remains an unresolved problem.

PROPOSALS FOR BETTER CIRCULATION OF CHRISTIAN BOOKS IN AFRICA

Our proposals touch on several aspects of publishing.

1. **Training:** In Christian circles, the problem of training in the book trade is even more acute. The profession of publisher, bookseller and writer must be learned. We can't simply talk about the divine call to mission and ignore the training factor. All the reminders in the previous sections follow this logic. By mastering what happens in the distribution of secular books, we can appropriate or draw inspiration from secular book distribution strategies. Langham's initiatives on literature and support for training and Media Associated International's (MAI) LittAfrica are to be commended.
2. **Distribution in theology schools.** A census of the schools and training institutes scattered across the continent provides a potential customer base for theological reflection documents.
3. **Temples and places of worship** are regular exhibition venues for Christian books.
4. **Book fairs specifically** set up for Christian books.
5. **Develop the POD technology for regions where we can easily make shipments by road.** Shipping books from Cameroon to Benin for instance, i.e. from Central Africa to West Africa, is extremely expensive by air, in addition to customs clearance fees and other hassles. It is possible to get in touch with a good printer based in Cotonou or an easily accessible capital to print and deliver directly. Having high quality digital production units or POD in the sub-regions can satisfy even small quantities of demand in the region. From Yaoundé, books can easily be shipped by road to Gabon, Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea and elsewhere.
6. **Websites specialized in Christian books for distribution.** Encourage African publishers and distributors to set them up.
7. **Develop digital versions of books.**
8. **Self-distribution and authorship must be at the heart of today's distribution:** immediate relations and entourages, and book promotion on social platforms. Distribution strategies revolving around authors, mobilizing a significant customer base. Canadian author William Young's *The Shack* (8) is a good example of how the author can mobilize distribution of his book, which has sold 20 million copies. Cameroonian born author Leonora Miano has used her personal Face-

book and Instagram accounts to promote her books.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to examine the current situation of book distribution, particularly of Christian books, in Africa; to understand how it works and to identify its difficulties. The review, which may seem to go back too far, has the merit of giving a deep and wide knowledge of book distribution. In the end, this led to a set of proposals which, if properly implemented, could boost the distribution of Christian books on the African continent, and ipso facto contribute to the work of evangelization.

DEVELOPING FAITHFUL PUBLISHING PROFESSIONALS

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Presented to: 2nd Africa Speaks Roundtable Consultation (for ASROCO2024) on 27th September 2023



Abstract

This paper looks at how Christian missions in the 19th Century changed African book publishing, focusing on the Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS) organization. ACTS is known for distributing theological literature in Africa. We explore how ACTS started, how it hires staff, and deals with challenges like dishonesty. Its growth shows the value of teamwork, strong leadership, and ethical management. Despite obstacles, ACTS remains a key player in shaping African Christian literature by balancing tradition with innovation.

Keywords: African book publishing, Christian missions, Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS), theological literature, visionary leadership, ethical stewardship, collaboration, technological integration.

INTRODUCTION

The expansion of Christian missions in the 19th Century revolutionized African book publishing. These missions not only spread Christian teachings but also ushered in modern publishing by establishing printing presses across the continent. This marked a pivotal transition in the distribution of literature. In the mid-19th century, Nigeria got its first mission printing press. More presses were set up in the 20th century, making it much easier for people to access knowledge

and personal development resources. The Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS) organization stands as a product of this evolutionary path. This paper will delve into the inception of ACTS. The first section describes how ACTS has navigated the challenge of unfaithful employees, overcoming these challenges with insights gleaned from successful publishing houses. The second section will describe ACTS' staff recruitment and retention procedures, and other strategies that have helped ACTS raise faithful publishing professionals.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ACTS

In 1991, a number of missionaries and theological educators living in Nigeria attended a regional conference of ACTEA (Accrediting Council for Theological Education of Africa). As a part of that meeting, the need for textbooks in African Bible colleges, seminaries and universities arose. Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS) was the eventual product of that meeting. Though the ministry began informally about that time, the organization was constituted in 1993, and was officially registered as a non-profit organization in 1999 with the Corporate Affairs Commission of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The ACTS Board of Trustees and Board of Directors is made up of missionaries, senior Nigerian academics and Christian leaders. ACTS is interdenominational and evangelical.

ACTS is now a leading provider of theological literature in Nigeria, Kenya and other parts of English-speaking Africa. ACTS imports a wide range of books and also publishes theological textbooks and reference books, mainly in English, and some in Hausa, to equip Christian leaders for the challenges facing Africa today. Responding to the challenge of book famine areas of Africa, ACTS could be described as an African-based international Christian literature aid agency which seeks to provide textbooks and other training resources for churches and schools in Africa. In May 2023, ACTS celebrated her 30th Anniversary with 20 branches all over Nigeria, in addition to branches in Kenya and Cameroon. There is an ongoing plan to open another Branch in Liberia.

A. NAVIGATING CHALLENGES OF DISHONESTY: A GLIMPSE INTO ACTS' EXPERIENCE

Within any organization, the complex issue of theft and dishonesty can rear its head, and ACTS has not been immune to these challenges. Let me share two noteworthy instances that exemplify these issues.

One situation revolves around a seminary branch that evaded computerized sales recording. This allowed staff to divert funds into their personal accounts. As scrutiny came to the forefront during accounting and sales reviews, those implicated tried to erase data from the hard disk. However, the intervention of a resourceful computer engineer led to data recovery, unveiling a significant gap in the expected revenue. This questionable activity resulted in a staggering loss of 6.5 million naira (\$16,331.65 foreign exchange rate as at 2021 – translating it at the rate of 398 to a dollar).

The second case centres on the marketing department. An employee within this unit undertook a deceptive approach by directly soliciting payments from clients for books, circumventing proper payment channels. This led to a substantial loss, exceeding 5 million naira (\$13,425.00 foreign exchange rate as at 2020 – translating it at the rate of 372.42 to a dollar).

In both instances, ACTS responded to these transgressions with the utmost prudence and maturity. Investigative committees were promptly established. They investigated each case carefully and provide management with comprehensive reports. The suspected individu-

als were placed on suspension during the investigations. The conclusions of these investigations guided subsequent actions. It's important to note that ACTS' Conditions of Service encompass an array of remedies for diverse offenses.

PRACTICES THAT ENCOURAGE UNFAITHFULNESS

Throughout my journey with ACTS, we have tried overcoming certain practices that inadvertently foster poor stewardship. Let us share some of our realisations:

1. **Sentiment and Bias:** Favouring individuals based on tribal, religious, or familial connections can hinder progress. Choosing team members who lack genuine enthusiasm and relevant backgrounds for the tasks at hand simply because of the aforementioned connections, has always proven to be a stumbling block.
2. **Unmerited Promotion:** There have been instances where leaders were appointed or promoted without their demonstration of a genuine commitment or a track record of competence. This sort of decision-making can hinder the quality of our publications. Additionally, hiring underqualified staff to save on costs, only to compromise on the quality of our work, has been a lesson learned.
3. **Lack of Accountability:** When employees are not held accountable to a higher authority, they tend to have a poor sense of stewardship. In mitigating this, we have recognized the value of seeking recommendations from respected figures who can vouch for an individual's character before they join our team.
4. **Justice and Fairness:** In our pursuit of trustworthiness, we have realized the significance of fairness within our organization. Dismissing employees without valid reasons, solely to assert authority, undermines the sense of justice we aim to uphold.
5. **Insufficient Training and Retraining:** Through experience, we've understood the importance of mentorship and continuous learning. Neglecting the growth of staff, both professionally and spiritually, can result in stagnation within our operations.
6. **Lack of Motivation and Recognition:** Neglecting to involve staff in important organisational changes can have a negative impact. Viewing employees merely as tools for achieving goals, rather than recognising their unique contributions, can lead to a lack of motivation and disengagement.



7. **Poor Understanding of the Vision and Mission:** When employees don't fully comprehend our organization's mission, it leads to confusion and misalignment. Communicating and reinforcing our vision has proven crucial to maintaining a shared sense of purpose.

In light of the above case scenarios that exemplify dishonesty in the work place, coupled with the above listed wrong practices that encourage unfaithfulness, the management of ACTS actively sought out steps to take in creating a culture of honesty and faithfulness in the work place. One of the first steps was learning from other successful institutions.

GLEANINGS FROM EXEMPLARY CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS

In establishing publishing houses and bookshops, staff accountability and integrity is crucial for success. In the past, Jos for example, had numerous bookshops, including those affiliated with various Christian denominations. However, these entities have struggled with persistent issues like theft and dishonesty. ACTS engaged in discussions with such organisations, using questionnaires to reveal insights. Some of the organisations interviewed include Oasis Distributions, Albishir Bookshop, FCS, ECWA Productions Ltd, Modern Bookshop, and NIFES Bookshop. The data gathered revealed that these publishing houses have dealt effectively with dishonesty and theft, leading to necessary staff terminations. Despite some of these challenges, some publishing houses have flourished. Four organizations stand out, from whom we can glean valuable insights:

1. Living Faith Church: Their resilient publishing arm has thrived by focusing on indigenous works authored by leaders, creating a relatable bond with their audience. Thus, one of the lessons ACTS has learnt is to publish indigenous books that local audiences can relate to.
2. RCCG: This denomination has recorded huge success and impactful service across the world that have inspired improved administration methods at ACTS.
3. Oasis Distributions Limited (**Nigeria**) and **Oasis International:** Their exemplary customer relationship management and commitment to evolving technology highlight the importance of nurturing relationships and embracing technological advancements. ACTS has learnt so much from them

about devising effective means for customer relationships among other lessons.

4. **Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries:** This denomination's success in embracing indigenous authors and modern technologies demonstrates the balance between tradition and adaptation. Thus, even though we strive to ensure that we are up to date with technology and modern evolving themes in theology, the need to meet the needs of those who are used to traditional ways of acquiring books is a big lesson learnt for us.

FOSTERING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAITHFUL WORKERS

ACTS has put in place various policies to enhance the growth of reliable and faithful employees. These policies focus on four main areas: a good recruitment process, stable HR structures, care for staff and benefits, continuous training; and staff recognition according to years of service. This section explores these policies to highlight their importance in fostering trustworthy and dedicated workers.

1. Staff recruitment policies:

ACTS employs a meticulous recruitment process, encompassing two approaches:

- a. **Secondment of Staff:** To address the evolving staffing requirements, ACTS reaches out to churches and missions, encouraging them to second or recommend suitable staff or clergy. A notable example of this approach is the appointment of the current Managing Director, who was seconded by Ekklesiya Yan'wa a Nijeria (EYN).
- b. **Conventional Hiring Processes:** ACTS employs a hiring method that adheres to conventional industry standards as described in the following steps:
 - i. **Personnel Recruitment Announcements:** Churches receive letters and advertisement notices to raise awareness among members.
 - ii. **Shortlisting:** Candidates undergo rigorous screening in order for the recruitment team to create a shortlist.
 - iii. **Interviews:** Shortlisted candidates partake in a structured interview, including a written test, practical computer test, and an oral interview.
 - iv. **Background Verification:** Successful candidates undergo comprehensive background

checks covering church affiliation, residential history, and employment history.

- v. **Finalization:** The ultimate interview confirms the final selection, leading to the formation of the definitive candidate list.
- vi. **Offer Package:** Selected candidates receive a formal letter of employment, salary assessment, employment contract, and detailed job description.
- vii. **Staff Orientation and Consequent Induction:** New ACTS staff undergo a comprehensive week-long orientation with the Director of Human Resources. Aiming for effective integration, this reviews the history, mission, values, policies, and Conditions of Service. Afterward, they meet Management, undergo induction, and start a one-year probation. Software training is offered to them, to enhance their technical skills for sales, records, and accounts. If performance is poor during the first year of probation, an extended probation year might be granted. Successful probation leads to confirmation.

2. Stable HR structures:

Clear and stable HR structures in ACTS have provided a framework for fostering trust, accountability, and fairness within the organization. Consistent policies and procedures have ensured that employees understand what is expected of them and feel supported in their roles, thereby promoting stability and loyalty.

3. Benefits and care of staff:

Upon completing a one-year probation without confirmation, staff gain entitlements, including gratuity and pension after service. They can obtain loans for land, housing, and apartment furnishing, with medical expenses subsidized by 70% for staff, spouse, and children. Additionally, education allowance is provided for up to 4 children under 18. After their first 2-3 years, ACTS supports employees in their pursuit of further studies. The organization also offers assistance during weddings, loss of parents, and other family events. Yearly benefits encompass Christmas bonuses, promotions, and incremental salary increases. After 5 years, a 15% leave allowance is granted, with leave duration varying based on years of service.

4. Training and re-training of staff:

ACTS is devoted to enhancing staff growth and development. This commitment is upheld through ongoing personal life reviews and mentoring initiatives. These practices are fortified by

continuous training, seminars, and regional engagements. To elevate performance, ACTS provides select staff with full scholarships to attend universities and seminaries for relevant courses.

5. Staff recognition according to years of service:

ACTS has a system of recognising and acknowledging staff according to their years of service as shown in the table below:

CATEGORY	YEARS OF SERVICE	NUMBERS OF STAFF
A LIST	26-30	2
B LIST	16-25	9
C LIST	6-15	25
D LIST	1-5	19
E LIST	Student on Training	10-20 & above yearly

ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES.

1. Every staff member who joins an organisation has questions that need answers. Your policies should address these questions. Some of the commonest questions are:
 - # What benefits will I get if I join this organisation?
 - # Will I have the opportunity to grow and develop in this organisation?
2. As an employer, you should understand that no one wants to stay stagnant. Unfortunately, some employers want their staff to work for them forever, but at the cost of their family life and future. They hire a single person, but they do not care about their marriage plans, further studies, career aspirations, or personal goals. They expect them to stay loyal for 65 or 70 years, without anything to show for it. There is often no written contract, no benefits like pension plans, gratuities, housing or car loans, no education support, family or social assistance, vacations, or church activities. Some employers do not distinguish between ministry and family life. They turn their staff into domestic workers or slaves. An organisation cannot attract faithful workers this way.
3. Staff look for organisations with leaders who have a human face, and not a lion face that makes them afraid to greet their boss



- or his wife or even his children.
4. Staff want organisations that care about their family's welfare and wellbeing.
 5. They just want to feel valued and dignified as they come to work every day. They appreciate words of praise and gratitude, like 'well done', 'God has blessed us with you', or 'cheers'. They like to receive encouragement, support and validation from their leaders.
 6. Leaders should welcome new talents and give them the chance to express their positive ideas.
 7. What stake do the staff have in the organisation as they sacrifice daily for it or for the employer?
 8. They need organisations that are not biased or tribalistic in dealing with or positioning people.
 9. Employees desire an organisation that places and promotes people based on their merit and not on their connections within the hierarchy or management.
 10. Christian employees desire an organisation that has Christ at the centre of its leadership. One where when the staff make mistakes, they are treated like members; corrected or disciplined with love.
 11. An organisation where rewards are given when deserved and punishments are given when necessary will be respected.
 12. It's important that those who leave the organisation are treated well. Whatever you do sends a message to those who remain. Maltreating one has negative consequences, treating one well has positive rewards.

REASONS FOR THE HIGH RATE OF STAFF RETENTION

Since its inception, ACTS has had a high rate of staff retention as depicted in the table above. The reasons for this are discussed in what follows:

1. Connection to the Church and passion for the gospel: ACTS' enduring partnerships with churches and seminaries across various denominations underscore its commitment to the gospel beyond mere profit-making. This mission-driven focus fosters a sense of purpose among staff, contributing to longer tenures within the organization.

2. ACTS shows high regard for, and connection with staff's family needs.
3. ACTS provides well-articulated conditions of service, special privileges and opportunities.
4. Staff are strategically placed in departments where they can achieve optimal performance. This approach has proven more effective than implementing forceful transfers and changes in duties against their preferences.
5. The founding fathers and Management offer deep empathy to staff in times of need.
6. The Staff Cooperative supports their daily needs.
7. ACTS is a mission-oriented organisation, where most staff feel called to serve.
8. ACTS is currently blessed with an MD and Senior Staff who listen to the plight of all other staff and attend to their needs.
9. There is prompt provision of working tools to aid the work of staff.
10. For the past 30 years, to-date, salaries have been paid promptly as and when due (25th of every month).

CONCLUSION

The journey of African book publishing, evolving from Arabic scripts to Christian missions, has paved the way for the success of organizations like Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS). From its beginnings to becoming a leading provider of theological literature in Africa, ACTS' journey reflects the importance of visionary leadership, thoughtful staff recruitment, retention strategies, and technological adaptation. The organization, born out of a need for theological resources, underscores the transformative power of collaboration. With its roots in missionary ideals, ACTS embodies a harmonious mix of tradition and innovation.

ACTS' staff recruitment emphasizes value-aligned personnel. The structured selection process, orientation, and induction nurture a dedicated workforce. Strong church connections, fair policies, conditions of service, and empathetic leadership contribute to a high staff retention rate.

Proactively addressing dishonesty underscores ACTS' commitment to ethical standards, transparency, and accountability.

Inspired by successful Christian institutions, ACTS values indigenous works, lasting relationships, and technology's role in staying relevant. Lessons from successes and challenges guide future growth and contributions to African Christian literature.

The evolution of ACTS' from humble origins to a respected resource provider reflects the power of commitment, collaboration, and ethical leadership. In a changing landscape, ACTS remains an inspiring force, affirming the written word's potency for enlightenment, education, and spiritual growth across Africa and beyond.

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SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

The biggest and most important thing that we chief executives, managers and stewards of our ministries need to answer is whether we allow Jesus to be a part of our work, and test our leadership or stewardship on a daily basis; or do we just leave Him behind and out of our lives and remember Him only when we are in trouble or inside the church? This is a big concern because living lives without Jesus will continue to sabotage our work. A true life story from Nigeria corroborates this:

A driver of a general secretary of a certain church (name withheld), when queried for quitting his job replied, "While the Bible has the real story of Jesus, we cannot encounter the Jesus who demanded that we will follow in his footsteps, if we don't live like He did. Currently, if not for the bible, I cannot believe from the life of my boss that Jesus ever existed.

"I have seen no sign of Jesus in my boss's life and relationship. I see more of the signs of the devil in him. As a steward, I desire to see and experience Jesus in practical terms. I therefore quit this job to look for the practical Jesus, and not the theoretical one."

It will be worthwhile to read this book, "Taking Jesus to Your Work: Living out Your Faith on the Job, by Vera R. Jackson, published by Chosen Books, 2008.

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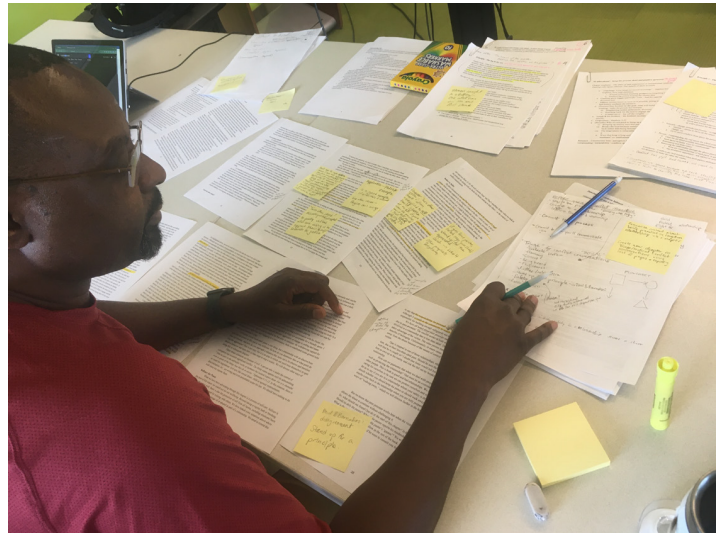


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Bookie Adekanye is the 2023 Writer of Colour Awards Winner, The Word Awards, The Word Guild. As a Nigerian lady who's single in her 40s, she reminds other single women of God's overwhelming love for them in her book *Happily Whenever After*.

Bookie has not only navigated the challenges of mature singleness in Nigeria. As a certified Christian counsellor, her passion is to see people live purposeful lives and walk intimately with God. She is also an entrepreneur, magazine columnist, travel enthusiast, and lover of nature.



Rev Dr Emmanuel Kwasi Amofo is passionate about the life-transforming gospel of Jesus Christ, Christian discipleship, and Christian spiritual formation. In his book, *Stand Up for the Gospel*, Rev Kwasi reveals what is happening in many of our churches today, and equips readers to defend our timeless faith.

Originally from Ghana, he has served in the Anglican Church of Kenya for over 20 years. He has been a lecturer at Carlile School of Theology, where he was also the Director of Student Affairs. He is currently with the Theology departments of Global University and St Paul's University.



Hilda Bih Muluh is the author of *The Girl With Special Shoes* – the witty and heartfelt story of a family's sacrificial love and a God who refashions pain into purpose.

Hilda is the first person with a disability to become a national radio journalist and news anchor on Cameroon Radio Television. Her journey with muscular dystrophy and passion for disability activism have been featured in The Washington Post, and the Voice of America. She is a recipient of Barack Obama's Washington Mandela Fellowship, and has spoken at The Speak Foundation Conference (Atlanta, GA) and the Young African Leaders Initiative leadership conference (Accra).



Ernest and Waturi Wamboye, authors of *Baesics*, are a dynamic and engaging couple, happily married with three children. Scan this code to see the Wamboyes at "Boy Meets Girl", a quarterly relationships forum under The Relationship Centre Ltd (TRC), a ministry they founded, which aims to promote biblical family values in contemporary urban communities.



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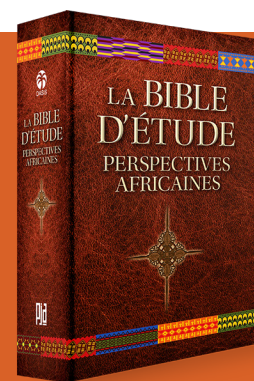
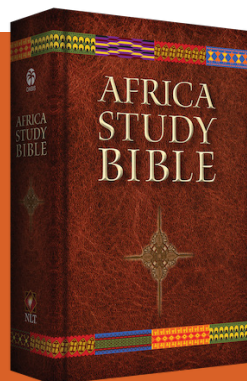
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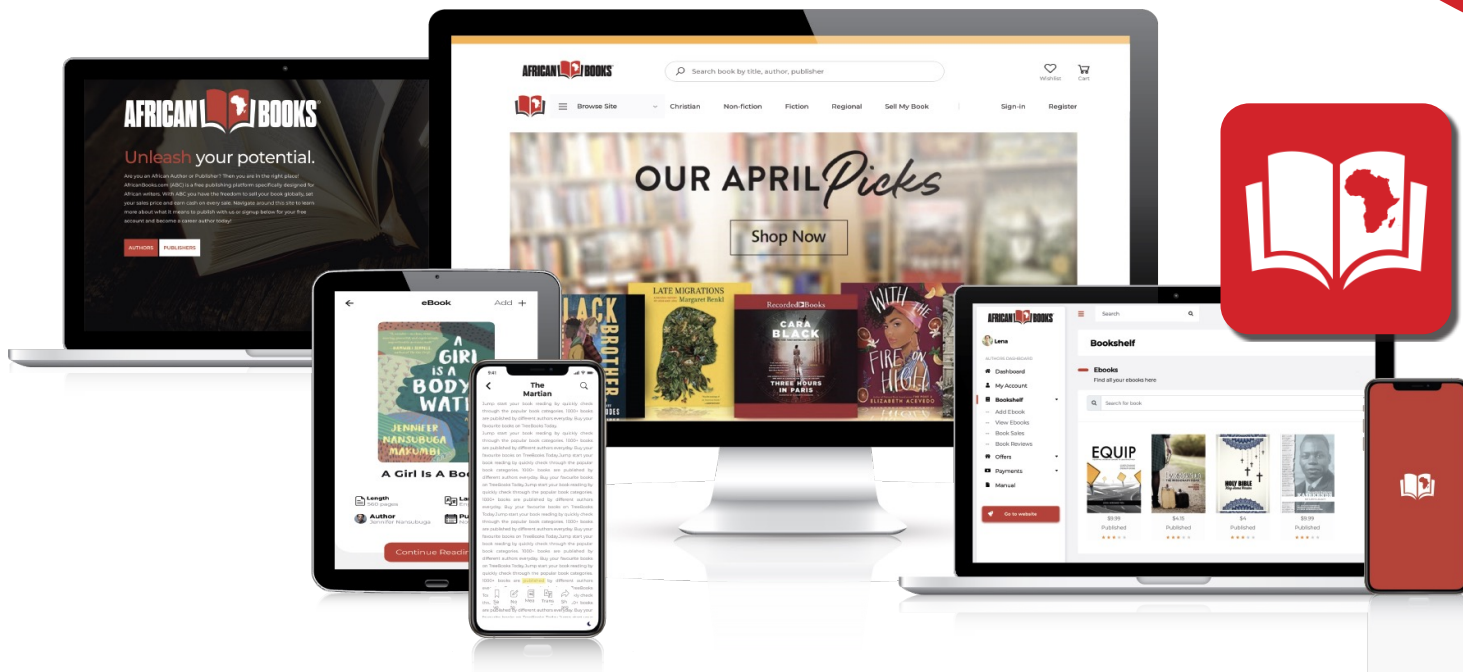
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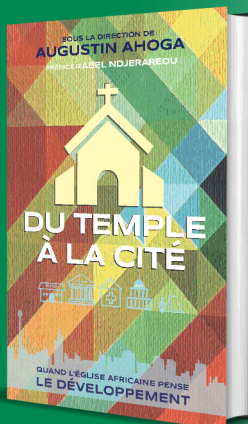
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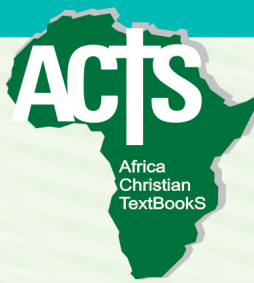
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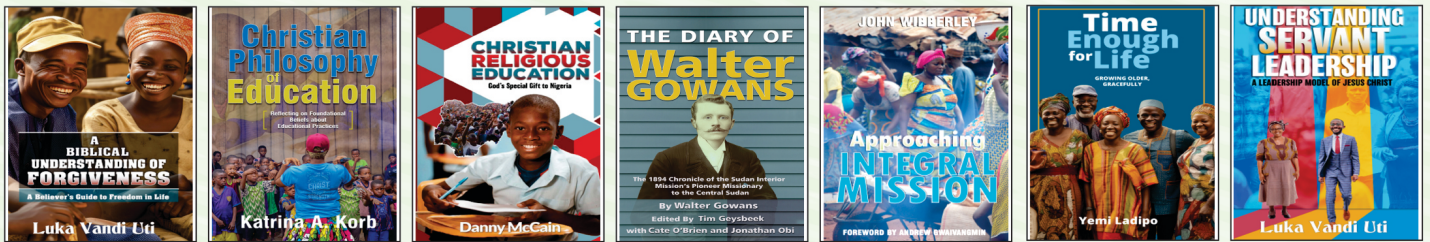
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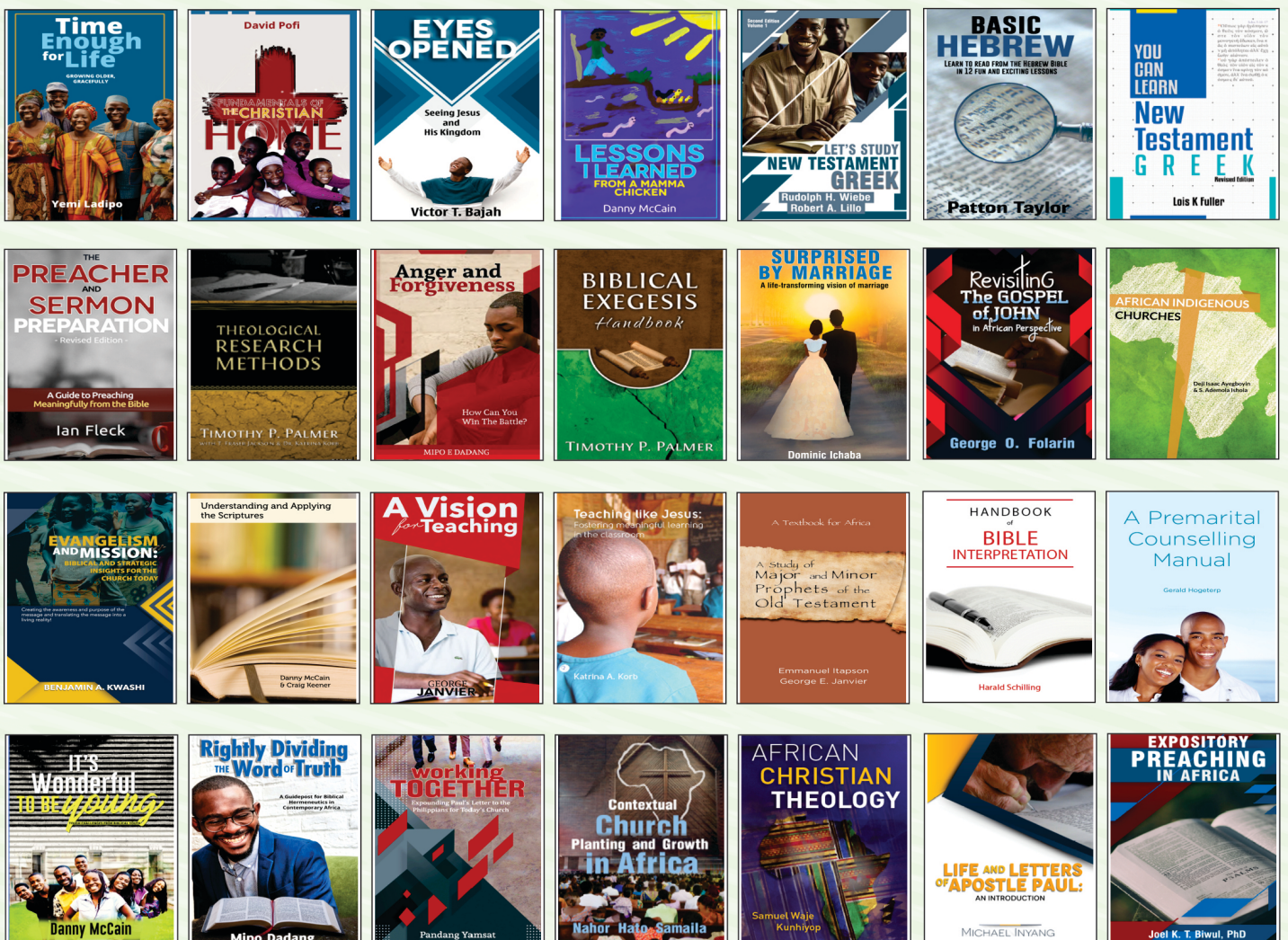
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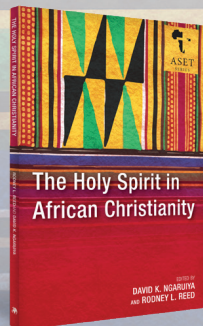
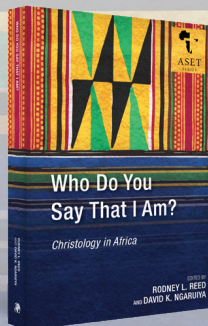
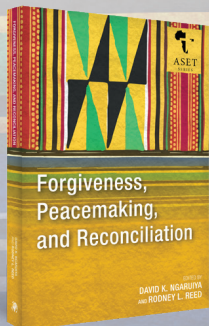
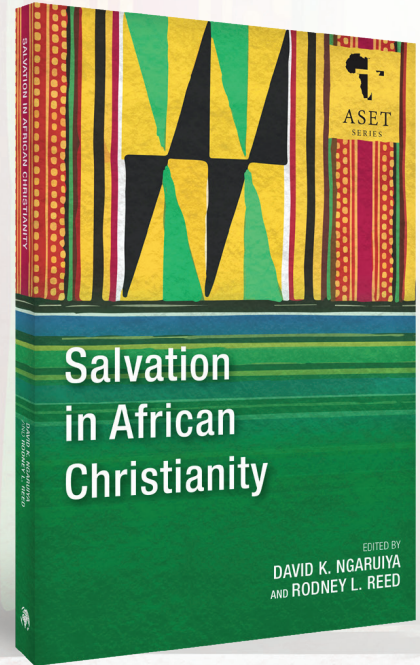
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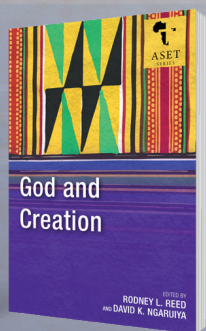
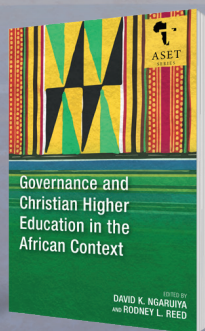
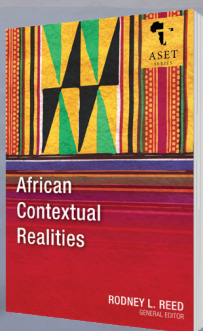
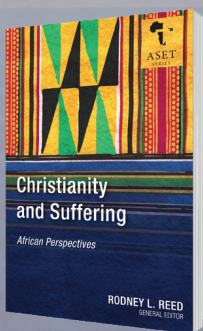
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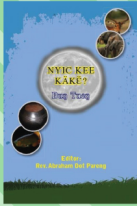
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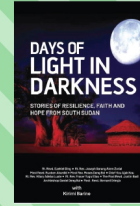
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AFRICA BOOKSELLERS SURVEY

The Africa Booksellers Survey seeks to understand how books are distributed in a country, which are the best-selling titles, what's the price the locals are willing to purchase a book, who are the leading local authors and what genres are the most popular among christians in the country. By visiting local booksellers and engaging with them, Africa Speaks is looking to gather accurate data on the state of publishing in African Citites.

Cities to be covered (Phase 1)

Addis Ababa
Dar es Salaam
Nairobi
Kampala
Kigali
Goma
Bujumbura

Lilongwe
Lusaka
Harare
Accra
Lome
Cotonou
Abidjan

Lagos
Douala
Libreville
Kinshasa
Johannesburg
CapeTown
Gaborone

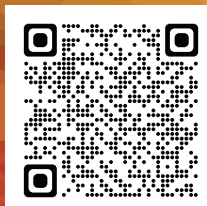


Cities already covered

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Nairobi
Kampala
Kigali
Goma
Lilongwe

Lusaka
Harare
Accra
Lome
Cotonou
Abidjan

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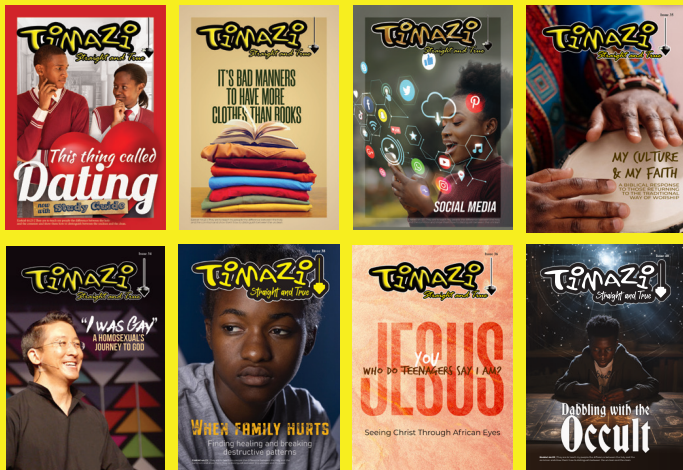
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