

Local and national languages: What opportunities for publishing in Africa?

International Assembly of independent publishers Workshop,
Strengthening and keeping bibliodiversity alive

June 11 – 13 2013 – Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Background:

While many African languages are widely spoken, publishing in national languages still has difficulty to develop in French-speaking Africa (as opposed to English-speaking Africa, amongst others), because of the dominating presence of colonial languages. However, some publishers do publish in African languages. To disseminate texts, promote authors, and circulate ideas as widely as possible, nine publishers from seven African countries have decided to convene to develop translation flux from one African language to another, to build bilingual or trilingual co-publishing projects – representative of Africa's linguistic diversity.

Based on an examination of African languages publishing, carried out by participants in preparation for this workshop, publishers have developed collective publishing projects that could be implemented over the next few years, with the Alliance's support, amongst others.

Finally, the setting up of an African Language Book and Writing Fair (SAELLA) was at the centre of discussions: this fair is indeed the next meeting where public authorities and professionals will adopt measures to support learning and publishing in African languages.

Workshop objectives:

- Raise public authorities' awareness regarding the development of learning in national languages;
- Draft concrete proposals and submit to organisations working in support of national languages;
- Draft recommendations and submit to book professionals (and more generally) for the setting up of an African Language Book and Writing Fair and for the development of publishing projects in African languages.

1/ Brief overview of African languages publishing

General observations:

- Modern publishing in African languages is still at a beginning stage (over the twenty past years for French-speaking Africa, and older in English-speaking Africa) – **to complete with Portuguese-speaking Africa**;
- Because of a lack of reliable statistics, it is difficult - at times impossible - to provide an accurate portrait of the current situation in this field (themes, printing run, generated incomes, etc.);

- The non-usage of national languages as a language of instruction at school remains a reality in most French-speaking African countries;
- Few textbooks are thus produced in national languages;
- Little or no financial means available for the production of works in African languages;
- “Classical” distribution circuits show little interest in these kinds of outputs;
- Libraries and other public reading centres promoting publishing in African languages are few, perhaps even non-existent;
- There is however some cases of relatively successful rural press in African languages (in Burkina Faso, for example).

Main difficulties facing publishers and other actors involved in African languages publishing:

- Very few publishers publish in African languages – the availability of books and other reading material in African languages is therefore low;
- Number of speakers able to read and write in these languages is diminished;
- Works published in African languages are, generally, of lesser quality in terms of manufacturing, are not included in traditional publishing and public reading networks.

In short: books in African languages have a potentially wide market. However, some barriers considerably reduce the size of this potential readership, amongst others high illiteracy rates, the absence of reading habits, the weak buying power of the targeted public, and the low visibility/availability of publications.

Opportunities presented by African languages publishing:

- The benefits of mother tongue tuition at the first levels of formal education for the learning process are well known;
- Africa has the youngest population in the world, with more than 130 million children aged below 6 years old and illiteracy rates are growing steadily;
- Markets are better organised, as well as professional synergies;
- Books in African languages have a potentially vast market, needing to be reached via well-targeted outputs (original, bilingual, translations, adaptations, etc.);
- An increasing number of countries adopt policy measures to recognise the role and place of national languages as education and training tools and supports: bilingual schools, satellite schools, second languages, etc.;
- Today, the potential is there, with several calls for tenders for textbooks in African languages for private publishers (as in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, etc.);
- The existence of complementary reading material, including children’s books, fiction, novels, etc. are expected to be found in school libraries and reading areas at schools (in Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea Bissau...).

2 / Workshop recommendations

To countries

- Pursue activities leading to the implementation of policies and regulations supporting African languages and publishers (in teaching, political and social life, taxation) and beneficiary for publishers – educational and language policies, public reading policies, etc.;
- Strengthen public-private partnerships in the field of textbooks publishing and educational material in African languages, by involving local professionals, and even by giving precedence to local publishers in cases of call for tenders;
- Implement support systems for the production, diffusion, and promotion of publications in African languages;
- Support the implementation of a literate environment in African languages (schools, literacy centres, libraries and other reading spaces).

To development partners

- Increase technical and material support for the efficient use and development of African languages as institutional and social communication vectors;
- Implement sustainable support measures to book and press professionals in African languages (capacity building, amongst others);
- Strengthen dialogue between national professionals and/or professional collectives and technical and financial partners (International Alliance of Independent Publishers, International Organisation of the Francophonie, UNESCO, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, etc.);
- Raise awareness and invite book donations structures to learn about African languages outputs and include African languages publications published in Africa in the donation processes.

To African book professionals

- Organise and/or strengthen national and regional professional organisations to enable them to lead advocacy and institutional lobbying activities;
- Diversify production of quality and affordable African languages books and contribute to bibliodiversity, at national and international levels;
- Implement a strategic monitoring system of commercial opportunities to seize in African languages (in terms of textbooks, amongst others);
- Identify and use existing digital tools (both for the production and conservation of African languages books as well as their promotion);
- Closely collaborate with African languages press organisations, bookshops and local libraries;
- Network and exchange with peers, enabling the implementation of co-publishing and translation projects (bilingual, trilingual, adaptation, etc.), an African Language Book and Writing Fair, cooperation with other organisations working in the same sector.

3 / Publishers practical proposals

- Implementation of an African Language Book and Writing Fair – SAELLA – 1st pilot edition in 2014, during the Cape Town General Meeting of the Alliance (South Africa) – date and place to be confirmed;
- Cross border co-publishing projects, for the most part bilingual:
 - Project 1: Sankofa & Gurli publishers/ Edilis and Ganndal = French/Dioula bilingual
 - Project 2: Sankofa & Gurli publishers/ Papyrus = Wolof and/or Peul
 - Project 3: Bakamé and Ganndal publishers = Kinyarwanda/Pular bilingual
 - Project 4 : Papyrus publishers/ Ku Si Mon = French/Creole bilingual
 - Project 5: Jeunes malgaches publihsers/ Edilis = transfer of copyrights for a bilingual publication (French/Malagasy and French/Ivorian national languages)
 - Project 6: Transversal projects in several languages = “*Les petites mains*” collection and *Histoire générale de l’Afrique* (“General History of Africa”).

4 / Way forward

- **Recommendations and proposals towards African languages publishing:** validation, recommendations and formulation of proposals by participants, translation and distribution to language networks of the Alliance for adaptation => autumn 2013
- **Workshop report = verbatim report of workshop** => 2014
- **Implementation of the SAELLA (African Language Book and Writing Fair) and publishing projects related to the workshop** => 2013-2014
- **Validation and diffusion of recommendations following the Cape Town meeting** => 2014



www.alliance-editeurs.org