

**“Digital publishing: what issues for bibliodiversity  
in the Arabic-speaking world?”**  
*12 May 2014*

**Press release from the International Alliance of independent publishers,  
following the workshop held from 30 April to 3 May 2014  
during the **Abu Dhabi International Book Fair****

**Some 13 independent publishers and digital experts from 7 countries** (Argentina, Jordan, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia) convened from 30 April to 3 May 2014 during the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair for a workshop on digital publishing in the Arabic-speaking world. This workshop, the 7<sup>th</sup> in the context of the [International Assembly of independent publishers](#), was held **via the support from the Prince Claus Fund, the International Organisation of the Francophonie, and in partnership with the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair**. It follows a prior meeting on digital publishing in the Arab world held [in Tunis in May 2011](#).

This three-day meeting focused on practices and knowledge sharing, enabling publishers to reflect on their experiences and discuss the various challenges and opportunities arising from digital publishing in the Arab world.

The first day was an opportunity to present an overview of the various formats and existing solutions to create eBooks. Despite recent progresses, the discussions highlighted the **continuous challenges related to the creation of ePub files in Arabic**, including issues of slow speed in the reading of digital books – problems linked to the absence of standards for Arabic typos. Some important work remains to be done by national libraries, among others the **unification of metadata in the Arab world**, as noted by participants during this first day.

Focusing on issues of marketing and distribution of eBooks in the Arab world, the second day provided an opportunity for publishers to examine the various existing economic models and eBook distribution platforms. Participants also called on the various **Arab countries’ national libraries to support independent publishers by acquiring more digital works in Arabic and by assisting with the digitalisation of their publishing funds, an essential heritage that should be preserved**.

The last day of the meeting focused on promotion and e-marketing strategies, an opportunity for publishers to share on the various means of communication with their readers and particularly on their usage of the Arab world’s social networks and readers communities. The issue of piracy was also addressed, participants presenting anti-piracy strategies being implemented in their respective countries. Publishers also agreed that **piracy was a consequence, among others, of the unlikelihood of commercialising their work, as there are no online payment systems in several Arab countries**.

**At the end of the meeting, participants drafted some recommendations addressed to public authorities and standardisation authorities to support digital publishing in Arab countries. The main recommendations include the following:**

- Make independent publishers' voices heard among the Arab world's standardisation organisations (IDPF, EDItEUR, etc.) by keeping an updated list of technical problems encountered during the creation of eBooks in Arabic;
- Undertake a study on the proportion of Arabic eBooks available in Arab countries' national libraries;
- Convince national libraries of the necessity of purchasing more eBooks published by independent publishers from the Arab world. Ensure that they enable independent publishers to digitalise their publishing funds, an heritage needing to be preserved;
- Approach public authorities from the various countries so they unify metadata in the Arab world;
- Mainstream the facilitation of Arabic digital publishing meetings in the context of the main book fairs in the Arab world, which are an opportunity to establish relations between traditional publishers and digital publishing actors;
- Organise parallel technical training sessions addressed to independent publishers' staff. These training sessions could be facilitated through the support of the main book fairs in the Arab world;
- Collectively negotiate with mobile telecommunication companies in order to obtain preferential rates for content distribution by independent publishers;
- Call on public authorities and national banks in the Arab world to enable the creation of international online payment services;
- Support digital publishing as a means of curbing censorship in Arab countries and elsewhere.

Besides these general recommendations, the workshop's participants expressed the wish for the International Alliance of independent publishers to directly develop some tools, beneficial for the sustainability and practical implementation of exchanges and lessons learned from this workshop. **These specific tools will be developed by [the Alliance's Lab](#), a website aimed at supporting independent publishers in their digital publishing endeavours:**

- Develop a practical checklist to help publishers creating and managing their metadata;
- Create a video tutorial on the creation of eBooks in Arabic;
- Develop a listing of all digital actors in the Arab world;
- Share information in the Alliance's network regarding free training on digital publishing that could benefit publishers in the Arab world.

These recommendations and tools will be built upon and further developed at the International Assembly of independent publishers' closing meeting, a unique interlinguistic and intercultural meeting that will be held from 17 to 22 September 2014 in Cape Town, in South Africa. This meeting will convene some fifty independent publishers from the five continents and will lead to the formulation of a joint declaration supporting independent publishing and bibliodiversity.

The International Alliance of independent publishers wishes to sincerely thank all participants to this workshop (publishers and digital experts) and its partners, particularly the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair, the International Organisation of the Francophonie and the Prince Claus Fund. **Their support and assistance contribute to strengthening bibliodiversity in the Arab world, and also to the development of business partnerships between independent publishers from various languages and cultures.**



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