

Rethinking book donations

Background

Book donations from North to South – but also from South to North – are based on international solidarity mechanisms that sometimes rely on a gloomy vision of developing countries. In the Francophone space, every year French structures send in the Francophonie of the South an important quantity of books donated by individuals, associations or French libraries (following “weeding” operations).

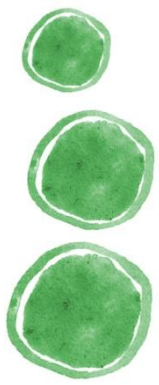
In the Arab world, foreign embassies or religious parties with proselyte aims disseminate works in reading spaces. In Brazil, book donations are done at national level: companies such as banks and major corporations use book donations for promotional purposes.

Whatever the context and objectives (obvious or hidden), book donations, when they are not adapted to the needs of readers, can have adverse consequences. They represent in many cases a disloyal competition for local actors of the book chain.

Recommendations for “another” book donation

To the attention of book donation organisations and book professionals

- **Establish, as a work foundation and for all donation operations, monitoring, consultation and fair relationships:** book donation programmes must be accompanied with knowledge sharing in terms of library management and activation. It is therefore essential to support librarians in the acquisition procedures and implementation of activities. This support could lead librarians to better target the needs of their readers. It is also important that librarians be able to judge the relevance of a donation, and refuse if considered irrelevant.
- **Stimulate local economy:** all donation operations must aim at stimulating the country’s local economy. Donation organisations can get locally published books from local bookshops, thus participating to the development of local publishing and the stimulation of bookshop circuits. Moreover, if books from the North are sent to libraries from the South, it is necessary that libraries from the North also purchase books published in Africa, the Arab world, and so on, to address the issue of diversification and plurality of their backlist. Acquisition of books published in the South could be a supplementary criterion, considered in public calls for tender in the North.
- **Promote direct support for local publishing:** instead of sending books taken from weeding operations, some libraries in the North do “library clearance sales”, enabling them to collect funds. This money can serve to start an acquisition budget for a local library, that could buy books through a local bookshop, or to develop publishing projects supported by local publishers. A donation structure can therefore create a partnership with a library from the North and a publisher from the South: the publisher from the South publishes a book through the support garnered via the library clearance sale or any other activity organised by the library in the North. This book will be sold at a lesser cost in many schools in this country, for example, and could be bought by libraries in the North.



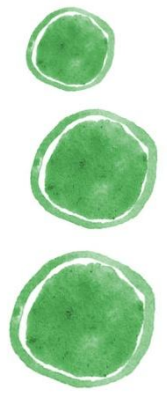
- **Consider local and national languages in book donations:** the integration of local production in book donations aims at addressing the need for books in local and national languages and bilingual books. Children need to read books in their mother tongue, to facilitate their learning. In order to do this, a close collaboration between local publishers and bookshops is essential. A portion of purchase of books in local and national languages done by the donor organisation could stock the library or create a mobile library that could circulate from one library to another in the country, to reach the most isolated population who are often speakers of a local or national language.

See also “Essential measures for publishing in local and national languages” recommendations

- **Guide digital book donations (reading support and digital contents):** digital donations practices must also be guided through a Charter, thus avoiding loopholes observed in paper book donation practices – in particular the issue of relevance of contents for readers. Also, and for major investments made in education projects not to be wasted, it is necessary that local book chain actors be mainstreamed in this instrument, with a fair remuneration of authors, publishers and booksellers. The development of digital projects must therefore be accompanied by a strong ownership by local actors, enabling them to create their own digital ecosystem.

To the attention of book professionals

- **Continue lobbying actions with public authorities in the countries of the South:** professional collectives (publishers, bookshops, librarians) have a role to play to raise awareness among the Ministries of Education and Culture, for acquisition budgets to be voted, allowing the dotation of libraries of the North and the South with books (orders made directly to local libraries). In Côte d’Ivoire, for example, over the past few years, local publishers receive orders from the Ministry of Culture to supply books to the country’s libraries.
- **Establish a toolbox that would assist donation schemes with the acquisition of local books:** it is necessary that publishers and booksellers value their productions via existing database, among other means, to encourage donation organisations to include local productions in donation processes.



Toolboxes (non exhaustive)

References listed here are mainly from the Francophone region as book donations are more common there.

Database listing books published in the Francophone region:

- **Afrilivres**, pan African association, showcases the production of 30 publishers from sub-Saharan Africa: www.afrilivres.net/ collective list developed in April 2014: <http://fr.calameo.com/read/001045068bcfffd041c69>
- **Electre** (French database for bilingual books and/ or books in French published in Africa and available in France): www.electre.com/ElectreHome.aspx
- **Sudplanète** (developed by Africultures): www.spla.pro/fr/
- **Takam Tikou** (online journal of La Joie par les livres/ BNF): www.takamtikou.bnf.fr

Diffusion and distribution structures of African books:

- **African Books Collective** (diffusion in Europe and Africa): www.africanbookscollective.com
- **L'Oiseau Indigo** (diffusion in Belgium, France and Switzerland): www.loiseauindigo.fr
- **International Alliance of independent publishers** ("Lectures d'Afrique(s)" backlist/ diffusion in France): www.alliance-editeurs.org/les-nouveautes-du-fonds-lectures-d?lang=fr

Upcoming tools and projects (2015-2016 perspectives)

- **A book donation Charter** "reviewed by professionals of the South", based on the [Book donation Charter](#) developed by Culture and Development
- **A toolbox**: practical proposals based on existing practices, examples of "good practices", database of African books diffusers/ distributors, website, contact persons, etc. – local professionals will be able to adapt the toolbox to their respective linguistic region
- **A workshop** between librarians from the North and South, and African publishers during the next IFLA Congress (Cape Town, South Africa, August 2015): knowledge of African productions, sharing, networking for future projects, etc.

To make remarks and give your point of view on these recommendations, contact the team of the International Alliance of Independent Publishers (equipe@alliance-editeurs.org).

Read the [International Declaration of Independent Publishers 2014](#)