ENGAGING THE PRIVATE SECTOR TOWARDS AN IMPROVED LITERATE ENVIRONMENT

A LEARNING PAPER ON BOOK DEVELOPMENT IN RWANDA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last several decades, donors, including bilateral organizations and private foundations, have provided extensive funding and programmatic support to improve book provision and usage. Despite this investment, a critical children’s book gap persists in many low- and middle-income countries. Literacy initiatives have often addressed the shortage of local language reading materials in underserved languages by dedicating project resources to developing levelled readers and story books. This approach has resulted in organizations usurping the role of publishers and has adversely impacted the local book chain. Without publishers owning rights to materials to enable future reprints, books are often no longer in circulation after the life of the project. With a view to address the root cause of book shortages, Save the Children has implemented an innovative approach to supporting local language children’s book development by focusing efforts on growing a robust local publishing industry in Rwanda.

Drawing on a desk review of program reports, reviews and case stories from 2014-2018, as well as key informant interviews with Save the Children staff, this paper includes an in-depth examination of the support provided to the book sector and the ensuing achievements, challenges, and learning. It also includes forward-looking recommendations for future support to the local publishing industry in Rwanda and considerations for the replication of the Save the Children book development approach in disparate contexts.

STATE OF THE PUBLISHING SECTOR IN 2013

In 2013, prior to support received from Save the Children, the children’s book publishing sector in Rwanda was negligible. There were only three local publishing businesses who had developed and published a collective total of 12 Kinyarwanda children’s books for ages 0-9. The few individuals involved in the book sector lacked professional skills in key technical areas related to book development and supply. Local publishers did not have a strong understanding of how to develop high quality books that spoke to a range of reading levels and interests. Similarly, publishing houses had limited experience in the necessary business dimensions of the industry, and weren’t able to effectively engage in marketing, forecasting, product research and customer engagement. Local publishers were not competitive in government tenders and only a handful book distribution points existed nationally. As a result, the industry was stagnant with few prospects to develop.

INITIAL RWANDA CHILDREN’S BOOK INITIATIVE PROJECT DESIGN

The book development support from Save the Children initially took shape as a project called Rwandan Children’s Book Initiative (RCBI). RCBI was designed as a component of Advancing the Right to Read, Save the Children’s wider education program supporting literacy for children in Rwanda from birth to age nine. RCBI focused on increasing children’s access to reading materials by promoting and supporting the production and provision of books. This holistic approach aimed to strengthen all aspects of the book chain, from book developers to end users, in order to increase both the availability and use of high-quality, age-appropriate Kinyarwanda children’s books.

A group of five local publishers enlisted in the initial RCBI publishing support activities in 2014. Only one of these publishing houses had previous experience publishing children’s books. The other aspiring publishers had selected professional involvement with regional publishers and were keen to extend their experience to begin their own businesses. Several of the publishing companies were comprised of only a single staff, generally the Managing Director, with editorial processes outsourced to contractors.

DEFINING THE STRATEGIC APPROACH TO BOOK DEVELOPMENT

Building from the RCBI pilot, Save the Children strengthened its collaboration with publishing industry stakeholders, education ministries and libraries in order to bolster existing systems and increase output and availability of quality local language children’s books. In an attempt to define this multi-pronged approach, Save the Children’s book development work has been distilled down to the following key activities central to the approach:

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1. Provide quality, relevant training and ongoing mentoring to the publishing industry and its constituent parts
2. Support the establishment of communities of practice for each constituent part of the industry
3. Maintain a book review committee to provide feedback to publishers, assess quality and inform procurements
4. Invest in initiatives that establish demand for the newly developed local language books
5. Advocate for a conducive book publishing environment

GROWTH IN THE BOOK SECTOR: 2014-2018

As a result of Save the Children’s support, the quality, quantity and range of local language children’s books in Rwanda’s publishing sector has grown significantly. There has been an overwhelming increase in number of books available on the free market, including the development and production of over 800 books by publishers receiving support from Save the Children. Improvements in quality, while more difficult to measure, are widely acknowledged by stakeholders and government.

The diversity and range of books available on the local Rwandan book market also expanded. Prior to Save the Children’s support, there were no developmentally-appropriate books available for children aged 0-6. Currently, there are over 200 titles for this age range, including creative titles that have had rights sold overseas.

Focused efforts have also led to more gender sensitive books. Girls are increasingly more likely to feature as main protagonists in children books and are more often portrayed in gender transformative roles. Additionally, publishers have developed several books to support children with disabilities, including tactile and Braille books.

Most publishing houses have also grown to include editorial teams that work on specialized areas within the book development process. With a stronger capital base, they are also now able to compete for tenders with both NGOs and government, opening up additional markets previously unavailable to local publishers. Additionally, publishers are diversifying their activities beyond Kinyarwanda children’s books. Three publishers have begun co-publishing textbooks in foreign countries, while several others have sold adaptations rights in other languages.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEFORE (2013)</th>
<th>ONLY 12</th>
<th>ZERO</th>
<th>ONLY 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>locally made local language children’s books for ages 7-9</td>
<td>children’s books available for ages 0-6</td>
<td>local publishers</td>
<td>less than 10%</td>
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<td>OVER 800</td>
<td>OVER 200</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>OVER 30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>locally made local language children’s books for ages 7-9</td>
<td>books available for ages 0-6</td>
<td>local publishers</td>
<td>of all children’s books published in Rwanda have a girl as the main character</td>
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LEARNING

Over the four years of support to the book chain, tremendous progress in the sector is undeniable. However, the factors that contributed to this change are worth identifying. The following points highlight critical areas of positive program learning based on input from Save the Children staff and publishing representatives.

- Stimulating demand for newly developed books must be a central program outcome, and involve piloting a series of innovative strategies to better understand market dynamics.
- It is crucial to develop a long-term plan for empowering the book sector, transitioning support as an initial capacity building partner to eventually playing the role of a reliable ally that scaffolds the work of an independent, self-sustaining industry.
- Engaging a broad range of stakeholders strengthens the plurality of voices in the movement.
- The establishment and legitimacy of private sector associations or bodies is necessary to empower distinct professions within the book chain.
- Programs should invest in and retain staff who are both avid readers themselves as well as demonstrate a genuine understanding of the unique approach to growing a private sector.
- Advance market commitments can help to jumpstart book development in the early stages.
- Agility should be a cornerstone of programming, especially the capacity adapt to new challenges and opportunities as they arise.
- Beneficiaries, participants, and partners should be actively engaged in the design of activities.
• Substantive growth in a book sector hinges on the integrity, work ethic, and commitment of the publishing personalities at the forefront of the indigenous book movement.
• Advocacy is a critical program activity necessary to positively influence the government to establish policies and practices that will allow a local book sector to thrive.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE SUPPORT TO THE RWANDAN BOOK SECTOR

Despite the substantial evolution in the book sector in Rwanda, progress is still delicate. There are several crucial issues that threaten the progress achieved to date. The lack of appreciation of the importance of recreational reading, particularly in as it relates to local language and young readers, persists as an obstacle inhibiting the development of the robust culture of reading. Additionally, new challenges, such as the government’s policy to publish their own textbooks, also pose a risk to the growth in the local book industry. It is recommended that Save the Children continue to provide strategic support to the sector in a bid to cement progress achieved, with a focus on advocating for substantial policy level improvements to bolster the budding indigenous publishing industry.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR REPLICATING THE APPROACH

Although a straightforward attempt to replicate any of these mechanisms is not recommended, there are useful lessons to be drawn from this experience. It is recommended that book development interventions build from nation’s existing assets while also targeting underdeveloped areas. It is important to recognize that in the absence of the enabling factors existent in Rwanda, the program would have likely employed different strategies resulting in different outcomes. In contexts with an established book industry, it would be worthwhile to examine the weaknesses in the local book chain, the policy environment and the market prospects. There is likely opportunity for programming to address gaps in the sector, although this will require a highly agile approach to project planning and management. Inflexibility in funding is a reality that often inhibits effective programming of this nature. Longer project timelines, ideally a minimum of a five-year project life, are also critical to mobilize the necessary actors, understand market variables and support sustainable growth in the industry.

It is further recommended that global book development activities provide targeted support to languages that are both viable and potentially productive. Organizations should make informed decisions based on the extent to which a language is currently developed, including the stability of the orthography and the scope of its use in communication and literature. In most contexts, book development activities should include outcomes that also focus on book use activities to ensure language users have opportunities to read the developed materials and practice the language.
INTRODUCTION

Access to stimulating collections of attractive and relevant reading books is an important determining factor in the achievement of early literacy. Reading books—which include picture books, information books, leveled and decodable readers, etc.—are particularly critical in building literacy skills and habits, as well as developing children’s background knowledge in key content areas. Importantly, given the evidence of the benefits of mother tongue instruction and the value of teaching children in languages that they speak and understand, books in these languages are vital to improving literacy levels.

An acute global children’s book gap persists preventing millions of children from accessing reading materials in underserved languages. Research has confirmed that many low- and middle-income countries experience a significant undersupply of reading books, particularly in mother tongue languages, and even when books are available, there are critical issues including poor quality and worryingly low usage. Under these circumstances the availability of reading books in schools, homes, and communities is clearly of critical importance, most particularly in rural areas where these materials are unlikely to be available from any other source. There is an urgent need to strengthen the book chain to increase children’s access to contextually relevant books in languages they use and understand. As less developed countries aim to become more literate societies, ones that can express themselves and their own culture, they need viable publishers and authors who can address the needs of the marketplace and make a living without dependency. Furthermore, a strong, well-functioning book chain is imperative to ensure national development and to promote full participation in society at the individual level.

Indigenous languages continue to remain outside the purview of larger multinational commercial publishing houses. Without any local publishing capacity in country or financial investment, these languages have not been able to develop sufficient written presence. Furthermore, weak and inefficient book supply chains hamper the number of books being produced and increase provision costs further widening the book gap. Considering most people speaking underserved languages are from majority low- and middle-income regions affected by poverty and low purchasing power, the market for books in these languages likely will not develop without support. Research conducted by PEN International in Kenya, Haiti, Serbia, and Nigeria found that, “there is still a conviction in the mainstream publishing industry that it is primarily viable to sell books in dominant languages, and that a major obstacle to establishing and sustaining strong minority-language publishing industries is the way that minority languages are valued locally and nationally.” This fact served as the rationale for Save the Children’s investment in a children’s book initiative targeting the development of ‘more and better books’ to meet the literacy needs of the most underserved children.

OVERVIEW OF BOOK DEVELOPMENT MODELS

Over the last several decades, donors, including bilateral organizations and private foundations, have provided extensive funding and programmatic support to improve book provision and usage. Literacy initiatives have often addressed the shortage of local language reading materials by dedicating project resources to developing readers and story books. This approach has resulted in organizations usurping the role of publishers and has adversely impacted the local book chain. Without publishers owning rights to materials to enable future reprints, books are often no longer in circulation after the life of the project. With a view to address the root cause of insufficient supply, Save the Children has implemented an innovative approach to supporting local language children’s book development by focusing efforts on growing a robust local publishing industry in Rwanda.

There are few examples of other book development models that have recognized the critical importance of engaging, not excluding, the publishing sector. Reading CODE is a comprehensive readership initiative and a key part of

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3 Ibid.
4 CODE Theory of Change
CODE’s international literacy programming, currently being implemented in eight African countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania. Reading CODE works with local teachers, librarians, writers, and publishers to support and sustain the development of literacy learning in K-12 schools. CODE has experienced success developing local book sector capacity and establishing a mechanism to activate a book trade by subsidizing demand while supporting the development of skills within the book chain.

The Tanzania Children’s Book Project began in 1991 as an initiative that combined direct funding with technical assistance in the form of capacity building for book sector actors with an innovative book purchasing model. Writers, illustrators, publishers and booksellers received training on the technical skills necessary for producing high quality children’s books. In this model, the organization purchased half of print runs at cost while requiring publishers to sell the remainder of the supply for their own profit in an effort to circulate local language books into the marketplace.9

Save the Children’s book development approach was initially based on learning adapted from Tanzanian Children’s Book Project with the similar objective of building the capacity of the publishing industry to develop more and better local language children’s books. Adjustments were made to this model during design phase, based on the varying context and donor expectations.

RWANDAN CONTEXT

Despite advances in enrollment in Rwanda, children are still entering primary school unprepared to learn and leaving without the foundational literacy skills they need to be successful.10 In 2012, an EGRA study conducted in Rwanda found that 13% of P4 students were unable to read 1 word of a Kinyarwanda P2-P3 text. 13% of these students could read less than 15 words correctly in one minute and 40% of P4 students could not answer half of the comprehension questions relating to a passage they had just read.

The Government of Rwanda, in its Vision 2020 statement, affirmed its commitment to transition to a knowledge-based society from a subsistence agriculture economy as well as becoming a middle-income country.11 The government has acknowledged that this transition can only be made possible by creating an enabling environment for literacy and a culture of reading in Kinyarwanda, the mother tongue language spoken by the vast majority of the population.

However, in 2012, there was a persistent lack of age-appropriate, contextually relevant children’s books available in Kinyarwanda to adequately support these literacy goals. The books that did exist were, for the most part, poorly written, edited, designed and illustrated, for the wrong age and in languages other than Kinyarwanda, particularly French and English.12 A previous national-scale USAID early grade literacy project had overcome this book supply shortage by producing their own project-specific levelled, decodable and read aloud Kinyarwanda texts for children in P1-P3. The copyright to these books was tied up between the donor and the Ministry of Education, effectively limiting the option of the books being sold to readers on the free market. Furthermore, with a subsequent change in national curriculum, the titles were no longer earmarked for government funds, ultimately resulting in no mechanism for the books to reach readers in the future.

STATE OF THE PUBLISHING SECTOR IN 2013

In 2013, prior to support received from Save the Children, the children’s book publishing sector in Rwanda was negligible. There were only three local publishing businesses who had developed and published a collective total of 12 Kinyarwanda children’s books for ages 0-9.2 The few individuals involved in the book sector lacked professional skills in key technical areas related to book development and supply. Local publishers did not have a strong understanding of how to develop high quality books that spoke to a range of reading levels and interests. Similarly, publishing houses had limited experience in the necessary business dimensions of the industry, and weren’t able to

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9 Global Book Fund Feasibility Report, Tanzania Case Study -Annex 3
10 Advancing the Right to Read Program Review 2013
effectively engage in marketing, forecasting, product research and customer engagement. Local publishers were not
competitive in government tenders and only a handful book distribution points existed nationally. As a result, the
industry was stagnant with few prospects to develop.

There was also a broad-spectrum shortage of experienced professionals operating within the other key book sector
fields. There was a pool of talented artists yet only a couple of individuals specialized in developing illustrations for/of
children. With a largely oral tradition in Rwanda, few individuals had been exposed to literature from a young age,
and had developed a passion and commitment to the writing profession. There were some existing authors with
experience documenting traditional oral stories, however, the vast majority of the stories contained violence, sexual
content or other inappropriate themes for children. This was the literary heritage that writers were coming with
which in turn affected the way potential authors approached writing for children.

The absence of specialized publishing professionals reflected the weak investment in the book sector in Rwanda,
likely due to a perceived lack of market for local language books. The widely-held belief was that there were limiting
factors inhibiting a demand, with most people pointing to the obvious lack of purchasing power of the average, low-
income Rwandan. It was believed that middle- or higher-income Rwandans with expendable income either preferred
their children to read in a European language (e.g. French or English) or lacked a reading culture and didn’t
appreciate the value of investing in books, particularly for younger children. This was a reasonable conviction at the
time, when the only significant customer for local language books was the Ministry of Education, with the vast
majority of the funds being used to procure textbooks. Due to the lack of capacity of the local publishing industry,
the supplementary reading materials that were being purchased by the government were most often developed by
international publishers and being translated in to Kinyarwanda. At times, this resulted in books that failed to
resonate within the Rwandan context, either due to unfamiliar images, storylines or character names. It also
exacerbated the cyclical nature of the challenge: a lack of market prevented investment in a local book sector, yet
a lack of skills in local book sector actors prevented them from developing products that could secure a market.

It is also worth noting the policy environment in Rwanda included constraints at the system level which affected the
growth of the sector. Prohibitively high taxes on paper resulted in relatively high cost of investment in printing of
books. Additionally, the banking sector did not recognize or trust the publishing industry as a sound financial
investment, and thus made it difficult for interested investors to raise capital required to compete in the occasional
government book tenders. These system level challenges, coupled with deficiencies of professional capacity and
pervasive supply side issues, limited the potential of the local book industry to grow in Rwanda.

AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Within Rwanda, there were multiple factors that contributed to an enabling environment for local book sector
growth. These positive contextual features include, but are not limited to, the following realities in Rwanda:

- Kinyarwanda is a local language but has an official status like English and French. It is also the language of
  instruction from pre-primary throughout lower primary grades. The institutional support for the language
  is central to the ability of the book sector to progress and grow.

- Rwanda is a small country by any measure. Virtually all of the professional activity is concentrated in the
  capital city of Kigali which lends itself to several logistical advantages including making activities accessible
  to relevant book sector stakeholders, relatively easy dissemination of campaign messages throughout the
country, etc.

- Strong government oversight of the education sector, including the book approval process, contributed to
  relatively simple communication and collaboration with the curriculum body of the Ministry of Education

- Ambitious government-led agenda for development that includes a drive for homegrown initiatives that fuel
  the local economy and promote a positive image of the country’s cultural identity.

INITIAL RCBI PROJECT DESIGN

The book development support from Save the Children initially took shape as a project called Rwandan
Children’s Book Initiative (RCBI). RCBI was designed as a component of Advancing the Right to Read, Save
the Children’s wider education program supporting literacy for children in Rwanda from birth to age nine. With financial support of the Innovation for Education Fund (a partnership between the Governments of Rwanda and the UK) and Comic Relief, RCBI targeted its focus on both book development and use. Internal funds from Save the Children UK also contributed to support of books for the 0-3 age range in order to provide baby books for parenting programs. While these internal funds were a small amount, they were critical to support development areas during times when securing other funding proved difficult.

RCBI focused on increasing children’s access to reading materials by promoting and supporting the production and provision of books. This holistic approach aimed to strengthen all aspects of the book chain, from book developers to end users, in order to increase both the availability and use of high-quality, age-appropriate Kinyarwanda children’s books.

The RCBI approach entailed an innovative, whole-system approach to book development and use which included the key outcomes:

- **Capacity building** local publishers to produce high quality, age appropriate, local language children’s books;
- **Stimulating supply and demand** for these children’s books;
- **Provision** of the purchased materials to intervention primary schools;
- **Train teachers, head teachers, government education officers, parents and caregivers to use the materials effectively to more effectively support improved literacy and learning outcomes**;
- **Generate evidence** to influence effective replication, scale up and policy change.

A group of five local publishers enlisted in the initial RCBI publishing support activities in 2014. Only one of these publishing houses had previous experience publishing children’s books. The other aspiring publishers had some professional experience with regional publishers and were keen to extend their experience to begin their own businesses. Several of the publishing companies involved only a single person comprising the entirety of the business, with some professional processes, such as editing, outsourced to contractors.

A 2015 assessment of RCBI evaluated the impact of the intervention at a national and local level. Key RCBI milestones at the national level included improvement in the quality and supply of age-appropriate Kinyarwanda children’s books and increasing the demand for these books. Through trainings, 311 (122 women, 189 men) professionals from the book sector had strengthened capacity to produce better books. The quantity of high-quality, age-appropriate Kinyarwanda children’s books increased, with more than 800 new high-quality Kinyarwanda children’s books published. Figure 1 shows the improved quality of books developed by publishers who attended RCBI trainings.

The evaluation demonstrated proof of concept and formed the basis of future publishing sector support. Book Use activities took the shape of other school and community based project activities with elements of book provision, while it was decided that Save the Children invested in the stand-alone book development approach by creating a distinct unit within Rwanda Country Office.

**DEFINING THE STRATEGIC APPROACH TO BOOK DEVELOPMENT**

Building from the RCBI pilot, Save the Children strengthened its collaboration with publishing industry stakeholders, education ministries, and libraries in order to bolster existing systems and increase output and availability of quality local language children’s books. In an attempt to define this multi-pronged approach, to the book development work has been distilled down to the following key activities.
1. Provide quality, relevant training and ongoing mentoring to the publishing industry and its constituent parts

Publishers

After initial consultations with publishers, a capacity gaps assessment was conducted to inform the framework of a professional training program. Decisions around training topics and sequencing were also influenced by staff insight in to areas for improvement, as well as the availability of skilled trainers competent in specific areas. Identifying trainers remained a consistent challenge for the program throughout the duration of activities. Internationally, there were experienced individuals available for consultancies, however this was usually associated with higher costs, both in terms of remuneration and travel expenses. Additionally, the fact that the Rwandan publishing industry was nascent meant that the realities of the market were entirely disparate to the more developed international markets the consultants had experience in. This affected the relevance of some of the trainings delivered by international consultants, particularly those done in the first years of the program.

Learning from this, program staff adopted two solutions to delivering relevant and appropriate trainings. The first strategy was to headhunt experienced professionals from the region, particularly from Kenya and Uganda, where there is the existence of more developed industries positing models of growth for Rwanda. These trainers were more likely to understand the context of a nascent publishing industry and share learning around what is involved in moving the sector to the next level, as well as pitfalls to avoid. The second strategy employed was to design and deliver the trainings in-house. Program staff had more experience in several of these topics, especially those literature-focused areas, and were able to tailor a training to exactly fit the identified needs observed.

Training topics spanned a wide range of areas, including literature and book related areas which were often unfamiliar to publishers due to the limited exposure to a diverse array of children’s books. These trainings served to build a foundational understanding of different types and genres of children’s books, and the key considerations for making high-quality titles within these categories. Additionally, a number of trainings focused on the business aspects of the industry in order to build the professional skills necessary to manage a financially viable publishing house. Trainings were intended to be practical and participatory, with publishers sharing experience and advise in a collegial environment conducive to relationship building.

As the publishers grew in the experience and know-how, they required higher levels of professional guidance. In early 2018, Save the Children forged a strategic partnership with the corporate social responsibility division of Penguin Random House, the single largest publishing entity worldwide. As a result, two senior executives from Penguin Random House visited Rwanda to facilitate a workshop with twenty-three local Rwandan publishers. The week-long workshop highlighted key professional aspects of the industry as well as insight into how to balance the various elements of a book, from the story to the illustrations to the design, in order to produce high quality children’s books. Rwandan publishers have cited this training as an invaluable professional development opportunity and continue to benefit from ongoing mentorship from the Penguin Random House trainers.

Authors

Save the Children has empowered aspiring authors through writers’ workshops that expand their understanding of children’s books and build their capacity to create high quality contextually relevant Kingarwanda children’s stories. Trainings employed different approaches to improving the theoretical grasp of children’s literature as well as the practical writing skills of authors. A key strategy throughout these workshops was to continually share examples of successful children’s books and effectively increase trainee’s exposure to diverse, creative representations of children’s literature.

As a means of furthering learning acquired from trainings, the writers received on-going mentoring support from Save the Children staff. Workshops were often followed by individualized coaching sessions as authors developed
and refined the story drafts. Particularly during the first years of SCI support, story drafts consistently incorporated elements that were wholly unsuitable for young children, including gruesome murders, decapitation, and rape. The reoccurrence of violence or death in stories seemed to be a legacy of the horrific past that many adults lived through in Rwanda. Most adults do not believe there is any danger in exposing children to violent descriptions and images, considering the reality of such events and occurrences. Most Rwandans were exposed to violent, vulgar oral stories as children themselves, which affected how they view what is suitable for children. Issues around age-appropriate themes continue to be a central discussion point that Save the Children staff emphasize in order to shift cultural mindsets.

Particularly between 2013-2015, authors benefited from coaching from Save the Children staff as they provided bespoke advice on improving their writing. As the profession grew, it was clear that this individualized level of attention was unsustainable and a more longitudinal approach to bolstering authors was necessary. The subsequent section on communities of practice describes the evolution of Save the Children’s support to authors.

Illustrators & Designers

Through specialized workshops, Save the Children supported more than 50 professional artists in becoming skilled children’s books illustrators. In a bid to attract a cadre of talented professionals to contribute to the industry, several of these trainings took the shape of introductory workshops targeting individuals with art talent but lacking the specialized knowledge and skills involved in illustrating for children. One strategy employed was to enlist students from the local art school in Rubavu district which effectively led to increased participation of Rwandans in the area of children’s book illustration, particularly from youth looking to identify future career paths.

More experienced artists were invited to attend Illustrators Master classes where they honed specific skills or received guidance on working with different mediums to expand their stylistic repertoire, such as trainings on the use of mache or Chinese ink. The program benefited from an experienced foreign art teacher residing in Kigali who was able to facilitate a number of illustrators workshops as well as provide ongoing support to the artistic elements of story drafts. She was also able to support aspiring designers through several practical trainings seeking to build specialized skills in designing children’s books. Additionally, a few master classes were held by world renowned illustrators, including Sophie Blackall and Leslie Patricelli, who agreed to pro bono involvement in Save the Children’s program.

Establishing a new profession in the creative sector comes with its added benefits and ripple effects. Pacifique Kabandana, the founder of Kigali Arts Centre, has experienced industry success as partial result of Save the Children’s capacity building program for artists. He started as a young illustrator participating in trainings and progressed to an art educator, initiating his own Illustrators master classes. He is now a full entrepreneur hosting an art gallery that supports most of The young illustrators of children’s books. He organized publishers to synergize and develop a collective illustrator’s website showcasing artists’ portfolios in order to attract clientele and professionalize the sector.

Editors

Through Save the Children’s initiatives, editors and designers have received training and capacity building as well as networking opportunities. Editors have had the opportunity to link with the Rwanda Academy of Languages and Culture and other editors in the industry locally and abroad. In addition, over the past four years, editors have been included in Save the Children’s quarterly book review meetings thus learning how to create books at an international quality level. In 2018, a cohort of editors self-organized to contribute to the Global Reading Network’s pilot exercise on quality assurance of digital content for the Global Digital Library.
Designers received mentorship from a consultant in 2016 to develop their skills and professionalism. Many of the designers that have worked with Save the Children are now being hired by other organizations due to their unique and technical skill set and ability to create high quality books.

2. Support the establishment of communities of practice for each constituent part of the industry

Beyond capacity building, Save the Children also established a key programmatic outcome focused on the building of cohesion and collaboration among and between book sector actors. The objective has been to create vibrant communities of practice and professional collectives that will serve as advocacy, capacity building, and networking platforms for all publishing industry actors. This eventually led to individuals investing more in the success of the sector as a whole, as well as provided unexpected gains, several of which are outlined in the subsequent paragraphs.

Rwanda Children’s Book Organization (RCBO)

There already was the existence of the Rwanda Publishers Union, however, with several of the members being representatives from large multinational publishing companies, local publishers felt they didn’t share the same goals and objectives. Generally, large publishing houses are only interested in government textbook tenders which represent the lion’s share of the market. Local publishers felt they were invested in achieving lasting progress towards a robust publishing sector in the longer term, and wanted to congregate publishers together with the same objective. After several legal iterations of the association, the Rwanda Children’s Book Organization (RCBO) is a nationally recognized civil society organization that promotes books and the culture of reading in Rwanda.

With most local publishers as members, RCBO has provided a platform for collective advocacy in the face of common industry threats, such as the government initiative to produce their own textbooks. It has allowed publishers to plan for effective lobbying and promotion of children’s books in Rwanda. One of the reasons behind the creation of such a platform is to establish the local publishing industry as a partner of choice in education, culture, and development of the country. With support from Save the Children, RCBO has begun recognizing achievements in the sector through annual industry awards in categories such as Best Author, Best Illustrator, Best Designer, and Children’s Choice Award for Best Book.

Additionally, through the establishment of RCBO, members delineated a common vision for the publishing collaborative, including an explicit responsibility to play a major role in promoting the culture of reading in Rwanda. This was a strategic decision to engage in corporate social responsibility, but also a business-minded approach to developing readership habits that will eventually stimulate demands for their products. As a result, members have cooperated with each other and with other private and public sector actors to implement a range of literacy-supportive initiatives and partnerships. Activities were entirely led by the individual members of RCBO as they pursued opportunities within their networks and interests. Some examples of these literacy-supportive activities include:

- Museums with children’s reading corners (Editions Bakame)
- Book access points at local wells (Mudacumura Publishing)
- National book campaigns (Arise Education, Ubuntu Publishers)
- School writing competitions (Furaha Publishers, Excel Education Partners)
- Donation of books to Kigali Public Library, schools, and a reading club in Gicumbi District
- Organizing Umuganda reading mornings in the communities

Through these efforts, RCBO has not only contributed to improving children’s access to books, but has also effectively reclaimed the narrative around publishers’ reputations, ethics and motivations. The single platform has

13 USAID Mureke Dusome Quarterly Report 2016
allowed the individuals to recalibrate their ambitions and approaches, and has initiated a small scale renaissance of indigenous publishing. Growing in professionalism and visibility, The Rwanda Children’s Book Organization is set to become the reference in publishing collaboratives, nationally and regionally.

**Abana Writer’s Café**

In response to the challenges of building writing capacity through one-off trainings, program staff developed the idea of creating a literary community of practice. The objective was to provide a regular event that brought together book enthusiasts, in the hope that some of these individuals could be inspired to begin writing for children. The result has been Abana Writer’s Café, a monthly gathering of established and aspiring illustrators, writers, and storytellers who meet to share their work and receive feedback. The regular event held the last Monday of every month is also an opportunity for publishers to spot and recruit new talent, and has effectively fostered an increase in cooperation between book sector players. Originally taking place in Kigali, the event now happens in several districts across the country. Now Abana Writers Café operates in Muhanga, Musanze, Nyabihu, Burera, Kayonza, and Gicumbi districts. In Burera, a Save the Children-trained Sector Education Officer has now cascaded the training to two groups of teachers based in his sector. In Muhanga and Gicumbi, the Abana Writers Café chapters have had a collective total of more than 85 stories published by Kigali-based houses.

When asked about what Save the Children interventions have been the most beneficial, publishers, authors, and illustrators alike mentioned the benefits of Abana Writers Café. Maurice Murisa, an established children’s book author in Rwanda, described the impact of AWC on his career:

“I used to write stories when I was at university but I didn’t have any information about the publishing industry or even if there was one in Rwanda. I would visit printing businesses to see if they had a designer to work on my manuscript, and then I’d print some copies of the book. It took a lot of time, money and my books didn’t reach people so I gave up. In 2014, I attended Save the Children’s writers workshop where I learnt about making a good story for children but I struggled to incorporate all the elements I learnt into my story. The biggest contribution that inspired my development came from Abana Writers Café. I read my story to the group, and they had such useful recommendations that it transformed my story into something more readable, funny and unique. I had previously had a brutal ending where the hyena killed and ate the sheep but after the recommendations from AWC members, I decided to change the ending into one that celebrated unexpected friendship. I then participated in a collaborative workshop that brought writers, illustrators, editors, designers and publishers together where I met a publisher who liked the story. He gave me a contract, and I got my first children’s book published.”

After three years of meeting, the Abana Writers Café forum continues to inject vibrancy into the industry with a community of individuals with a keen interest in reading and writing children’s books. Interestingly, avid membership has come from a relatively young segment of the population, which was a departure from the previous engagement of older storytellers. Particularly in the original Kigali chapter, the event has attracted educated, creative-minded ‘millennials’ often engaged in freelance cultural work such as filmmaking or photography. Several of these younger participants are now some of the most prolific authors in the country, writing best-selling stories.

3. Maintain a book review committee to provide feedback to publishers, assess quality and inform procurements
In 2015, following publishers’ requests for on-going advice, the program staff convened an internal book review committee at which Save the Children staff regularly evaluated drafts of children’s books submitted by local publishing houses. The committee provided bespoke advice to publishers on how to improve the quality of the text and illustrations. It also suggested modifications, drawn from staff’s experience with the REB\(^{14}\) evaluation process, to increase the likelihood of the storybook ultimately being approved by the government. This system provided a mechanism for program staff to continuously support publishers in improving the quality of their work.

Book reviews also served the purpose of informing purchasing decisions. One of the features of the Save the Children model has been the use of **advance market commitments (AMC)** in the initial year of programming. In order to quell fears about market demand, it was necessary to incentivize publishers to develop local language children’s books and to motivate them to work towards higher levels of quality. Most publishers took some time to understand how this mechanism worked but it has been an effective way of stimulating the supply chain via the promise of a guaranteed, bulk purchase of books that meet the organization’s quality standards. AMCs allowed publishers to print large quantities of stock while still having enough financial resources available to simultaneously invest in new book production.

As the industry grew, the publishing outputs increased in both quantity and quality. Publishers were applying their increasing knowledge and skills to make better books. To date, over a thousand titles have been evaluated by this committee, with detailed feedback provided to publishing staff both orally and in writing. In 2017, Save the Children began to involve a new cadre of editors in the review process as a means of increasing their professional experience and understanding of quality elements of children’s literature. This involvement has proven successful, and editors are demonstrating more comprehensive editing skills beyond the basic copy-editing for errors approach that had been the norm in Rwanda. As a result of increased capacity, in 2018, editors associated with RCBO members began to collaborate to review titles from publishing members in an attempt to improve the collective quality of the local publishing sector’s outputs.

Book reviews have also been used as a means of stimulating demand. External reviews invited representation from partner organizations with expertise and interest in children’s books, such as UNICEF and World Vision. These partner organizations are also prospective purchasers of children’s books, so it effectively increased their awareness of the existence of these high-quality children’s books soon available for purchasing.

Following successful book review sessions where a wide range of titles were approved, Save the Children explored the efficacy of organizing purchasing consortia to showcase the new books. In principle, a purchasing consortium brings together prospective buyers of children’s books with the intention of combining orders. If publishers have larger print runs, the unit cost is driven down for all of the customers and the publishers yield larger profit margins. Realistically, the specific procurement processes of each consumer or organization frequently complicated this process. To overcome this challenge, pre-agreements would need to be established between participating organizations or institutions, a reality that would require a more widespread understanding of the rationale for supporting the local publishing industry. In spite of the difficulty in the actual co-procurement, purchasing consortia still offered the opportunity to raise awareness of the existence of the newest collection books. If the consortia are well-organized, it can effectively stimulate demand and empower publishers to be able to hold a greater stock of books.

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\(^{14}\) REB, abbreviated for Rwanda Education Bureau, is the arm of the Ministry of Education tasked with implementation of education development initiatives.
4. Invest in initiatives that establish demand for the newly developed local language books

Engaging Booksellers

As a critical mass of Kinyarwanda children’s books developed, the program pivoted and began exploring how to support booksellers in country. In order to increase access and stimulate demand for the newly developed books, distribution points were key. In 2013, there were less than five book shops in the country carrying children’s books, none of which were located outside of urban centers. It was clear that access to books would continue to be problematic without book distribution points. Program staff scanned the educational landscape to identify and recruit interested people to sell books. An expression of interest was advertised and two book distributors working with large multinational publishers were identified. Both were curious yet wary of the prospect of selling children’s books in rural areas and ensured there were safeguards in the MoU signed with Save the Children to mitigate any losses.

In collaboration with one of these booksellers, children’s book fairs were piloted in Kigali as well as in two rural districts (Gicumbi and Huye), one of which had widespread literacy sensitization conducted through the Literacy Boost program. The objective was to understand the feasibility of book selling in rural and poverty-stricken areas. Save the Children subsidized book costs in order for there to be a range of price points from which customers could choose, and documented spending patterns. Interestingly, book sales were greater in the Gicumbi districts which had benefitted from reading awareness campaigns and parenting sessions, in spite of the fact that it was a poorer region with lower literacy levels. Additionally, the pilot fairs also found that people seemed willing to spend coins on a book, yet less willing to do so once the price point necessitated a 500 Franc note.16

From this, the book sellers further collaborated to organize a mobile book selling pilot in Ngororero District, an extremely rural area of Rwanda where Save the Children was implementing a parenting program. Community members were being sensitized on positive parenting practices, including an element on using baby books to support children’s emergent literacy. Working with the two Kigali-based booksellers, twenty-seven Ngororero locals interested in selling books were identified as mobile booksellers. Guidelines for community book selling were developed and the mobile booksellers were trained on key principles on product management and sales. The rurally located mobile booksellers were linked to one of the Kigali-based booksellers who oversaw the sales activity, replenishing stock when necessary. Provided with a backpack, the mobile booksellers circulated through their communities, often attending market days and setting up small stalls.

Through these two pilots, the prospect of book selling outside of Kigali was not proven as a lucrative endeavor, however, the fact that any books were sold refuted theories of weak family purchasing power being an insurmountable barrier. It was made clear that motivation to buy books was highly linked to increased knowledge and exposure to books through parenting and community engagement activities. In these sensitized areas, even though parents couldn’t afford much because of low purchasing power, there was interest and motivation to buy if the books were priced right. This was in stark contrast to areas with higher income families where the curiosity and interest in books simply was not there due to lack of exposure to the books and the benefits of reading. A few publishers took notice of this and began experimenting with strategies for making more cost-effective books with lower price points to be more financially accessible to the average rural Rwandan. Rwandan Publishers have also taken ownership and initiative to spearhead and organize annual and bi-annual book fairs in Kigali and beyond.

In 2017, the community bookselling training guidelines were integrated in the Abana Writers Café facilitators guide in order for individuals to link up with Kigali-based book sellers or publishers to distribute books. As a result, there are now book selling points in Nyabihu, Musanze, Korangi, and Muhanga districts initiated by RCBO members. Unfortunately, as outlined in the recommendations section, sales data is not being regularly collected in order to illustrate the financial success of these book selling points.

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16 At the time of the book fair, 500 Rwandan francs was the equivalent of about 60 US cents.
Organize Campaigns

In cooperation with passionate book sector players, several national campaigns were organized to galvanize the general public in the promotion of cultivating a culture of reading in Rwanda. In collaboration with a local bookseller, Arise Education, and MINISPOC, Save the Children supported several national-level campaigns. One particularly innovative campaign, Gira Igitabo,17 was conducted from 2017-2018 and involved a range of interesting activities, including engaging public figures to co-author stories with children to raise visibility of the books. It also piloted approaches that stimulated reading habits by providing books on public buses to encourage recreational reading during longer bus rides to secondary cities outside of Kigali. Anecdotal evidence indicated that this initiative was effective in the sense that it raised awareness of the existence of Kinyarwanda books, as many commuters indicated that they were not aware there were books written in non-colonial languages. It also was successful in that it ‘generated a buzz’ in lesser reached communities, garnering extensive media coverage and instigating interesting discussions from people otherwise not concerned with literacy. Yet it is worth highlighting that this initiative was not intended to be a sustainable solution to increasing access to books considering provisions were not made for book management.

Support for library expansion

Recognizing that well-equipped community libraries are critical to foster reading and reach beyond schools, Save the Children has worked with government counterparts to strengthen the public library network. In collaboration with Kigali Public Library, a mapping exercise of existing inventory of books and libraries across the country was conducted in order to better advocate for strategic resourcing, particularly targeted funding for the purchase of locally-published materials. As the bulk of library purchases tend to be supplementary readers, the influx of overseas book donation programs which ship tens of millions of free books to African public and other libraries every year negatively impacts the local book publishing industry and distributes irrelevant reading materials to readers.18 Some progress was made as a result of advocacy efforts, most notably the Kigali Public Library for the first time purchasing Kinyarwanda children’s books to source their Children’s Corner.

Generally, the program experienced challenges in supporting sustainable improvements to the library system due to changes in the government library structure. More targeted support is necessary to build the capacity of the local library associations to engage in the advocacy necessary for establishing a more conducive government policies and practices, including funding and staffing to support the expansion of the public library network.

Children’s Readership Preference Study

In late 2016, Save the Children engaged a consultant to conduct a Children’s Readership Preference study, an innovative approach to documenting book demand in Rwanda. This study recorded and examined the broad variety of opinions from children about their reading preferences. Its findings challenged commonly held assumptions that young children do not want to read, and rather evidenced the opposite: The study found that children have a myriad of opinions and personal, unique lives as well as common external factors that shape them and determine what they want to read. The research aimed to explore those variables, bring to light the assumptions around them, and ultimately provide some insight for book sector actors on how to develop books that reflect Rwandan children’s reading preferences. Through the dissemination of this study, the dialogue around the reading and books shifted, with publishers and government players alike beginning to speak more to the need to develop of reading habits or a love for reading by ensuring children have access to quality books that pique interest.

17 Translated as “Have or take a book”
5. Advocacy for a conducive book publishing environment

The policy environment is central to the existence of a healthy indigenous book industry. A comprehensive advocacy strategy outlined the project’s key objectives. Through this, Save the Children staff have focused their efforts in advocating for key policy issues affecting the sector, including the establishment of a National Book Policy. Government officials at all levels have been encouraged to urge the population to read more, to support children’s literacy and to buy books for children. In addition, Save the Children has also focused on raising awareness of the existence of the newly developed Kingarwanda children’s books as well as the rationale for supporting a local book industry. Efforts were made to persuade development partners to work with local publishers, rather than developing materials themselves. The subsequent impact of these efforts is further detailed in forthcoming sections.

National Book Policies (NBP) establish a legal framework to bolster a domestic book industry with a view to ensuring that reading materials are developed and accessible. According to UNESCO, NBPs provide an assessment on the state of health of all of the links within the book chain from which policy objectives can be tailored. Policies often include measures to:

- encourage literary creation
- establish an appropriate legal framework for the protection of authors’ rights
- provide fiscal, credit and administrative incentives for the publishing industry
- facilitate nationwide distribution and free international circulation of books
- establish nationwide library networks
- introduce new methods for teaching reading
- train human resources in the different skills involved in the book sector.

GROWTH IN THE BOOK SECTOR: 2014-2018

PUBLISHING OUTPUTS

As a result of Save the Children’s support, the quality, quantity, and range of local language children’s books in Rwanda’s publishing sector has grown significantly. There has been an overwhelming increase in number of books available on the free market, including the development and production of over 800 books by publishers receiving support from Save the Children. Improvements in quality, while more difficult to measure, are widely acknowledged by stakeholders and government. Prominent bookstores in Kigali, Ikirezi and Caritas, previously weren’t distributing products from Rwandan publishers due to concerns around book quality but now credit Kingarwanda children’s books as one of their best-selling items.19

The diversity and range of books available on the local Rwandan book market also expanded. Prior to Save the Children’s involvement in the industry, there were no developmentally appropriate books available for children aged 0-6. Currently, there are over 200 titles for this age range, including baby books, fiction, nonfiction, and braille books.

Many publishing houses have also now grown to include teams that work on specialized areas within the book development process. Publishers hire professional in-house editors to work on new title development which has contributed to a critical improvement in the accuracy of the texts. With a stronger capital base, they are also now able to compete for tenders with both NGOs and government, opening up additional markets previously unavailable to local publishers.
A snapshot of publishing sector growth: Before & After

<table>
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<tr>
<td>ONLY 12 locally made local language children’s books for ages 7-9</td>
<td>OVER 800 locally made local language children’s books for ages 7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZERO children’s books available for ages 0-6</td>
<td>OVER 200 books available for ages 0-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONLY 3 local publishers</td>
<td>24 local publishers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LESS THAN 10% locally made children’s books featuring a girl as the main character</td>
<td>OVER 30% of all children’s books published in Rwanda have a girl as a main character</td>
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Additionally, many publishers are diversifying their activities beyond Kinyarwanda children’s books. Three publishers have begun co-publishing textbooks in foreign countries, while several others have sold adaptation rights in other languages.

DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE BOOKS

Save the Children built the capacity of local Rwandan publishers to include positive disability messaging in children’s books through trainings and workshops. Kibondo Editions, a local Rwandan publisher, has created books for children with visual impairment and other disabilities known as tactile books. Tactile books can be about experiences, objects, or based on different themes and play a significant role in fostering the development of literacy skills in children with visual disabilities, as well as for children with other types of disabilities. These types of books help children to learn “reading” using their hands and other parts of their bodies. This way, they will appreciate the “reading” activities in a way that keeps them engaged as they interact with books in the same way they interact with their environment. If tactile books feature patterns paired with Braille, then the books become ideal reading materials for children with visual disabilities.20

In addition to tactile books, publishers have created children’s books geared toward children who are visually impaired using Braille. These new books are making children’s books more accessible to children with visual impairment. Save the Children negotiated free adaption rights of ten Kinyarwanda children’s books to be published in Braille, and seeks to collaborate with the Rwanda Union of the Blind to print these books at a discount price and distribute them to schools. 200 copies of 10 titles featuring Braille will be distributed to schools teaching children with visual impairment.

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PROMOTING GENDER POSITIVE BOOKS

Save the Children in partnership with the Rwanda Men’s Resource Center (RWAMREC), a local organization specializing in gender issues, conducted a gender analysis report on Kingarwanda children’s books published in Rwanda. Based on this analysis, training sessions on Gender, Inclusion, and Diversity were developed for all publishing sector training programs. The training opens with an introduction on gender equality and gender equity. The main discussion points include the introduction to masculinities/femininities, male engagement, the importance of gender inclusion in development, and what research concludes on gender inclusion in children’s books.

During these trainings, participants did not always agree on issues around gender and sex roles, particularly within the Rwandan context. Initially, publishers were reluctant to embrace gender positive representations in their books, considering it as a “Western concept” attempting to influence the Rwandan culture. A main activity of the training was to examine the gender roles and stereotypes in Rwanda, and how these stereotypes play out in storybooks. At the start of this exercise, one publisher remarked on the gender equity represented in one of his books about children going on a walk through their neighborhood. After further discussion, the trainer pointed out that on each page, a boy led the way while the girls always followed, a point that resonated with the publishers. Through this dialogue and self-reflection, publishers and authors have become more aware of their blind spots and are now developing gender positive transformative books that are culturally relevant and reflect the lives of all children in Rwanda.

Gender has also been reinforced through encouraging girls and women to participate in writer and illustrator trainings. The most significant change has been the number of published female illustrators: in 2015 there were no

### Challenging gender norms through children’s books

Dr. Christine Warugaba is a writer, founder and the manager of Furaha Publishers. She has attended Save the Children trainings and workshops. Her focus has been to challenge gender norms through children’s books. With over 90% of her books featuring a female protagonist, she is changing the way children’s books portray girls.

“As a young girl, I loved to read but found that most books had male characters. With time, this changed in the West, but for our young publishing industry here in Rwanda, this has not yet changed. As an author, having female characters comes naturally to me as I relate to them. I want to empower girls with my stories so they have the confidence and knowledge that they can be anyone and do anything they want. As a publisher, I look for similar stories that will be inspiring to girls.” – Christine

female illustrators contributing to published children’s books, whereas by 2018 there were eight female artists with this accolade.

As a result of these efforts, there has been an increase of girls as main protagonists in locally developed children books from less than 10% to more than 30%. Although publishers are making more gender sensitive books, there is still work to be done in the sector in order to mainstream the idea gender transformative children’s books. Ongoing capacity building, dialogue and exposure to gender issues will be necessary in order to achieve larger scale change in publishing outputs.

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STRENGTHENING COOPERATION BETWEEN ACTORS

Save the Children has also invested focused efforts to increase collaboration between these central actors in order to ultimately establish a self-sustaining industry which draws on the mix of skills and expertise that come together to produce and publish literature. Initially, mistrust existed between different players to the extent that several publishers only had a few authors and illustrators with which they had ever worked. There was reluctance to contract new people, so as a result, many publishers consistently produced the same style of book. To initially overcome this, Save the Children had to intervene to bring together illustrators and publishers, mediating the negotiations associated with the process of commissioning work and purchasing the rights to it. Once publishers demonstrated their professionalism, illustrators were able to engage directly on contracts from that point onwards. Following this, activities like Abana Writers Café brought together writers, illustrators and publishers and encouraged the book sector actors to forge new connections, allowing Save the Children to remove itself from the book chain business dealings.

The growth in the sector has also led to shifts in more supportive procurement practices from the Government. In 2012, of the 1,008 book titles approved by REB, only 136 books were written in Kinyarwanda (mostly translated from books published in the region) and targeted children in Primary 1-Primary 3. Only 4 of those books were published by Rwandan publishers. There was only one publisher developing quality children’s books but she was not working with REB. By the end of 2017, Save the Children had supported the development of 213 books that were REB-approved, a staggering shift in the relationship between publishers and the government. Furthermore, as a result of advocacy by Save the Children, Rwanda Education Board, the Pre-primary Teaching and Learning Materials tender included picture books and read aloud story books for pre-primary for the first time in 2015/2016.

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Save the Children has invested program resources in efforts to improve the Government of Rwanda’s policies affecting the local book sector. After engaging in advocacy with the Ministry of Sports and Culture (the Ministry charged with promotion of reading culture and creative arts professionalization), Save the Children provided technical support to the drafting of a National Book Development Policy in 2014. Subsequent changes in the government library structure led to the policy being stalled at Cabinet level the following year. In December 2016, MINISPOC requested support on updating the draft policy in an effort to ensure the policy is validated and adopted before 2019.

After years of advocacy with the Ministry of Education to provide substantive support to the newly acquired area of community libraries, a public association, the Rwanda Community Libraries Forum, emerged. Flexible budgeting approaches allowed for a small amount of funds be directed towards supporting the establishment of the association, development of its bylaws, and its initial member conference. Save the Children has also led the way in supporting the Ministry of Education to develop a National Literacy Policy, ensuring that one of the key objectives focuses on the strengthening of the national book sector. Specific measures were largely informed by the previously drafted National Book Development Policy’s assessment of the sector.

In 2017, the government adopted a new policy to develop their own textbook materials, an action which poses a grave risk to the budding publishing sector. However, despite the uncertain climate around book publishing in Rwanda due to this reform, publishers have been able to remain with the supplementary materials market because, according to a REB official, “at least publishers have the capacity to make storybooks.”

This position as a partner of choice for the Government of Rwanda yields benefits but also risks. In Rwanda, like most other developing contexts, relations between the Ministry of Education and publishers have been mired with conflicts and rumors of unethical dealings. Save the Children staff toed a delicate line when advocating for best practices while refraining from any areas that have business or political dimensions. A small amount of funds was carved out to target strategic advocacy activities, and the budgeting approaches remained agile and often able to respond to opportunities as they arise. Effective advocacy required program staff to remain involved and relevant as government priorities and activities evolved. For example, as the Ministry of Education embarked on a curriculum overhaul, the program committed to contributing staff time to participate actively in the development of policies and practices that would be of future to the consequence of the local publishing industry.
LEARNING

Over the four years of supporting the book sector, tremendous progress in the sector is undeniable, but the question of what contributed to this change remains of interest. The following points highlight critical areas of program learning based on input from Save the Children staff and publishing representatives.

Substantive growth in a book sector hinges on the integrity, work ethic, and commitment of the publishing personalities at the forefront of the indigenous book sector movement. These initial leaders foster a professional culture that will normalize positive attributes within the industry with spillover effects on other sector actors. While there continues to be a diverse blend of personalities and attitudes at the helm of the private sector’s initiatives, the publishers and other book stakeholders have, for the most part, demonstrated professional integrity, work ethic, and dedication to the objective of promoting literacy for children in their country. This positivity and passion cannot be underestimated in terms of its contribution to a collaborative sector where stakeholders support a shared goal rather than compete individually for short term financial gains.

Programs should invest in and retain staff who are avid readers themselves and demonstrate a genuine understanding of the unique approach to working with the private sector. As with any project, there is a unique chemistry involved in the makeup of the program team, as well as their interactions between program staff and beneficiaries. In Rwanda, the program team brought together a set of essential skills necessary to foster positive productive relationships with book sector and government actors, as well as the creativity and strategic vision to drive impactful and innovative programming over the years.

Advocacy is a critical program activity necessary to positively influence the government to establish policies and practices that will allow a local book sector to thrive. Once Save the Children established its expertise in local language children’s literature, the government of Rwanda began to increasingly rely on Save the Children staff to provide technical support to the development of a new competence-based curriculum, drafting of relevant policies, and general support to the identification of quality supplemental reading materials for the early years.

Stimulating demand for newly developed books must be a central program outcome, and involve piloting a series of innovative strategies to better understand market dynamics and identify potential opportunities. Book sector growth is not sustainable until a market for local language children’s books begins to take shape in country. Program activities must be making continuous effort to stimulate demand for the newly developed books by employing strategies include supporting book campaigns, book fairs, linking publishers with retailers, urging for other organizations to procure books and engaging the media to publicize books and support publishers to expand their networks. Efforts should harness creativity and uninhibitedly explore unchartered areas, recognizing that every country has possible windows of opportunities unique to their context.

Develop a long-term plan for empowering the book sector, transitioning support as an initial capacity building partner to eventually playing the role of an ally that scaffolds the work of an independent, self-sustaining industry. To catalyze sustained growth, implementing partners and donors should strive for a five-year plan targeting support to the book publishing industry. This will allow for more effective high-level policy dialogue and planning for critical advocacy issues such as the supporting the host country government to development a national book policy. The plan also outlines intentional yet gradual phasing out of financial and technical support to publishers as they evolve their businesses and as professional associations assume management of activities.

Engaging a broad range of stakeholders strengthens the plurality of voices in the movement. The industry needs professionals contributing to the book chain as well as allies stimulating demand and promoting the sector. To build this base of supporters, it is worthwhile scanning the landscape for potential partners. Explore individuals with passionate about books or reading, or perhaps who have a vested interest in promoting literacy. It may also involve identifying individuals with a skill set that could transfer to the books sector or fill an existing gap. Take a calculated gamble and invest in individuals that can influence and play a key role in developing the sector.
The establishment and legitimacy of private sector associations or bodies is necessary to empower distinct professions within the book chain. Initial programming targeted the government adoption of some of these bodies in an effort to institutionalize the activities. However, public agencies and funds are subject to shifting priorities beyond the publishing sector’s control which can jeopardize progress. The current trend is to support the book sector to occupy more influence in to the private sector space by being able to establish independent professional bodies that can take forward their interests and priorities. These bodies not only contribute to collective advocacy efforts but also support increased professionalism and cooperation.

Use advance market commitments to jumpstart book development in the early stages. To encourage market demand, governments and donors should consider advance purchase commitments, providing publishers with an initial guarantee of profit on quality books developed to enable them to hold stock and continue to invest in new titles. Predictability of purchasing will also support publishers to budget more strategically and minimize costs.

Exercise agile programming, adapt to new challenges and opportunities as they arise. There are significant benefits to remaining flexible in budgeting and planning, particularly in an ever-evolving private sector industry influenced by waves of government priorities and plans. Encourage staff and stakeholders to pilot innovative strategies in response to shifts in the landscape. Consider how to tackle supply and demand issues from developmental points of view, not just literacy or reading, when opportunities arise in other arenas, such as as gender, entrepreneurship, youth employment, nutrition and hygiene, culture and arts, identity building, etc.

Have beneficiaries, participants and partners join in on the design of activities and inform them of outcomes. This increases relevance by ensuring the programs consider the needs of our partners and beneficiaries. It also contributes to accountability as the public is aware of the program plans, activities, and strategic decisions. Always be clear about what beneficiaries and partners are gaining from working with us. Networks, trust, accountability, and transparency are key to maintaining the relationships with publishers and partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FUTURE SUPPORT TO THE RWANDAN BOOK SECTOR

Despite the substantial evolution in the book sector in Rwanda, progress is still delicate. There are several crucial issues that threaten the progress achieved to date. The lack of appreciation of the importance of recreational reading, particularly in as it relates to local language and young readers, persists as an obstacle inhibiting the development of the robust culture of reading. Additionally, new challenges, such as the government’s policy to publish their own textbooks, also pose a risk to the growth in the local book industry. It is recommended that Save the Children continue to provide strategic support to the sector in a bid to cement progress achieved, with a focus on advocating for substantial policy level improvements to bolster the budding indigenous publishing industry.

As the book sector transitions to its next stage of development, it will be critical to understand the types of support it will need to sustain its growth. The RCBO has emerged as a professional collective striving to advance the interests of the industry as a whole. Hans Zell, an industry expert, has catalogued 24 Pan-African and regional book professional organizations, groups, and networks in Sub-Saharan Africa, most of which have not stood the test of time.²²

Zell suggests the following factors contributed to the eventual collapse of previous publishing organizations:

- “A failure of collective will, and a lack of the necessary commitment from the main intended stakeholders.
- A low degree of professionalism, lack of vision, and/or weak management.
- Donor or other funding ceased, and activities came to a standstill.

• Despite their best intentions and a goal of working for the common good, there was, in practice, an unwillingness to share information among the different stakeholders, for example professional experience and know-how, much less marketing intelligence or knowledge of digital/ICT skills.

• There was also an absence of visibility for a number of these organizations and networks: to make their activities widely known, through appropriate publicity, and (for those organizations that started in more recent years) through an attractive and regularly updated website, a presence on relevant social and professional media, and regular publication of an online newsletter.²³

Bearing in mind these evidence-based pitfalls, the following recommendations are based on author’s perspective, interviews with program staff and books sector representatives.

Support publishers to explore how to leverage technological innovations to modernize their business models. Electronic books for children will likely not replace print versions in the near future, yet it is more likely that both formats will coexist in the foreseeable future. However, publishers lack a thorough enough understanding of digital publishing to understand how to best engage in e-book development and sales. As Save the Children transitions the publishing sector to independent, self-sustaining activities, it is recommended that support is provided to publishers to better leverage the opportunities presented by digital books and open licensing. This will require re-conceptualizing traditional publishing business models and identifying income generating strategies.

Invest in figuring out bookselling and distribution models. Revenue sales for books is of paramount concern. Booksellers and distributors need to develop sustainable models for meeting the existing demand and identify strategies to penetrate additional markets. They should be supported to venture in to new territories and forge partnerships with innovative initiatives. For example, the African Books Collectivewas founded by a cohort of African publishers aiming to increase visibility for African publishing output in the international sphere.

Support the sector to collect credible data. “Book publishing data and book production statistics are important elements in measuring the growth and vitality of indigenous publishing in any part of the world, but reliable figures of book publishing output for the continent of Africa do not exist at the present time, with the exception of South Africa and, to a limited extent, for one or two other countries.”²⁴ Publishers would benefit from collecting statistics on everything from market research, to sales records, to documenting their impact on economic development in order to better position themselves as culture sector agents contributing to the Rwandan economy, to improve their business strategies as well as to engage in evidence-based lobbying to the governments.

Prepare the sector to leverage regional or continental opportunities for growth and expansion. As Rwanda begins to assume a stronger role in the African publishing arena, it is possible for Rwandan publishers to occupy more space in terms of the presence of its publishing outputs in less developed countries that still lack a formalized book sector, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, or Mozambique. Publishers and book sellers should be prepared to forge strategic partnerships on the continent in order to stimulate additional markets and increase collaboration.

Continue fostering dialogue and cooperation between the publishing sector and government authorities. Ongoing collaboration among government institutions is still critical to the sector’s viability. Cross-ministerial support for reading promotion would help to raise the visibility and resourcing of literacy-supporting campaigns and messaging. To achieve this, it would be advisable to establish a policy framework outlining areas of responsibilities and funding considerations.

Invest in strengthening the sector’s ability to advocate for legislative frameworks to protect Intellectual Property. There is a need to shed light on the extent of the problem of piracy in Rwanda, its form and dimensions and cross-cutting approaches to mitigating risks. This should look at accession by the government to international

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²³ Ibid.
instruments for the protection of copyright, national intellectual property legislation and the fiscal and administrative systems governing intellectual creation, and their institutional support.

REPLICATING THE APPROACH

It is important to recognize that there is no magic recipe for developing the local book sector. In the absence of the enabling factors existent in Rwanda contributing to a conducive environment, the program would have employed different strategies likely resulting in disparate outcomes. However, based off of Save the Children’s experience in Rwanda, the following points prescribe a process by which future programs could plan for book development initiatives.

1. Understand the publishing environment. Conduct a local book audit by implementing a children’s literature market survey and capacity gaps assessment of the sector. The process of collecting this information from book sellers and publishers will help to inform the current needs and assets of the book chain.

2. Organize and develop contextualized trainings and ongoing mentoring to the publishing industry that meet professionals where they are in terms of their existing assets and their skills gaps. Ensure each constituent part received training, beginning the first key cohort of content producers, the publishers, authors and illustrators. Later phase in support for a second cohort of content refiners, editors and designers. Over time, trainings focus on more specific skills. Once a critical mass of books has been developed, Support publishers to identify distribution points and enhance their marketing capacities.

3. Develop and share quality guidance to evaluate the age and cultural appropriateness of story drafts as well as the quality of writing and illustration and the physical production standards. When necessary, create guidelines that are relevant to different categories: picture books, levelled readers, concept books, early chapter books, etc.

4. Establish a book review committee to review new story drafts and provide feedback to publishers on how to improve the books before going to print. The committee also identifies and endorses books that that meet minimum quality standards.

5. Make advance purchase commitments to support local publishers to produce new titles in the knowledge that their titles will be purchased when they are brought to market. Require publishers to print a larger quantity than the advance market commitment to stimulate the supply chain.

6. Support the establishment of communities of practice for each constituent part of the Industry. For example, writer’s cafés, local publishers’ associations, etc.

7. Begin exploring support to book sellers and distributors to strengthen their ties to the publishers. Due to the bleak prospect of actually making a significant profit selling books, consider incentivizing them to engage in pilots to test opportunities for selling and distributing books outside of the conventional book stores.

8. Develop partnerships with other child-focused development actors to co-procure titles, thereby increasing the quantity of the orders and decreasing the unit prices of new titles. Book purchasing consortiums bring together prospective buyers to view the current range of titles currently on the market.

9. Gradually phase out financial and technical support to publishers as they transition to more independent businesses comprising a functional professional collaborative.

10. Encourage publishers to set up a professional consortium that serves as an advocacy platform to continuously promote the growth of the industry and align the collective’s goals to national, continental, and global book sector strategic objectives.
GLOBAL FACING CONSIDERATIONS

Although a straightforward attempt to replicate any of these mechanisms is not recommended, there are useful lessons to be drawn from this experience. It is recommended that book development interventions build from nation’s existing assets while also targeting underdeveloped areas. It is important to recognize that in the absence of the enabling factors existent in Rwanda, the program would have likely employed different strategies resulting in different outcomes.

It is further recommended that global book development activities provide targeted support to languages that are both viable and potentially productive. Organizations should make informed decisions based on the extent to which a language is currently developed, including the stability of the orthography and the scope of its use in communication and literature. In most contexts, book development activities should include outcomes that also focus on book use activities to ensure language users have opportunities to read the developed materials and practice the language.

CONCLUSION

The book development work done by Save the Children in Rwanda demonstrated the value of a ‘whole chain’ approach to children’s book supply. With extra capacity throughout the book chain, the publishing sector was effectively able to produce more and better books. Throughout the processes described in this paper, working in partnership was critical to establishing and sustaining momentum. It was necessary to collaborate with numerous institutions including several government agencies, the private sector, and communities in order to understand the book supply chain and put in place measures to improve it. This type of innovative and responsive programming necessitated flexibility in funding and organizational management.

This paper also asserts that further work is needed to support local publishers to flourish. There is a need to sustain the supply, requiring ongoing capacity-building of stakeholders within the publishing industry to enable them to manage the process and address children’s continuous need for books. Additionally, the sector would benefit from ongoing support to develop sustainable demand for books, in order for publishers’ businesses to remain viable.