



PUBLISHING IN AFRICA BUT NOT FOR AFRICANS:

**How the Publishing & Bookselling Industry can contribute to
the GDP of the Country**

By

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STATE OF PUBLISHING IN SA

- **Over 30** publishing houses, **over 100** booksellers; including distributors
- ...Yet South Africa is still counted amongst the top countries with the lowest reading culture in the world.
- The publishing and bookselling industry has been noted as one of the worst performing industries in South Africa and not contributing much to the GDP of the country.
- How many books are sold in SA a year? *10.5mil (Nielsen 2016). Note: Figure doesn't include independent book stores. 80% of this number is non-fiction.
- Out of the 10.5mil, only 2.5mil are fiction.
- These are not all SA authored and published.
- 550 000 fiction sold in SA is South African. 450 000 are Afrikaans.
- English best seller in SA is between 600-1000 copies - Author's lifetime.
- A non-fiction bestseller - 5000 copies
- Africa's total book production compared to the rest of the world is 3% (Note: figure debatable)



STATE OF PUBLISHING IN SA

- One would expect this to be an industry that has a huge contribution to the GDP of the country considering the number of publishing houses and booksellers, and population
- A [South African Book Development Council](#) 2016 study shows that reading is the fifth highest leisure activity by adults in SA
 - Top 4: listening to radio, watching television or playing video games and shopping
- Question: What are we, as content creators and distributors doing wrong?



IMPORTANCE OF READING

- Specialists reveal that a country with children who have a high rate of language acquisition = a high rate of academic success and employment rate.
- Reading for pleasure is also a greatest tool for fighting poverty and inequality as it helps children to grasp concepts easily and gives them a better chance of excelling in their studies, and thus contribute to a better socio-economic status in the future.
- Reading allows one to understand the world they live in and in turn promotes social cohesion.
- With a low culture of reading in South Africa, our future socio-economic status looks dire.



STATE OF READING CULTURE IN SA

- The PIRLS 2016 literacy study was conducted in 50 countries. SA was the worst performing.
- Same study indicates that children who have parents who read, become better at reading and understanding.
- Teachers who are themselves not fluent in the language of instruction which is mostly English in South Africa, or teachers who are not well trained to teach how to read and comprehend.
- Famous claim: Black South Africans as non-readers and not book buyers.



SA POPULATION

- **Current population: 57mil**
- **Black: 80.2%**
- **White: 8.4%**
- **Coloured 8.8%**
- **Indian & Asian 2.5 %**
- **Other 0.5%**



THE REAL PROBLEM

- We often look at this crises as “There is a lack of reading culture in South Africa or South Africans do not buy books.”
- Suggestion: We need to first create a reading culture in South Africa. Make people see the importance of reading, then they will buy books.
- Real issue: Not that we have citizens who do not like to read, we have a country that does not pay attention to the need of its citizens.
- Consumerism
- Why do people buy? Fear of missing out, to be liked, to show love or to feel loved, to make their lives easier etc.
- However, people also consume what they can relate to, what they can identify with and what validates them.



HISTORY OF PUBLISHING IN SA



- The history of publishing in South Africa shows that black people in the country greatly consumed books that had a lot of western influence.
- European experiences, Books only represented a certain group of people.
- Black child could not find his/her identity, experiences, neighborhood and his everyday thoughts in the book.
- Kantey, M (1989:vi):
By 1842 Cape Town had nine presses, seven newspapers and six bookshops (Randall 1983: 105), while the first fully-fledged South African publishing house was started in 1854 by Jan Carel Juta (Donker, 1983: 30). Yet the majority of books continued to be imported from Europe, especially Britain, Holland and Germany, and these importations reflected the colonial view of the times.

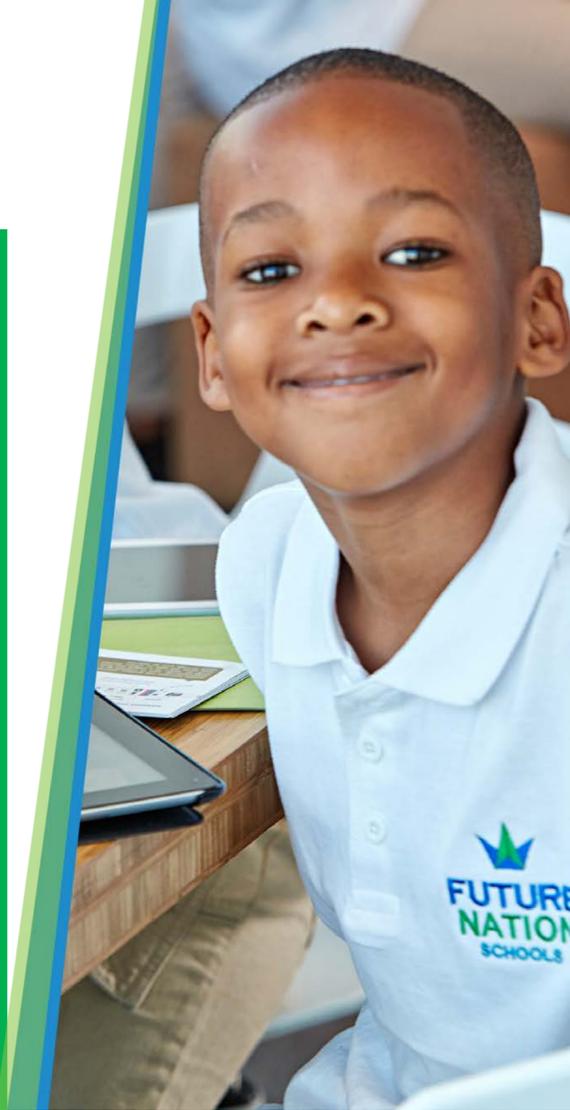
POSITIVE CHANGES HAPPENING

- The problem of illiteracy in South African cannot then be solved by making South Africans believe in the importance of reading
- It can be solved by creating content that they would be willing, not forced to consume.
- Examples: black panther, Inxeba, A Man Who is Not a Man
- African content by African authors, in different indigenous languages.
- A wave of literary bodies have risen up: **Publishers:** Sifiso Publishers, BlackBird publishers, Weza Home Publishing. **Bookstores:** African Flavour Books, Book Central Capital, Xarra Books, Ethnikids. **Book festivals:** Future Nation Schools Book Fair, Abantu Book Festival, Ratanang Book Festival. **Bookclubs:** The Wordiest Book Bond, Bafati Bembumbene, Bookwormers.
- There is a huge wave already happening but a lot still need to be done for SA Book Publishing and Bookselling industry to contribute to the GDP of the country
- The above examples show that when the content in the book validates the reader, the reader will follow the nature and rules of consumerism and buy and consume the product.
- Books by African authors, with African content and in all African languages are growing, however we still face other challenges



DISTRIBUTION

- Purpose of distribution: to get books to the people.
- Current situation: books in the hands of few – urban areas.
- Publishing and bookselling industries are still largely “colonized” – a certain group “deserves” books.
- For these industries to contribute to the GDP of the country, we need to decolonize them.
- How? = Alternative ways of distribution – “informal”.



LANGUAGE

- Strides in publishing African content by African writers have been made, but indigenous languages are still not recognized.
- Books in African languages are few and not visible in book stores.
- Most writers in indigenous languages hope for their books to be in schools, but the department of education controls the outcome of those books.
- Well known figures's books are not made available in indigenous languages. People in the rural areas who do not understand English are not included in books.
- The only books they can read are the ones their kids are being taught at schools. How do we expect parents to read to their children when there is no reading material in their languages?
- Notion that black people, especially in rural areas do not read is a myth.
- FACEBOOK stories: **Brownsense, Diary of a Zulu Girl, Ubomi ngamajingiqhiwu, Ubomi bunzima, Xhosa Culture, Ndingunobangela kusini na.**



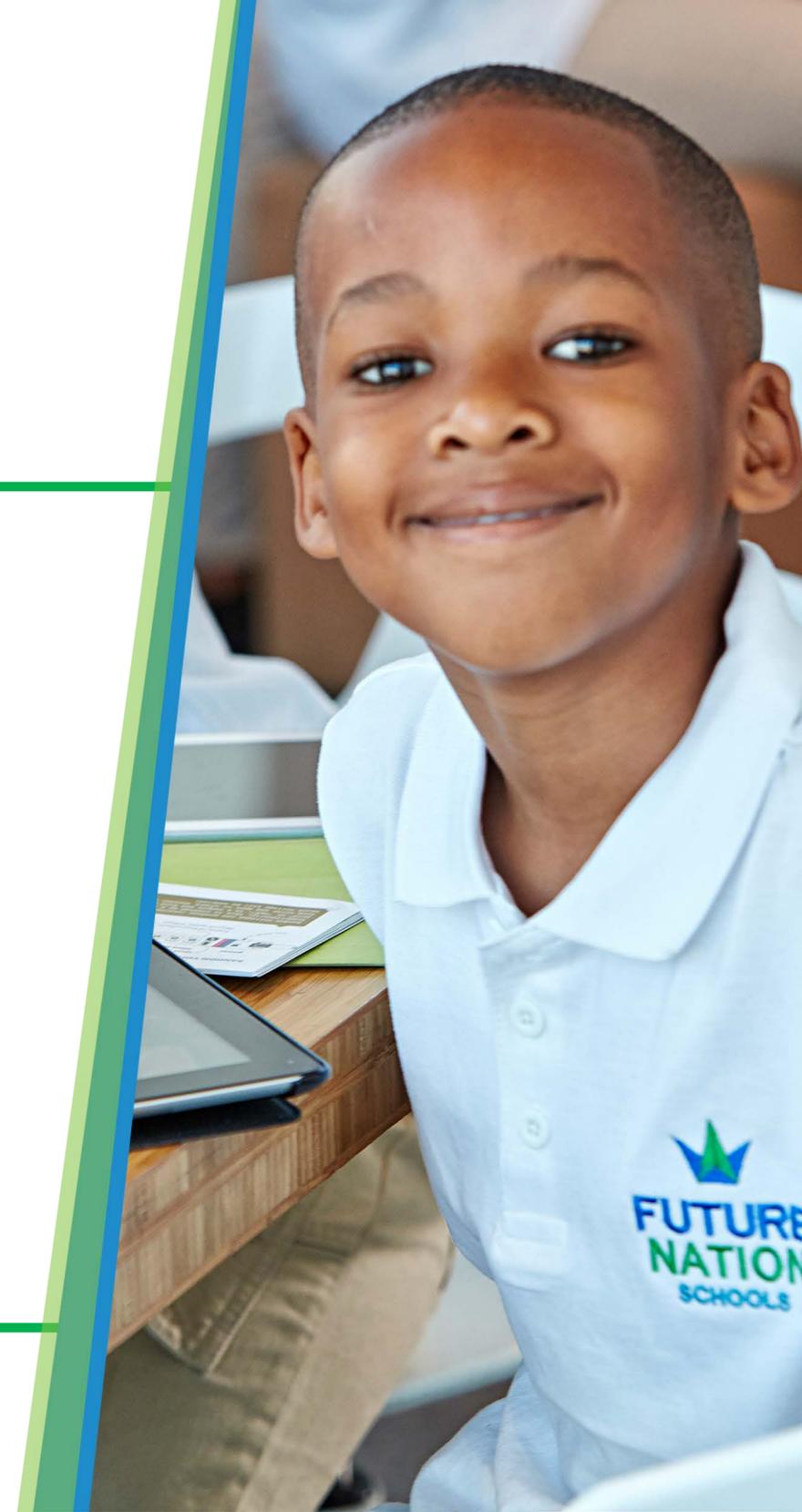
LANGUAGE

- Example: Universities in SA have cultural societies. Students want a space where they can be with people they can relate to, whom they share the same experiences with and whom they can speak the same language.
- No one feels welcome in a space that represents less of who they are. It is the same in books.
- Not everyone in South Africa can read and converse in English. So, are we saying those people must not read books?
- Language of instruction in schools is in English. How do we then expect a child to learn from the language they do not understand?
- Studies show that a child needs to learn in their mother tongue for first 3 years of study



WAY FORWARD

- African content
- Language inclusivity
- Disrupt the current distribution channels
- Engage readers in all platforms: print, digital and audio



THANK YOU

