

Community Conference Report

Venue: Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania

Dates: 15-16th April, 2014



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Overview

Worldreader was pleased to host its very first community conference in Dar es Salaam on April 15-16, 2014. About 24 participants, approximately 85 percent of whom were from various publishing houses attended. Worldreader was also well represented with teams attending from all four of its global offices. The goals were

1. To expose publishers across Tanzania to our impactful work on literacy in both East Africa and across the continent
2. To expose them to the fast emerging digital publishing industry
3. To demonstrate ways all these stakeholders can collaborate and contribute towards the fight against illiteracy, right here in with Tanzania and eventually beyond.

As an organization that prides itself in the ability to make culturally relevant books accessible to all, our investment in and support of local publishers is crucial. For most publishers, Worldreader becomes the means through which they can profitably establish themselves in the digital industry and market. At the conference, publishers were given the opportunity to collaborate on how to approach this dynamic field of digital publishing in order to get their books into the hands of students ready to read them. Impact stories from Worldreader programs both in and outside Tanzania also brought to life how their books can potentially impact children all over sub-Saharan Africa, and, consequently, the transformative power this presents to them as publishers. The discourse also allowed for notable grey areas and misconceptions about digital publishing to be addressed.

Thus when Ian Moshi, Chairman of the Publishers Association of Tanzania, admitted in his opening remarks that, "Though Worldreader seems genuinely interested in helping eradicate illiteracy, we (as publishers) need to be objective and sense gaps, if there are any, before buying into it," Worldreader was quite unperturbed, because therein lies the objective in bringing such a community together.

Plenary

The plenary was an opportunity for Worldreader to present our vision, goals, work and impact to the community. Joan Mwachi-Amolo, Operations Manager, Kenya, warmly welcomed participants, also describing Worldreader's role as action takers towards promoting literacy, and detailing our current programs and impact in Tanzania. Tina Tam, Director of Programs and Operations, talked on the three key aspects of our program implementation: the e-reader-technology, the content (books) and the learnings – learnings we share with all our stakeholders. This transitioned into Worldreader Mobile, which currently houses over 2400 free titles; its impact, expanse and profound research potential. Using this tool, Alex Polzin explained, Worldreader not only reaches thousands of readers, but also gains access to valuable data on reading habits, patterns and interest from all across the globe. This he demonstrated with personal stories of users from Nigeria, India and other areas of notable usage. Alex also shared the fact that female young adults are amongst our biggest user groups in Africa and Asia, adding that the means to be able to empower these users further using the platform and content is simply exciting.

Impact stories were similarly shared by partner organizations. Stephen Mhando of UNHCR proudly presented their partnership with Worldreader, which had consequently led to the

deployment of 300 devices into two refugee camps in Tanzania. We were informed that these devices were being effectively used during school hours, after school hours and at weekend programs. It was an honor, he said, to be able to provide educational materials to these refugees/asylum seekers and internally displaced persons, beautifully ending with: “the students thank you also Worldreader – Asante sana.”

Dina Machuve of the Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology (NM-AIST) presented the impact of the e-reader programs she manages in two schools in Nganana and Nambala, in Tanzania. According to Dina, very observable impact was already being made in the schools: higher enrollment, higher standardized exam scores, more efficient teaching and learning in the schools and the promotion of further partnerships with other organizations. In a video, we heard teachers from these schools excitedly reiterate the above points. Teachers also wanted to see more Swahili and Tanzanian curriculum books on the e-readers. They admitted that the Kenyan curriculum books were only valuable as supplementary materials. Publishers responded to this as a challenge to get more Tanzanian books digitized and made available on the e-readers.

The Worldreader team from Ghana concluded by describing Worldreader’s work in West Africa and specifically Ghana. As the very first country in which a Worldreader program was implemented, it has been a great learning environment for Worldreader with regards to identifying what works, what doesn’t and critical areas of improvement. These learnings have consequently led to more robust and impactful programs. In Ghana, for instance, projects are supported with after-school reading programs (Out-of-classroom experience), School Management Committees, Vacation Reading Schools, and very importantly, the involvement of not only students, but teachers, parents and ultimately, the communities as a whole. Increasingly, it is becoming clear that all these components create an excellent platform to not only provide content for students, but to develop and promote the culture of reading in and beyond the school unit.

Open Dialogue: Digital Publishing and Reading

Ian Moshi, Chairman of the Association of Tanzanian Publishers in his welcome address set the tone for a great dialogue on the potential risks or concerns associated with the digital market in Tanzania. Despite his pleasure at the foreseeable collaborations between Worldreader and publishers, he raised a few issues that he hoped would be critically addressed in the course of the conference.

These included his concern and consequently hope that Worldreader would provide partnership contracts that catered to the interest of publishers and resolved all issues on ownership. He was also concerned about copyright issues to which Joan Mwachi-Amolo responded by demonstrating how protected content is on the e-reader (kindles). Ian also wondered about the implications of changing the publishing platform from paper to digital and, more specifically, how that would affect the relationship between publishers and authors. Here, Alex reaffirmed that in the digital industry at present, publishers are still recognized as the middlemen between authors and users, stating that Worldreader preferably works with publishers and not authors. Finally on device (e-reader) robustness,

Worldreader remarked on how low our breakage rate has been maintained across projects and countries.

Worldreader also facilitated an open dialogue on the potential of digital reading here in Tanzania, asking the question:



Will digital reading become ubiquitous in Tanzania in 5 years time?

The most popular responses were as follows

- Whatever technology is in use will have to truly stand up to the environment, particularly the rural environment. *A fact already tested by the easy access to cell phones and robustness of e-readers in all environments.*
- That this would be likely provided the cost of e-readers were to drastically reduce. *Since there has already been a 80% reduction in the cost of e-readers in the last four years, this seems plausible.*
- That this is likely but only if it is promoted and financed by the government. *In response to that a participant (non publisher) was of the strong opinion that publishers could take the opportunity to make this happen on their own.*
- That it would be a most natural progression. Indeed, it would take time for that habit to be created, considering Tanzania is generally not a reading nation. But with time, more and more will be drawn towards e-reading, particularly the young generation.

- It has to be because it is truly the easiest way especially looking at the cost effectiveness of e-reading and e-books.



Joseph Botwey, Partnership Development and Publishing Manager, in relation to the above dialogue, asked publishers to think about how going digital would affect them as individuals and impact their method of operation in the publishing houses. Indeed, it would simplify the process tenfold, obviating the need to outsource content for printing, ship books back into Tanzania with the related high clearance cost, and develop a robust framework for distribution into schools and stores. By working with Worldreader or taking advantage of other digital opportunities, most of these processes would be automatically circumvented.

He also told the story of Elliot Agyare, CEO of Smartline who began to market his books digitally with Worldreader a few years back and is currently quite proudly managing his own account on Amazon. At Worldreader, we pride ourselves in the ability to empower publishers like Elliot.

Technical Workshops

On asking if anyone had used any digital platforms in the past and what they had found challenging, it was apparent very few had been exposed. These workshops, facilitated by Alexander Polzin, Muthoni Muhunyo and Joseph Botwey, therefore became extremely relevant, as majority were fairly new to this.

The sections covered were as follows

- Going Digital
- Scalable Digital solutions
- Digital Publishing in Kenya : Issue and Opportunities/ Open Dialogue
- Introduction to trends in digital publishing
- Platforms and Devices
- Digital Content Development
- Epub Workshop
- Introduction to Digital Readers
- Digital Marketing and Digital Publishing Next Steps.

The anticipation throughout these workshops was palpable. Participants seemed genuinely excited by the prospect of learning all these new concepts and ideas. As the facilitators run through the above topics, the practical examples used were also very helpful. For instance on the relevance of color in digital print, participants were asked which of their books would be suitable in black print. What if the book in question made references to color? Alex followed up with this.

Participants were very engaged during the session on marketing strategies using social media. Two of the concerns shared were whether social media will eventually wane with time, and if it was ever possible for a small Tanzanian publishing house to compete with big companies like Amazon. There seemed to be a general admission that social media was only expanding and will continue to.

Overall, these workshops were very effective as publishers were able to voice their concerns, more so than they would have on a one-on-one basis. By voicing these concerns and receiving clarification, the transformation from critically observing to eagerly contributing was clearly evident. As Colman Kimeryo of Tanzania Institute of Education commented, it was indeed a GREAT EYE OPENER! There is certainly strong interest in future collaborations with Worldreader on both the e-reader and mobile fronts.

Conclusion/Way Forward

The two days of intense learning and sharing concluded on an exciting note. There was a general feeling of anticipation towards the potential collaborations with Worldreader in the coming months. Participants had come to learn and were ready to employ these lessons both positively and profitably. For those new to the e-reader, they spent time being trained on its usage and functions at the demo table.

Certificates of Completion were awarded on behalf of Worldreader to publishing houses, invited project managers, as well as, individual publishers who participated to mark the end of the conference.

Surely, this is the first of many publishing conferences and seminars in Tanzania. As an organization, we will continue to share our knowledge and provide support in several avenues in digital publishing.



Tina Tam awards a Certificate of Completion to Publisher