

Community Conference Report

Venue: Nairobi, Kenya

Dates: 10-11th April, 2014



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Overview

Worldreader hosted its first community conference in Nairobi on April 10-11, 2014. Representatives from 21 publishing houses, 38 current project managers, as well as, important stakeholders from the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), Kenya Publishers Association (KPA) and community leaders attended. Worldreader was well represented, with team members attending from all four of its global offices. The anticipation on both ends was palpable.

The conference succeeded in bringing together relevant stakeholders, creating a setting that allowed for an effective exchange on promoting literacy in the East and sub-Saharan Africa at large. Publishers had the opportunity to share strategy on how best to expand upon the existing business model offered by 'going digital,' and to also collaborate on how to approach this dynamic field of digital publishing. Additionally, publishers were greeted by the experiences and stories from the Worldreader program schools and library project managers, which brought to life how their books are being read via new technologies, the immense impact they are making in the lives of children in remote areas, and, consequently, the transformative power this presents for them.

*As Joan Mwachi-Amolo, Operations Manager in Kenya, so rightly summarized in her closing address, “ **each of us here (truly) has the power to impact the life of a child out there.**”*

The Plenary

The primary goal of hosting a community conference had been to create a platform where Worldreader, Publishers and Project managers could fully interact and share impactful ideas. As Colin McElwee (Co-founder) described in his opening remarks, in Worldreader, one, we bring together communities and second, we care about our end users. As we aim towards reaching and impacting at least 1 million people by the end of 2014, what do we contribute to make this a reality?

Joan Mwachi-Amolo talked on Worldreader's role in promoting literacy and our current programs in Kenya. Tina Tam, Director of Programs and Operations, also 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. The opening session ended with Alexander Polzin talk on the impact and potential of the Worldreader mobile app, which currently houses 2400 titles for free. By having this tool, we cannot only reach thousands of readers, but gain access to valuable data on reading habits, patterns and interest across the globe. For instance, we know for a fact that female young adults across Africa and Asia are our most avid user group, and the means to be able to empower them further using the platform and content is simply exciting.

The community conference was also an opportunity for Publishers and all community members alike to share their concerns. When Lawrence Njagi, Chairman of Kenya Publishers Association (KPA) was invited to give his opening remarks, he applauded Worldreader on their mission towards providing culturally relevant books for students, adding that it is important that they be taught from the known to the unknown, i.e. from the books they can most easily engage with. Regardless, he also shared his fears and concerns on the protection of publishers' material, use of materials/content that is not approved by KPA, and our more limited content in the mother tongue. In order to build onto this 'skeleton' of content, he urged the publishing community to support Worldreader with their content, adding that while KPA may not have the means and capacity to make content available and books accessible, Worldreader does!

There were also general questions on how Worldreader chooses schools/libraries to partner with, how e-readers are utilized in pre-schools (several flashcard content), the relevance of color in digital print and our capacity to support special need schools and programs (audio games, text-to-speech device recognition and font size variability). A participant also questioned our focus on reading and not writing. The story of Kate Okanta, a Worldreader high school student in Ghana, who had desired to become an author after the opportunity to read from several female African writers, was shared. Kate currently not only supports reading programs in Ghana but also has her poetry and short stories presented on the Worldreader mobile app. Some participants were also interested in cost of the devices, the minimum that can be deployed to a school and the cost related to maintenance.

Also significant was how the space allowed stakeholders to engage themselves. We observed exchanges between Project Managers and members of KICD on the 'frustratingly' frequent changes in the curriculum. When Richard Teka shared the story and impact of the Worldreader program in Kibera Girls Soccer Academy, he wasn't asking Worldreader to provide them with revision books. This time round, he was asking the publishers themselves. Richard was one of the three Worldreader's project managers invited to share their experiences and stories with the community. He told the story of how Kibera Girls Soccer Academy, a small school in the slums, had gained access to 150 e-readers with relevant content including all KPA recommended textbooks. While these devices were greatly impacting the performance of the 127 students in the school, the rippling effect by sharing with neighbors, siblings and families was even more profound.

Ronald Odongo also shared his experience as an e-reader librarian. Ronald is an example of a librarian who understands that in his community people are generally not inclined to seek out libraries. Ronald therefore seeks out users by carrying his content (e-readers) to schools and classrooms for use. He talked about how easily students engage with the biblical content on the devices.

David Lemiso ended with an overview of the program in Kilgoris. This was Worldreader's very first program in Kenya. He detailed out key impact of the project including higher enrollments, changing students' attitudes, promoting a reading culture, and boost in reading with measurable improvement in speaking and comprehension. He also mentioned how the program had interestingly enhanced both parent and community engagement.

The plenary was followed by series of concurrent workshops for Publishers and Project Managers.



Colin McElwee (Worldreader co-founder) talks to two project managers who share impact stories at the plenary.

Publishing Workshop

This was highly relevant for both publishers who were new or fairly abreast with the digital industry. It wasn't limited to ways of partnering with Worldreader. On the contrary, it was an opportunity for publishers and content designers to learn and share on issues and challenges in the digital industry through open dialogues, and to receive training on content development, Epub and the numerous digital platforms and devices truly at their disposal. A key element was also addressing notable grey areas in the digital industry. Alexander Polzin, Muthoni Muhunyo and Joseph Botwey facilitated these workshops.

Several key players were found here as well: designers, editors, illustrators, animators, managers, production people and the 'marketing guys.' This particularly allowed for very diverse perspectives on the topics, consequently leading to very meaningful collaborative dialogues across the different departments.

Naturally, the community also discussed the digital market and the profound role social media can potentially play as a marketing tool.

Sections covered during this workshop 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



A designer and a writer intensely sharing views on the power of the social media in making books more readily available

Project Managers Workshop

This was a great opportunity for project managers or potential project managers to share and discuss success stories, as well as, ongoing challenges in the program. A few publishers and members of KICD were also present, bringing in a wealth of information. The publishers, on listening to the impact stories from the Managers, called it an inspiration; it was great honor to know how their work was impacting lives. On challenges, the group discussed problems with trouble shooting device issues, disengaged or even intimidated teachers, language barriers with regards to training materials being in English, and on content, not having all relevant text and revision books on the devices.

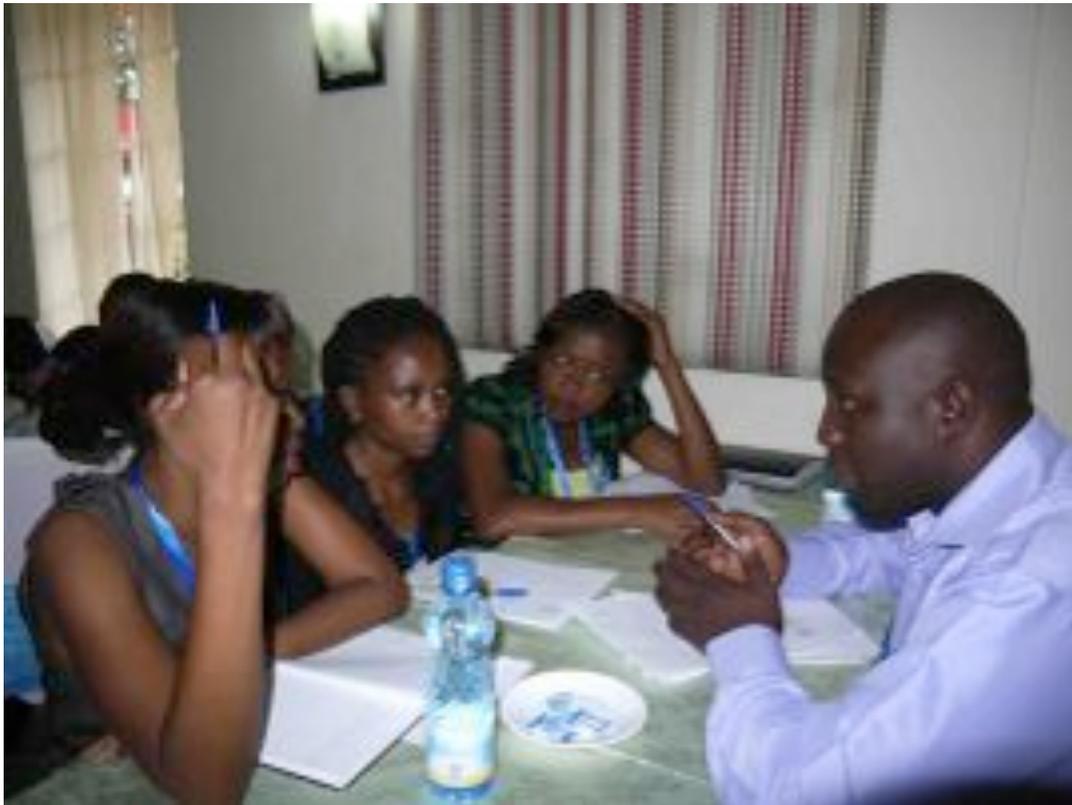


Worldreader interacts with Project Managers on Content

Participants also broke into even smaller groups to discuss how as project managers they could contribute towards literacy in their communities. On this, several participants talked on ways to mobilize the community and to create a culture of reading that was not only limited to their students. The four distinct items from these discussion were promoting a reading culture, raising funds locally to support programs, engaging both young and old in reading through the easily accessible mobile app, and having a sense of ownership as a project manager.

Worldreader also provided tips and tricks and training on Monitoring and Evaluation, how to raise funds locally, and an introduction to Worldreader's after-school reading program (OCE), which will hopefully be replicated with some support in various communities,

schools and libraries. Participants found the tips on Monitoring and Evaluation and local fundraising particularly enlightening.



Project Managers' small group sessions: Sharing best practices

General Outcomes and Feedback

Feedback from the community was highly encouraging. It was clear that we are all indeed working towards the same goal: books for all, books for kids. Even more so, the platform to share, discuss and brainstorm was very inspiring. At the Project Manager's workshops, we had participants asking for more sessions in future workshops on fundraising and Monitoring and Evaluation. This means that Project Managers are thinking beyond simply receiving devices and anticipating ways to sustain the current projects and consequently expand as well. Additionally, we now know they want tools with which they can measure, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the impact they are making on the ground.

Publishers were quite ecstatic. Kulamo Bullo of Kenya Literature Bureau gave huge thumbs up, adding that she hoped to see continuous engagement on how the community can cover more frontiers that would place their books literally everywhere. Ian Arunga from Storymoja admitted to enormously enjoying digital online marketing and was glad to have been able to share his own experiences as well. Several participants, in the future, asked for more insights on social media marketing opportunities and more hands on experience as well. There were several others who also wanted to have had more discussions on the

role of traditional designers and in-house content developers in the digital industry at present. Thumbs-up to Lawrence Njagi (Chairman KPA), Musyoki Muli (Longhorn) and Angela Wachuka for adding to the dialogues in numerous ways.

There is certainly an expectation that Worldreader's Community Conference in Nairobi has come to stay.

Conclusion/Way Forward

The 2-days of intense learning and sharing concluded on quite the high note. After closing remarks by co-founder, Colin McElwee, there was a general feeling of having been officially initiated into the 'reading revolution.' Certificates of Completion were awarded on behalf of Worldreader to publishing houses and the project managers who participated. Additionally, Cathy Malalah (project manager) and Bullo Kulamo (Kenya Literature Bureau) received awards for best answers to pre-conference survey questions.

Joan ended with a vote of immense thanks to all for making this community conference possible. With laughter and excitement, the cake was cut and shared amongst all participants. As participants departed, each left knowing that they were a part and parcel of this great community of action takers towards literacy. Even more importantly, each left knowing precisely what and how they could contribute to the community.



Attendees: Publishers and Project Managers



The Worldreader Team

Surely, this is the first of many annual Community Conferences to be held. Until then, we will endeavor to participate and continue to share our knowledge in the ecosystem here in Nairobi.