

The Baobab tree and the African publishing sector



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The baobab tree is a common part of the African Savanna landscape and a powerful feature in its folklore. It is the biggest and most resilient tree, known to live more than a thousand years in the most arid parts of the continent.

The baobab tree is a viable system in its own right. Many creatures live in and on the baobab tree. It provides shelter and food to many. Ancient families have been known to live in its curvatures and under its shed. Its fruit is nutritious and its fibre provides medicine and weaving material. It stores water, which can be tapped for drinking and allows it to survive through droughts for thousands of years.

In African folklore, the baobab tree looks grotesque because its branches were once its roots. It became too powerful and challenged the gods, who punished it by turning it upside down.

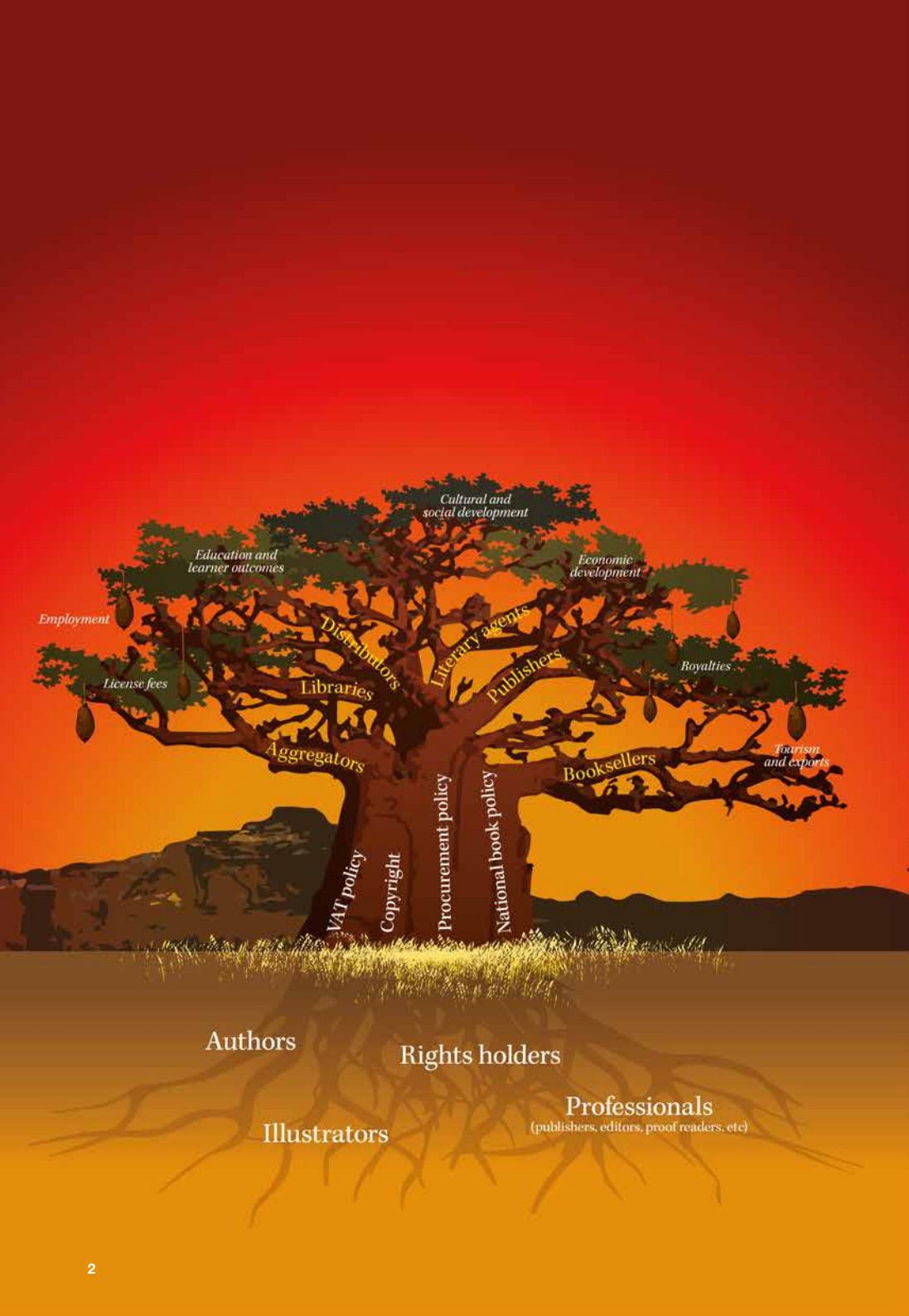
The baobab tree is a symbol of a viable publishing sector.

1. The roots

The roots of the baobab symbolize the creative part of the book sector. This sector includes **authors, rights holders, professionals like publishers, editors, proof readers, typesetters** and other people that work in the sector. Like the roots that extract nutrients and water to feed the baobab, this sector creates the content that informs and educates readers. It is essential that the creative sector is organized through institutions like authors associations and professional bodies like editors' forums. These representative bodies champion the interest of their members, including fair compensation for their work. When writers and professionals are well-supported national book output and the benefits for education grow.

2. The trunk

The trunk of the baobab anchors the baobab tree and supports the upper part, i.e the branches, the leaves and the fruit. Without the trunk, the tree crumples. The trunk is a critical link between the roots and the branches, the leaves and the fruits. It transmits the nutrients for the upper part of the tree to flourish. The trunk of the baobab represents the policy environment in the book sector. These policies link the creative sector with readers, publishers, booksellers and education, which are represented by the



Cultural and social development

Education and learner outcomes

Economic development

Employment

License fees

Distributors

Literary agents

Publishers

Royalties

Libraries

Aggregators

Booksellers

Tourism and exports

VAT policy

Copyright

Procurement policy

National book policy

Authors

Rights holders

Illustrators

Professionals
(publishers, editors, proof readers, etc)

branches, the leaves and the fruit. The policy environment includes **procurement policy, copyright, the national book policy, and sales tax policy**. In the digital environment, it also includes digital transmission policies. Just like the baobab, which will collapse without its trunk, the book sector in Africa is heavily reliant on policy and the enabling role of the state.

2.1 Copyright

Countries need a good balance between rights holders and users. They need to ensure that creators are fairly compensated for their work and that copyright law allows users to access content for their reading and education needs. This includes people with various disabilities and special access needs. The copyright law needs to be supported by enforcement and proper user education. Countries also need to modernize their copyright law to ensure that it is in line with international conventions and developments in technology.

2.2 Procurement policy

The education book sector relies heavily on state expenditure and is affected by procurement policies. More than 80% of publishing in Africa is on education and depends on state procurement. Procurement policies need to ensure that there is a sustainable education book sector to meet national educational needs and ensuring that all learners have suitable quality learning materials. Both the book sector and the education sector need to be supported by adequate budget provisioning. The state manages the curriculum and ensures that textbooks can support the curriculum, while the industry develops and distributes textbooks. Textbooks improve

education outcomes significantly and complement teachers. Good textbooks are critical guides in the curriculum for both teachers and learners. It would be advantageous to have multiple providers in order to promote diversity, competition and innovation.

2.3 National Book Policies

Crucial elements like bookshops, libraries, publishers, printers, reading clubs and many others need to be coordinated so that their contribution is optimized towards national objectives. Policies that shorten the value chain by excluding booksellers through direct supply may in the short term lead to lower prices and better textbook coverage but may not aid national reading needs. Stockholding bookshops ensure that reading happens beyond education but also need the education business to sustain themselves. National book policies articulate national book and reading objectives and ensure that the activities of each sub sector contribute positively towards national objectives. All countries need to adopt a national book policy.

2.4 Sales tax policies

Across the globe countries are encouraged to remove VAT on books in order to reduce the price of books, create greater access to books and promote publishing and reading. Many countries have either removed VAT from books and book inputs or have a reduced VAT rate.

3. The branches, leaves and fruit

The top part of the baobab tree comprises branches, leaves and fruit. This is the flourishing part of the tree. This part can represent the

industry through the branches and the leaves and fruit can represent society, education and economic development, which benefit from the effort of the creative and policy sectors.

3.1 Branches

The branches of the baobab play a critical role in ensuring that the nutrients from the roots are distributed to and nourish the leaves and the fruit, in the same way that the **publishers, the booksellers, libraries, distributors, aggregators and literary agents** ensure that the works of authors and creators reach the readers and education. In the book sector the branches represent the industry and its distribution components. These entities rely on policy to do their work. They take the work of authors and add value by developing these into published works and learning tools. They also take these to learners and readers, through different distribution channels, just like the branches of the trees. In addition to distributors, content aggregators are playing a critical role in placing content and digital assets on learning platforms for learners and teachers. In many cases they add value by providing analytics and feedback to learners, teachers and parents, thereby improving learner outcomes.

3.2 Leaves and fruit

The work of authors, enabling policy and the industry result in tremendous **educational, social and economic benefits** to society. The impact of the industry on education, social and cultural development in Africa is huge. Compared to the developed world, given the young population and education needs, the African book sector can contribute a lot more to GDP. Like the leaves and fruit that fall to

the ground to nourish the baobab tree and to grow new trees, when readers buy books royalties accrue to authors, and income accrues to industry thereby enabling authors to write more and industry to invest more. Like the leaves and the fruit of the baobab tree, readers need to be developed and sustained through literacy and reading campaigns. Society and readers need to have access to reading materials through well-stocked public libraries and accessible bookshops.

4. The baobab as a system

Like the various parts of the baobab tree, the book sector has many interdependent parts. These parts need to be coordinated through policy to ensure a thriving and sustainable book sector. Without such co-ordination, these parts can work at cross-purpose and fail to achieve reading, educational, economic and social development needs and objectives.

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