

African Storybook Collections Boost Literacy in Kenyan Schools

Beatrice Kache Maitha

Introduction

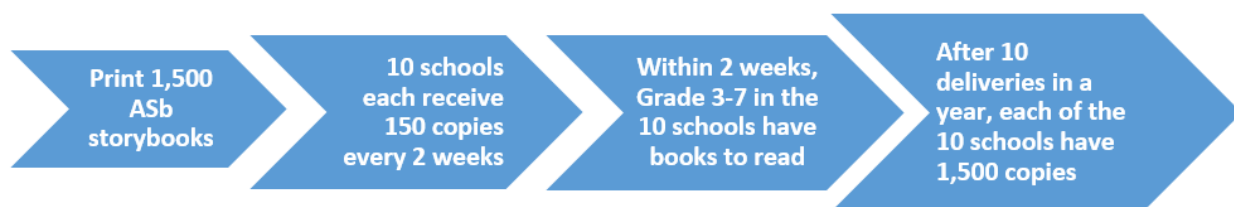
Four years ago, I joined the African Storybook (ASb) Champions to promote literacy in primary schools and libraries in Kilifi County, Kenya, using ASb tools. However, children's access to digital storybooks in public primary schools has been hindered by limited and non-functional devices like tablets and computers.

A lack of appropriate learning materials in both primary and secondary schools contributes significantly to poor learning outcomes in the county. In primary schools, the ratio of reading materials to students is 1:20 in overcrowded classrooms with 70 to 100 learners. Of the 163 public secondary schools in the county, only 35 have libraries. Most public primary schools have only a storage room for the few curriculum textbooks available for the entire school.

To make matters worse, many households in the area are impoverished, making access to reading materials at home almost non-existent.

My response to the situation

In January 2023, I started a mobile revolving library to supply ASb printed storybooks to primary schools in the County. This initiative targets children from Grade 3 to 7. The approach outlined below ensures that children and schools in Kilifi have a constant supply of diverse storybooks to read throughout the year.



When I started, I faced the challenge of printing one storybook at a time, which was time-consuming due to the need to constantly adjust printing settings for each book. Additionally, storybooks with fewer pages tended to get damaged quickly when used frequently by children.

To address this, I realised that creating collections of storybooks would be a more effective and sustainable solution. Each collection would contain 4 to 7 storybooks, making it easier to give to a

printer or a school for printing. I created storybook collections in KiGiryama (the most widely used local language in Kilifi County), Kiswahili, and English. Once the collections were ready, I encouraged schools with printers to print them. Kibaoni Primary School successfully took on this task. Below are samples of the collections.



Kiswahili collection and English collections

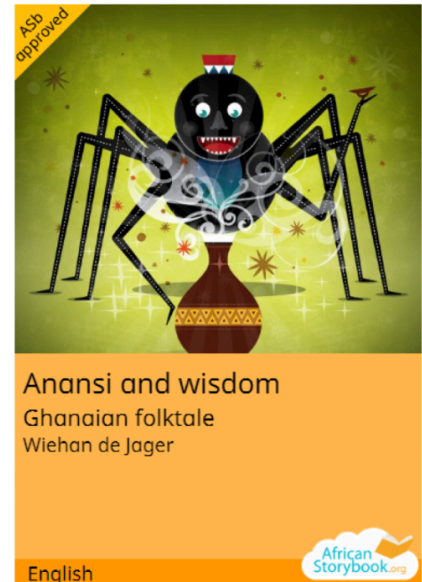
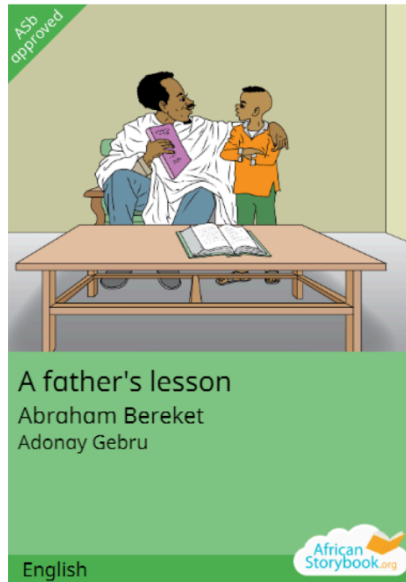
To ensure durability, each collection has 30 to 60 pages and includes 4 to 7 titles, providing a variety of storybooks for children to select and read. I created a total of 120 storybook collections, these include:

- ◇ Collections 1 to 18 in Kiswahili (18 books)
- ◇ Collections 19 to 27 in KiGiryama (9 books)
- ◇ Collections 28 to 120 in English (92 Books)

Putting together the storybook collections

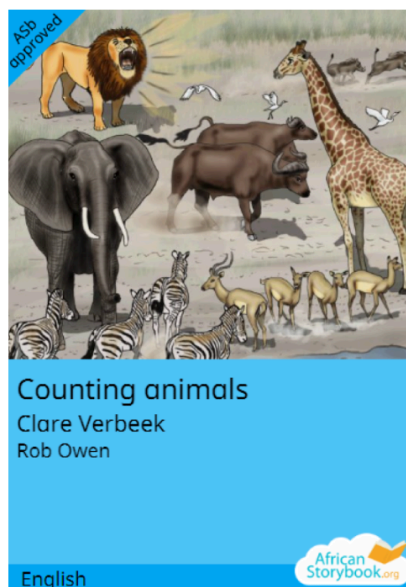
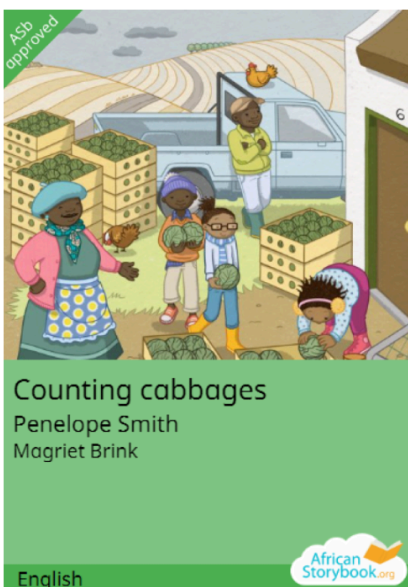
I devised my own method of creating the collections, organising them into ten simple themes and categories based on the storybook titles. For example, storybook titles featuring words like "baby," "elephant," "hare," "rainbow," "river," "soccer," "grandmother," "holiday," and "animals" formed the basis for these categories. The logic was simple: if a story had a specific word in its title, all the storybooks in that collection would share similar themes, characters, and topics.

For instance, Storybook Collection 37 focuses on "grandmother" and includes titles such as [Holidays with grandmother](#), [Grandma's bananas](#), [Grandmother and the smelly girl](#), [Grandmother's jerseys](#) and [A present for grandma](#). Collections that emphasise social values include storybooks like [Unwise Judge](#), [A Curse or a Blessing](#), [A Father's Lesson](#), and [Anansi and Wisdom](#).



Storybook collections based on families and social interactions include themes of friendship and important people in a child's life. For example, Storybook Collection 33 includes titles such as: [Abel and his sister's doll](#), [Aku and her ice cream](#), [Chess and family roles](#) and [Fati and the Green Snake](#).

I also created collections that promote numeracy to help children with counting. So Storybook Collection 48 includes storybooks such as [Counting cabbages](#), [Counting animals](#), [Counting cats](#) and [Can We Count Our Cats?](#)



Finally, Storybook Collection 42 features *how/why* stories and includes titles such as: [How night came to Opio's village](#), [How Stories Came to People](#), [How Tortoise's nose became crooked](#), [Why Ajao was not buried](#) and [Why hyenas limp](#).

I find that this simple way of making storybook collections saves time and provides children with an opportunity to access a diverse selection of storybooks, allowing them to enjoy reading and grow in their imagination.



How night came to Opio's village
Robert Ekuka
Wiehan de Jager

English



Anansi and wisdom
Ghanaian folktale
Wiehan de Jager

English



Why hyenas limp
Oda Wako Genale
Adonay Gebru

English

