

**A CASE FOR NATIONAL BOOK AND READING POLICIES FOR AFRICA
IN THE ADVENT OF THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION**

An Advocacy Policy Paper for the
Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA):
Working Group on Books and Learning Materials (WGBLM)

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INTRODUCTION

National Book Policies (NBPs) as a concept has been with us since the 1970's. It was propagated by UNESCO ostensibly to urge member countries to formulate and adopt book and reading policies with a view to ensuring that books and other reading materials are developed and made commonplace for the purpose of supporting education, literacy and lifelong learning. NBPs require legal action through the Ministries of Education or Culture, because a law needs to be enacted for setting up a National Book Development Council (NBDC). This body is necessary for regulating the book industry, which is by nature complex. With the government being at the centre, it involves authors, publishers/printers, distributors/wholesalers, booksellers, libraries/archivists and last but not least the user/consumer (see Figure 1 below). Today the book chain is even more complex as all actors involved in publishing digital materials would need to be added. The globalization of electronic publishing did not lead to a balanced representation of publications and knowledge, but the dominance of research and information from the Global North remains. For example, the whole continent of Africa contains only about 2.6% of the world's geotagged Wikipedia articles despite having 14% of the world's population and 20% of the world's landmass (Information Geographics, 2016).



Figure 1: The Traditional Book Chain © LilyNyariki2016

Therefore, deliberate support to local and regional publication efforts in Africa remains crucial given the fact that the number of research articles is rising Schemm. (2013).

A recent study by the Results for Development Institute (2016) reveals that there is in Africa lack of awareness among governments, parents and teachers of the value of reading in supporting literacy and education.

In many African countries, the availability of books and other relevant reading materials is still low. The graph below shows how many African countries struggle with providing children’s books and other print and digital reading materials in the home environment, which is crucial for developing early literacy skills.

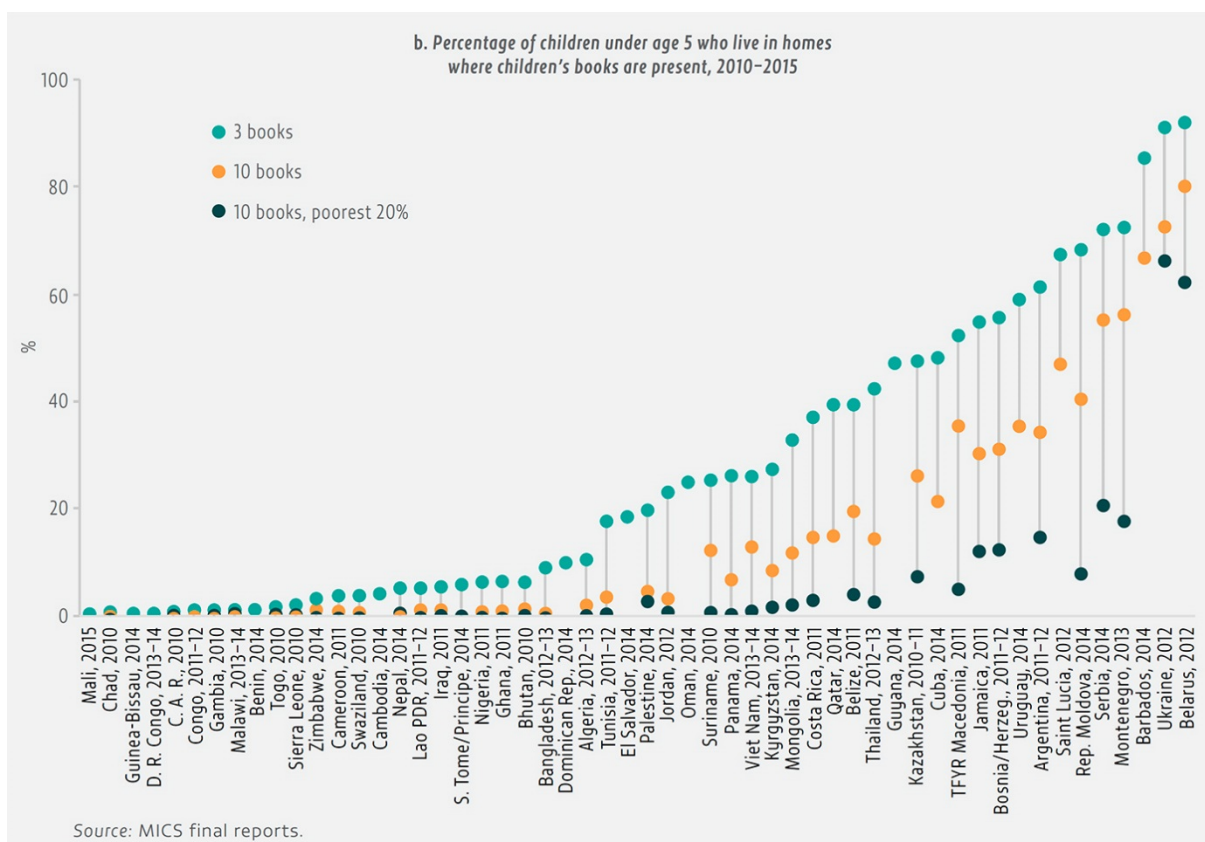


Figure 2(© UNESCO 2016, p. 215)

The formulation of Book and Reading Policies will directly improve the levels of literacy and reading in Africa and support the realization of the United Nations’ (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 that urges member countries to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and effective learning environments. It will also impact the Africa Union (AU), which has come up with its own Agenda 2063 and the

Common Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016-25 also seeks to improve the quality of life in Africa and to revolutionize education.

This paper makes a case for the need to have well-articulated and coordinated book and reading policies which will give rise to National Book Development Councils (NBDCs) in support of the creation, production, distribution, dissemination and use of books and other print and digital reading materials in national as well as local languages. Given the importance of ICTs for teaching and learning literacy skills throughout life, it also discusses their place in developing and sustaining the reading culture. Without these policies, the ambitious targets by both the UN and the AU are in danger of not being achieved.

BOOKS AND READING SUPPORT LITERACY, LIFELONG LEARNING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Books, literacy, lifelong learning and sustainable development are inextricably linked. Without access to a wide range of relevant books and reading materials, literacy skills – which are the basis for lifelong learning – cannot be developed and sustained. UNESCO already stated in 1991 that this "involves the development of literate societies in the developing world, and cannot be attained solely by providing quality learning materials to schools. If people are to stay literate, they must have access to a wide variety of written materials and continue the habit of reading in their adult lives". This is underlined by Shrestha and Krolak (2015) when saying that "...it is not enough to simply teach the population how to read if there is actually nothing relevant to be read and furthermore no motivation or demand for them to use and practice their literacy skills". The two author's further state that, "dynamic and stimulating literate environments at home, in the classroom, in the workplace and in the community, are essential to literacy acquisition, development and lifelong learning." This means that the whole community, including parents, grandparents as well as teachers and librarians, must be fully involved in creating a literate environment and reading culture among children and the whole community. There are many innovative and effective examples of literacy and reading practices from all over the world, including intergenerational approaches to literacy teaching and learning, which show how books and other reading materials are used to develop literate communities.

For Africa, it is important to provide books and other reading materials with a content that is relevant and available in local languages. Krolak (2005, p. 4) states "in order to express and record local culture, knowledge and research and to translate relevant material into indigenous languages, it is important to have a strong local publishing industry. Unfortunately, in many countries the complex book chain, linking author to reader, via publishers, booksellers and librarians, is often small and struggling. The situation is particularly complicated in countries that have several local languages, especially if it is government policy that pupils should be taught in

their mother tongue for the first few years of primary schooling.” Garzón (2005, p. 6) asserts that “in environments where books are rare and expensive objects, those who want to learn to read can become discouraged” and that “to attempt to satisfy this need implies a constant and lasting supply of printed materials adapted to the needs of the readers in question.” Garzón advises that this can only be achieved, in a lasting and sustainable way, through the creation of local publishing capacities and markets for locally produced books.

THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

In its Post-2015 Position Paper on Education, UNESCO (2014) proposes that flexible lifelong learning opportunities should be provided through formal, non-formal and informal pathways, including harnessing the potential of ICT’s to create a new culture of learning. UNESCO’s Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices Database (LitBase) offers many examples of programmes on how ICT’s can be used creatively and innovatively for improving literacy skills. With the high availability of smart phones in Africa, especially among the youth, their use for supporting reading and other literacy skills has to be further explored and harnessed. The emergence of digital formats is raising the question, which format is more preferred and better placed to tackle the endemic absence of a reading culture in Africa. As the ability to read is fundamental, all efforts must be made to ensure that children and youth, women and men alike, are given the opportunity to read and develop literacy skills through a variety of formats. Printed books, eBooks, tablets, mobile (smart) phones, audio books, DVDs, videos, radio, TV, maps, comics, reference works and the internet are all critical in the quest for quality education and lifelong learning.

A good example of best practice is offered by the Kenya National Library Services Board, which provides tablets to children to make reading more fun and involving. Similar initiatives are found in South Africa with the Africa Storybook Project that operates on open licensing publishing model and makes children books available digitally (www.africastorybookproject.org). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has come up with the Bloom Writers Software (www.bloomesoftware.org) that enables everybody to quickly produce reading materials in different languages and to make them available in digital and printed formats.

Digital formats have implications in the debate on National Book and Reading Policies for Africa and any such policy ought to integrate the use of modern technologies to help support national literacy and lifelong learning efforts. UNESCO (2016) states that there is great potential for ICT’s to benefit literacy teaching and learning, there is still a lack of research and evidence on the impact of mobile learning on literacy skills. To fully embrace the potential of ICTs, there also needs to be a reliable IT infrastructure. Communities that struggle with power cuts, outdated hardware, no or limited access to the Internet, etc. are at a serious disadvantage in this globalized world.

PAST INITIATIVES AT HAVING NATIONAL BOOK POLICIES

In the 1970's and 80's, the African book publishing industries had a boost from UNESCO which held several forums propagating the need for each country to formulate National Book Policies (NBPs). African countries did not embrace this call for formulating National Book and Reading Policies (NBRPs) and the creation of the related institutions –National Book Development Councils (NBDCs), whose purpose would be to regulate and harmonize activities in this domain. Their absence has resulted in disjointed efforts in the publishing sector as well as the development of relevant and adequate teaching and reading materials in most countries in Africa. Unfortunately, this also means that Africa has continued to be a consumer of other people's knowledge and culture and has missed out on the opportunity to contribute substantively towards the world's knowledge base.

Zell (2008) wrote about a major conference on publishing and book development in Africa held in Nigeria in 1972. It consisted of publishers, booksellers, librarians, writers, and scholars from many countries, who reaffirmed their belief, “that books are an indispensable cornerstone in education and that a nation's book industry must be considered an essential industry in terms of national development planning”. Zell further argued that the reality of the book sector anywhere in the world is closely related to government policies or the lack of them. He also observed that the main reason why the African book industry has not yet realized its full potential is because very few governments have provided positive support for their book industries, or created environments conducive to writing, reading, and publishing.

Rosenberg (2000) observed that the “shortage of good quality teaching and learning materials remains the main stumbling block to literacy and effective schooling”. A World Bank Report (1988) revealed that “...there is a strong evidence that increasing the provision of instructional materials, especially textbooks, is the most cost effective way of raising the quality of primary education”. It furthermore underlines that “the scarcity of learning materials in the classrooms is the most serious impediment to educational effectiveness in Africa”. And it concluded by stating that “...it is certainly here that the gap in educational provision between this region and the rest of the world has grown widest”.

It is noteworthy to mention that other parts of the developing world (notably India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asian and Pacific countries) took the cue from UNESCO and now boast well-regulated book industries. Good examples are the Asia-Pacific Reading Promotion and Book Development (APPREB) and the Regional Center for the Promotion of Books in Latin America and Caribbean (CERLALC), which are UNESCO supported and ensure that reading needs of the people in those regions are catered for.

Available information shows that Africa also had a similar body, referred to as the Regional Centre for Book Promotion in Africa (CREPLA) in Yaoundé, Cameroon, which unfortunately remained moribund and non-performing since its inception in the 1970's. Africa's leaders need to revive this regional organization which should ensure that Africa's reading needs are catered for. There has to be a concerted effort by Ministers of Education in Africa to reflect back on the merits as provided by UNESCO on why it is critical to formulate National Book and Reading Policies, enact them into law and establish National Book Development Councils to implement them.

A number of African countries, including Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa and Guinea, held at different times national book development forums with varying degrees of success. At an ADEA sponsored conference on Book Development in Africa in 2011 it was noted that the book and education sectors are strategic to the acquisition of critical knowledge, competences, skills and qualifications for the world of work. As books and education are intrinsically intertwined, it is reasonable to assert that book and reading policies are indispensable for quality education and sustainable development.

TENETS OF A BOOK POLICY

According to UNESCO, a National Book Policy is a coherent set of regulations and indicators set by the national authority to govern the development, production, printing, distribution and dissemination of books and other reading materials, with the aim of promoting a reading culture (see a model National Book Policy in the appendices). The backing of the highest national authority is essential since it is not only a question of the allocation of sufficient resources, but also of giving official status to the book policy to ensure that it will be implemented. Each stakeholder has a distinct and specialized role, but many times there are conflicting interests among them. With such dynamic and specialized stakeholders, the ensuing mistrust, misunderstanding and rivalry demands for a mediator. This mediation can only be done through a regulatory body, namely a National Book and Reading Council (NBRC), which is mandated by law to have representation of all stakeholders and can deal with each stakeholder firmly and fairly. In the case of mediation, any ensuing matter would be discussed and resolved by the council and a binding decision made for purposes of harmonious relationships for the good of the industry.

Figure 3: The traditional book chain stakeholders with their distinct roles



THE GOVERNMENT - This is the regulator and responsible for maintaining harmony within the industry through policy. They make laws, provide tax incentives and are responsible for training and supporting reading promotion through school and institutional libraries through budgeting and provision of funds. They support cross border trade and cultural autonomy.

AUTHORS - These are originators of ideas and manuscripts and the all-important part of the chain. They are easily exploited by Publishers and their interests must be secured through legal contracts. They need special training on how to present their manuscripts.

PUBLISHERS/PRINTERS - These are the investors and take a big responsibility in ensuring books are produced in the most attractive manner, with the right price and at the right time. They determine pricing of the final product and may need subsidies.

DISTRIBUTORS/WHOLESALE - These deal directly with Publishers to bring all publishers' books under one roof to make it easy for bookseller's especially from rural areas to quickly access the stocks they need.

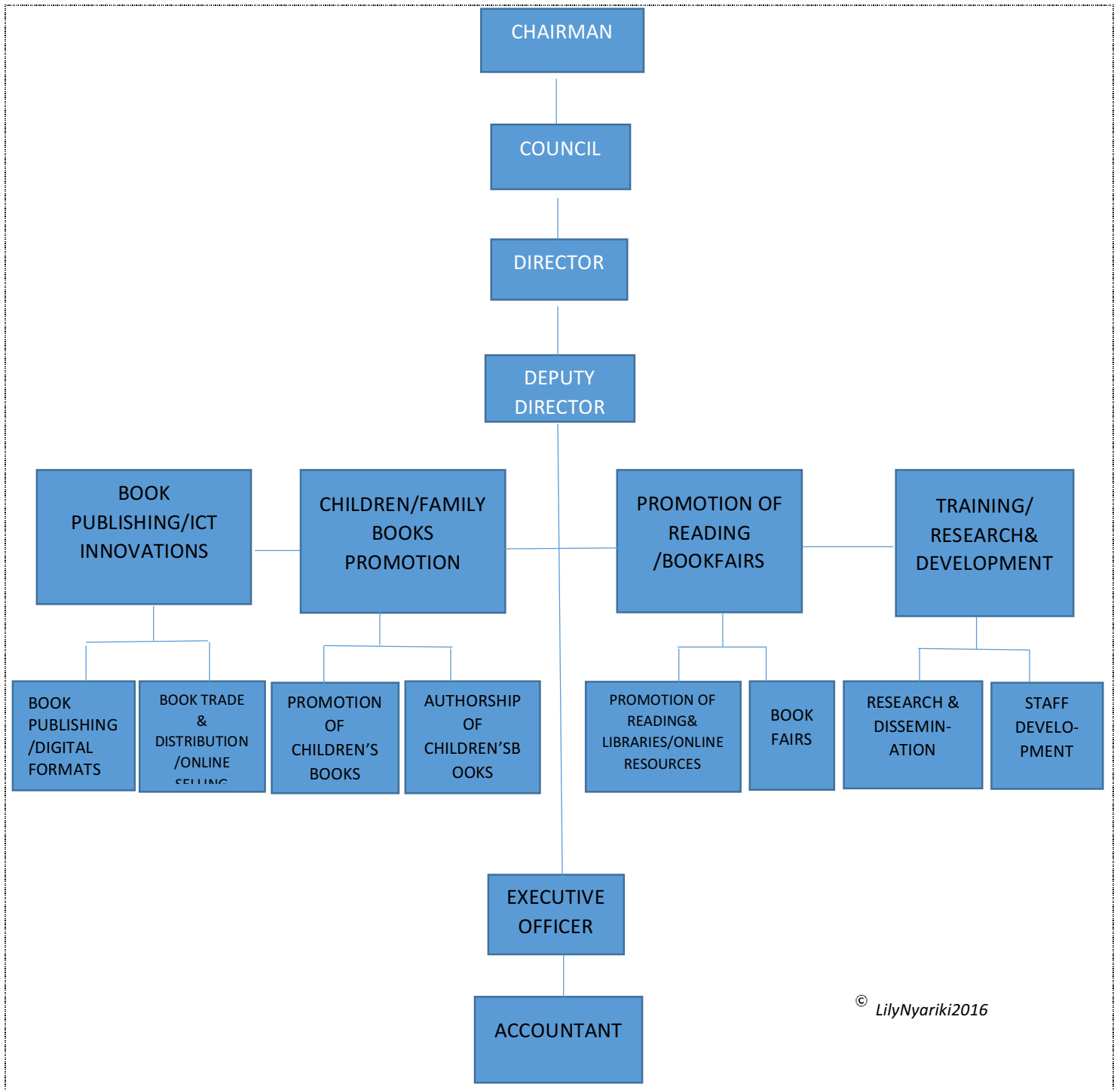
BOOKSELLER - A key stakeholder in the book chain as they are the ones who bring books into close contact with readers/users/consumers. They are found in strategic small towns across the country and hence play a critical role in disseminating information to rural schools and institutions.

LIBRARIES/ARCHIVES - These are institutional consumers who purchase in bulk and greatly support the sustainability of publishing as a whole. As consumers they ought to purchase through booksellers. They are key in promoting the reading habit and recording and keeping titles for research and posterity.

USERS/CONSUMERS/READERS - These are individuals and parents who buy to read for leisure or educational purposes. They are key in supporting the publishing industry because they are the very reason publishing exists.

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A Book Council would be represented as shown below:



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Figure 4: Proposed Organizational Structure for a National Book and Reading Council (adopted from a report of a national seminar for re-launching the National Book Development Council of Kenya. Nairobi, 1988)

The mandate of an NBRC among other things would be to ensure:

- the right content (greater indigenous publishing in terms of both content, language and digital formats)
- the right place (accessibility of bookshops, libraries and other distribution channels)
- the right price (an affordable price, given the socio-economic conditions that exist in Africa)

Specific objectives of a NBRC would be to:

- foster literary creation
- establish an appropriate legal framework for the protection of authors' rights
- provide fiscal, credit and administrative incentives for the publishing industry
- facilitate nationwide distribution and free international circulation of books
- establish nationwide library networks
- introduce new methods for the teaching of reading
- train human resources in the different skills involved in the book sector
- mainstream ICTs as facilitators of literacy acquisition
- maintain a data base of all books produced for posterity
- Meet the reading needs of learners with different interests and literacy levels

The functions of a NBRC will be to:

- to advise the Government on the enforcement and implementation of the Book Law and on the development of a National Book and Reading Policy (NBRP) (see model book policy in the appendices)
- to harmonize state and private-sector interests and efforts for the sustained and democratic development of the national publishing process
- to propose to the competent authorities the adoption of legal, economic and administrative policies or measures that would help promote and strengthen the culture of books and reading, and publishing in general
- to serve as an entity for consultation and conciliation in all matters concerning publication policy and its implementation, evaluation and updating

A NBRC is a legal entity that has the power to manage every aspect of the law (see model law in the appendices).

IMPLEMENTATION/ENFORCEMENT

A NBRP will remain real and practical to the extent it is owned the stakeholders and implemented by the stakeholders. Of great importance is the key role the Government is expected to play, first by funding the establishment of the NBRC and ensuring that the Council is established as a legal entity able to perform independently in order to regulate and harmonize activities in the book industry. Secondly, the government will need to empower the stakeholders by bringing them together in order to have a functional forum where each one of them feel recognized and supported through capacity building, subsidies where needed and overall support in book creation, production, dissemination and reading promotion. Without this concerted approach, it will be difficult to have a functioning Council and although it is clear that it is critical to have effective implementation, the idea may not work for lack of appreciation of why the book industry is critical in the first place. It is our view that African governments consider the role to be played by a NBRC and support without reservation this key sector of great national importance.

CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

National Book and Reading Policies are at the core of educational quality, literacy development, lifelong learning and sustainable development. Africa needs to position itself to achieve the UN SDG's and its own set of targets as stipulated in Agenda 2063 and the CESA 2016-25, if it is to catch up with the rest of the world. All African countries owe it to themselves to formulate their book and reading policies and enact National Book and Reading Councils (NBRCs). Given the critical importance of books and reading in the development agenda, ADEA should jumpstart the process of propagating NBRCs by organizing high level forums at the various regional economic blocks, for the purpose of first discussing the need for NBRCs and later the revival of an institution such as CREPLA.

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APPENDICES

- Model National Book Policy
- Book Law
- National Book Policy – UNESCO Guidelines
- About ADEA – Working Group on Books and Learning Materials (WGBLM)