STORIES ACROSS AFRICA (StAAf):
towards a shared African children’s literature

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STORIES ACROSS AFRICA (StAAf) is a pan-African project which began in 2004

... a core project of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), the official language agency of the African Union (AU).

... enabling and supporting book reading and a love of stories among children across Africa.
Who is StAAf?

Coordinated centrally by the Early Literacy Unit of PRAESA, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Regional involvement in East, South, West, Central and North Africa, as well as contacts in the Diaspora.

A steering committee made up of individuals from Egypt, Ghana, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania, South Africa.
StAAf is working to create common anthologies of stories in African and other languages
...using African story tradition

- Power and wisdom in stories once cherished has shrunk into insignificance in the eyes of teachers and others responsible for early childhood and later phases of education.

- At home the habit of storytelling has often dwindled and even died.
Yet, like most children in the 21st century African children need to learn to read and write
But how are they to work out why people find it useful or enjoyable and why should they bother to learn when their experiences with print are few and far between?
Disjuncture between development of education and children’s literature development

Storybooks categorised as ‘supplementary materials’ - accepted as normal in the education system.

Reflects notion and reality that significant initial texts, when available, are textbooks with focus on decontextualised learning.

Inadequate understandings of how young children learn and begin to read and write.
...so most don’t have a good start with appropriate books
Despite different contexts...
ALL CHILDREN benefit from stories and books!
Tasks:

? Develop and support the use of African languages in print;

? Support mother tongue based bilingual education in Africa;

? Stimulate and support the African publishing industry and African literary and visual artists to create and foster the use of children’s literature;

? Begin to create a common store of written children’s literature for African children in their own languages;

? Support possibilities for reading for enjoyment as part of literacy learning and development.
Why are doing this?

In addition to literacy development, we are promoting unity through diversity.

Help children from diverse African societies and communities grow up with the understanding that they share a valuable common heritage at the same time as we cherish all of our unique social and cultural attributes.

a special pan African set of little books for young children (2 - 6 years old) has been made, French, Portuguese, Kiswahili, Arabic.

a range of languages as well as the five AU official languagesic and and English.
LITTLE BOOKS FOR LITTLE HANDS

STORIES ACROSS AFRICA
A CELEBRATION IN THE YEAR OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES 2006–2007
Contributions from

Egypt, Ghana, Ethiopia, Senegal, South Africa, Cote d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Mauritius and Mozambique.
Young children’s little hands can easily hold and handle the sturdy little books and their box...
16 little books for Little Hands
As can bigger hands!
By November 2008

Books will be printed in: Arabic, Afrikaans, Amharic, English, Cinyanja, Emakhuw, French, Isindebele, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Kimwane, Kiswahili, Kinyarwanda, Makonde, Mandingo, Portuguese, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, Twi, Xitsonga, Yao ...

and we hope to continue in this way with many more languages.
Tugire isuku

Mzuri na msali

Kuhle begodu kuhlwengile

Bonito e limpo

Mhle kwaye ucocekile
This is the beginning as ...

LITTLE HANDS has been a pilot run for further work.

Working in a similar way, StAAf is now preparing 3 anthologies of stories for children in early childhood, middle childhood and for teenagers.

We hope these will be published by 2010.
How do we get stories?

Calls put out for stories appropriate for the various age ranges.

The call went out to all African publishers via APNET and to authors via a range of contacts.
Writers workshop for early childhood material
Language issues

Invite texts in the original language accompanied by a translation in English or French.

Dealing with multilingualism not easy: though steering committee members speak a range of languages and others can be called upon. Need a common language text as a base, and this is often not a good, literary translation.
Challenges - there are many!

? Several of the submissions more appropriate as stories for older children.
? Communication
? Funding

? But the point is that each initiative that is taken provides an opportunity for progress
While the difficult question remains

Who can afford to buy books?

There is no doubt that when development and ownership of the domain is representative of the people of Africa, the chance of finding an answer becomes far more likely.
Nkosi! Thank you! Dankie! 
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