

Thanks for having us present and we're so grateful to be part of this network as we venture further into the world of Book-gifting, have learnt a huge amount already and uplifting to hear of everyone else's experience and lessons etc.

Colleague Dorette also here and can help answering questions in you have.



Book Dash is a non-profit publisher and disseminator of beautiful, African picturebooks for very young children.

Book-ownership in South Africa is incredibly low and is linked to equally low literacy levels.

South Africa is also an incredibly unequal country, where some of the population have access to many resources, but the majority of the population have very little.

There is also a legacy of unequal education systems that means literacy levels (and awareness of early literacy development) among the majority of caregivers is also very low.

# The South African Context



For a little more idea of the context in which we operate (to understand what we do and why, which sometimes differs to the national book-gifting programmes), I wanted to look at some topline indicators:

## The South African context

### Population

- 59.3 million estimated current total population
- approximately 1 million babies born every year,
- so 6 million 5 and under.

# The South African Context



## The South African context

### Economic indicators

- Unemployment rate: 30%, a third of the population and growing could reach 50% unemployment with the impact of COVID-19
- Half of the population lives below the upper-bound poverty line and a quarter. 25.2% live below the food poverty line
- The median wage in South Africa is R3,300 monthly (155GBP/170 EUR/190 USD), and each wage supports 3.5 people
- Child support grant is R445/child/month (25 USD/20GBP/22 EUR): less than estimate to feed a small child/month (is R527)
- Local research estimates that GDP per capita could be up to 30% higher if all South Africans were literate.

# The South African Context



## The South African context

### Access to books

- 58% of South African households don't have a single book, and a further 35% have fewer than 10 books.
- 27% use a library 2 - 3 time/month (lower for rural populations, lower SES and lower education levels and fewer libraries in reach  
pg 87, 88 SABDC report, 2016.
- Average takes 30 minutes to get to library, mostly walking or public transport.
- 71% of 4,000 sample said they never visit a library.

# The South African Context



## The South African context

Literacy levels, 2016 PIRLS study as indicator

- SA placed last of all 50 countries surveyed
- 78% of South African Grade 4 children were not able to reach the lowest benchmark compared to 4% internationally. Means they cannot read for meaning or retrieve basic information from the text to answer simplistic questions



Informed by this dire context, Book Dash saw an opportunity to level the playing field and reduce inequality by distributing books to young children in abundance. Hence the vision of every child should own a hundred books by the age of five.

This was informed by research that shows the power of book ownership and the presence of books in the home from an early age improves a child's lifelong prospects of academic and economic success.

To achieve this, we needed an abundance of high-quality books that we could print very cost-effectively translate and print across all 11 official languages of South Africa. But there was also a lack of existing appropriate material and what there was was expensive to use.

Being publishers, we developed Book Dash model for creating new open-licensed picturebooks in 12 hours, harnessing power of local creative volunteers.

By our estimates (informed by the “cost of books study” done in 2018), this way of making new books saves 80% on the production and printing costs. Necessary when we're thinking of getting books to all children without state funding.

The innovative model for book-creation plus the

- economical size and design of the books,

- lack of rights and royalties,
- plus large volumes we print

mean we consistently print books for about 6 ZAR (about 30 cents in respective currencies) and offer them to funders and partners at R10 (about 50 cents in respective currencies).



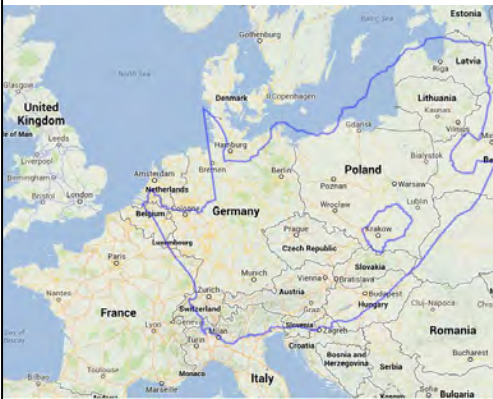


Recap how things fit together:

1. Fast-paced, facilitated model for new book creation.
2. Founded by three individuals in 2014, as a voluntary start-up project intent on increasing access to high quality local books. Now a core Book Dash team of three manage all aspects of the work including optimising systems and relationships.
3. All books are published to our website for free for anyone to access & read.
4. The open-license means anyone can use the books for free and translate them. Incredible uptake, reach and spread of the books adds to our impact, but in South Africa we focus on funds for translation into all 11 official South African languages, and physical distribution of books to children.
5. Printing books in large volumes to reduce unit costs and collaborative print runs to pools funding and reduce costs.
6. A note on funding:
  - Book Dash's early origins were 100% bootstrap, with a small loan from one of the Founders' publishing organisations. It was not triggered by the state.
  - With the help of a few early adopters, we have grown our funding base, with funds coming from private philanthropy, charitable trusts and corporate social investment.
  - Although we work with the state in some capacities and partnerships, we do not receive any state funding for our programmes at all.
7. Getting physical books to children

All these parts work together towards our vision, the image in the centre, every child owning a hundred books by the age of five.

# Targeting the hard to reach



## Targeting the Hard to Reach

Visual: Map showing SA compared to Europe. Examples of rural contexts.

Given the context I just explained, we basically have to treat all our targeted beneficiaries as “hard to reach” for a variety of reasons:

- **Physical inaccessibility:** Very rural settings and large country, levels of infrastructure hugely variable (roads etc) -- makes physical logistics of getting books to children very expensive. Library and postal systems not a reliable means to reaching children.
- **Systemic inaccessibility:** No formalised pre-school system and many children not in an form of pre-school. Grade RR made compulsory only very recently. Much ECD is child-minding with unskilled practitioners. Many of our partners work to upskill and equip these centres to comply with standards to be registered. Healthcare system is an option to an extent, but is stretched and buy-in not always possible given other priorities.
- **Financial inaccessibility:** Very low SES, targeting families that would never otherwise be able to afford books. Hence the “100 books” -- books from Book Dash are not a trigger to go visit the library or invest in books, they form the library.

# Targeting the hard to reach



## Reaching the Hard to Reach

Visual: Examples of rural contexts. Book in 11 languages.

- **Contextual inaccessibility:** Majority of books SA children interact with are published elsewhere and not reflective of their reality.
- **Language inaccessibility:** Same as above, most in English. Few existing picturebooks in relevant mothertongue languages -- 11 official SA languages. We cater for this and also find wordless books to be extremely beneficial.
- **Educational inaccessibility:** Parents with little education and low literacy levels. Knowledge and skills of how and why to read with children before school, before they can talk, is essential.

Increasing accessibility is key to creating opportunities to read/bond/develop (and all the benefits that come with reading/books).

Book Dash sees our value in identifying and empowering organisations already reaching children, so as to build roads into systems to reach the hard to reach.

# Working through partnerships



Visuals: map of partners around the country & photos from partners

To this end, it was clear to us that the path that would allow us to make the most effective use of resources would be to identify and plug into networks already aligned with our vision and enable them to incorporate book-gifting in their work, rather than recreate new channels.

Three main types channels:

- **Literacy promotion or early childhood development organisations**
- **Healthcare channels**
- **Alternative channels**

Multi-pronged approach, targets children from many different angles without duplicating efforts

It also allows our team and overheads to remain small while our reach is wide.

Partners have to adhere to strict criteria that align with our vision

We have worked with about 200 partners to date.

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(To onboard a partner for book distribution we need to see that they are:

- Working with children 5 and under
- Have strong literacy promotion component to their work

- There is parent and/or community involvement
- Believe in (or willing to believe in) book ownership for young children
- Have a trusted and strong track record of work)

# Enabled growth and reach

Total Book Dash books in the world



Through these partnerships, and maintaining a clear focus on our role in the book-gifting value-chain, we've managed to scale quickly and grow our distribution effectively.

We're about to distribute our millionth book this year -- a milestone we've been working towards for a while.

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(In the early years, much time and resources went to creating the books so we had appropriate (and cost-effective) content to distribute. In early 2018, we published our 100th title, and thus shifted focus towards strengthening partnerships for funding and distribution to get physical copies of the books into children's hands and homes.)



Also to note:

- Don't have a standard book pack, but select from our 140 titles based on age and languages of the children the partners reach. Send enough for every child to get at least one, but often multiple.
- Book ownership is such a rarity in South Africa and resources so scarce, that even the partner organisations sometimes need to be educated on why it's important to send the books home with children and increase reading opportunities in the home as well as the place of learning.
- This is why we prefer to develop partnerships over many years, to build trust and ensure the books go home with the children. It's why multi-year funding partnerships are also so key to our work (we don't have guaranteed state-funding).
- Don't train anyone directly, but do provide consistent messaging to partners at all touchpoints about the intent for the books
- Each donation goes with a pamphlet explaining the concept and importance of book-gifting, as well as tips for how and why to read with young children.



# ECD/Literacy Promotion Organisations



Channel Type #1: ECD/Literacy Promotion Organisations E.g. Thanda, iThemba, Masicorp, Nal'ibali

**Literacy promotion or early childhood development organisations** with a strong literacy-promotion emphasis. There are many already doing a great job of reaching families and promoting early literacy, but don't have the means or budget to provide children with books. Sometimes community-based organisations providing many services, sometimes national focused only on literacy

44% of the partners we work with said that before Book Dash, they've never been able to give books to the children they reach.

Lucky to have lots of these organisations in SA, and a very active ECD and civil society -- but funding to distribute books to give to children seems unimaginable (when many centres won't even have a library corner) and would never happen if we didn't provide the books for free/at extremely low cost -- so it's an obvious channel to reaching children in a mediated environment.

# Healthcare channels



ChannelType #2: Healthcare.

E.g. Sakhe Esethu, Bethesda, Paarl Hospital, New Somerset,

Recognise the power of this channel, but it's size and inertia and overburdened capacity makes it difficult to get buy-in on a national level without guarantee of funding.

We want this to be sustainable to so allow partners to suggest what will work best and we also learn: sometimes it's the the OT department who distribute the books, sometimes it's the support staff, sometimes the paediatricians and sometimes a community organisation who promote the books in the books in the waiting rooms at clinics.

Definitely changing the way practitioners think about healthcare, and holistic development.

# Alternative channels



## Channel Type #3: Alternative channels

In thinking about how to cost-effectively target the hard to reach, we work to identify other existing network/systems that reach parents and children & tap into those, rather than creating our own.

Example:

- Santa Shoebox Project -- 100,000 boxes each year already going to vulnerable children,
- no books until partnership with Book Dash.
- We source funds and add books to boxes.



Thank you!

We know access to books and owning books makes a difference & literacy promotion provided by partners, so success for us means enabling them to back that up with books to give away freely.

Research we reference: international & local

- Mariah Evans and Joanna Sikora's work on number of books in the home
- University of Reading/Mikhulu Trust book-sharing research in SA
- Reach out and Read
- National Literacy Trust in the UK
- Centre for the developing child and James Heckman's work on power of early intervention