



Stories are Africa's new gold

The Book Industry in Africa: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities for Growth (UNESCO 2025)

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Objective of the Study

Purpose

Provide a comprehensive mapping of the African book industry across 54 UNESCO Member States, identify structural trends, challenges, and strategic opportunities.

Goal

Inform policymaking and guide sustainable development of the book sector, with a snapshot baseline for 2023.



Limitations

Excludes academic and university publishing, print and paper industries.

Does **not include** self-publishing, digital-only publishing (e.g. serial fiction via WhatsApp), or informal sector outputs.

Data gaps, especially in countries with weak statistical systems.

AI's impact acknowledged, but **not yet fully measurable**.

Employment figures are **conservative** estimates, formal sector only.



Key Findings

Market Size

- Africa represents **5.4% of global publishing revenue** (US\$7 billion in 2023)
- **Educational publishing** dominates ($\approx 70\%$ of the market), with **US\$13 billion potential**.
- Trade publishing is growing in certain markets (e.g., Egypt, Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa).
- Dominated by foreign publishers – estimated at 70% of market share.

Structure and Reach

- 6,400 publishers producing 86,000 titles/year
- 13,000 bookstores and 8,000 public libraries
- 270 literary festivals and fairs
- 200 professional associations
- 6 countries produce 82% of the titles published



Key Findings

Trade Deficit

- **Imports:** US\$597 million | **Exports:** US\$81 million
- Many countries still dependent on former colonial markets – UK & France.
- Weak ISBN infrastructure (only 54% have national ISBN agencies).

Weak Regulation

- Only 5 African countries have specific **book industry laws** beyond copyright.
- 54% impose **VAT on books**.
- 38% have a designated governmental body overseeing the book sector.
- 91% copyright Acts, all outdated – WIPO/IFFRO project 29 countries



Key Findings

Underdeveloped Sector

- Low production capacity
- Weak institutional support
- Limited infrastructure
 - Including training
- English, French publishing dominate
- Very limited audience data – i.e. book reading activity, access, preferences, barriers



Opportunities

Resilient, committed industry

Untapped stories

Unprecedented interest in cultural and creative industries


African Development Bank feasibility study to invest in CCI

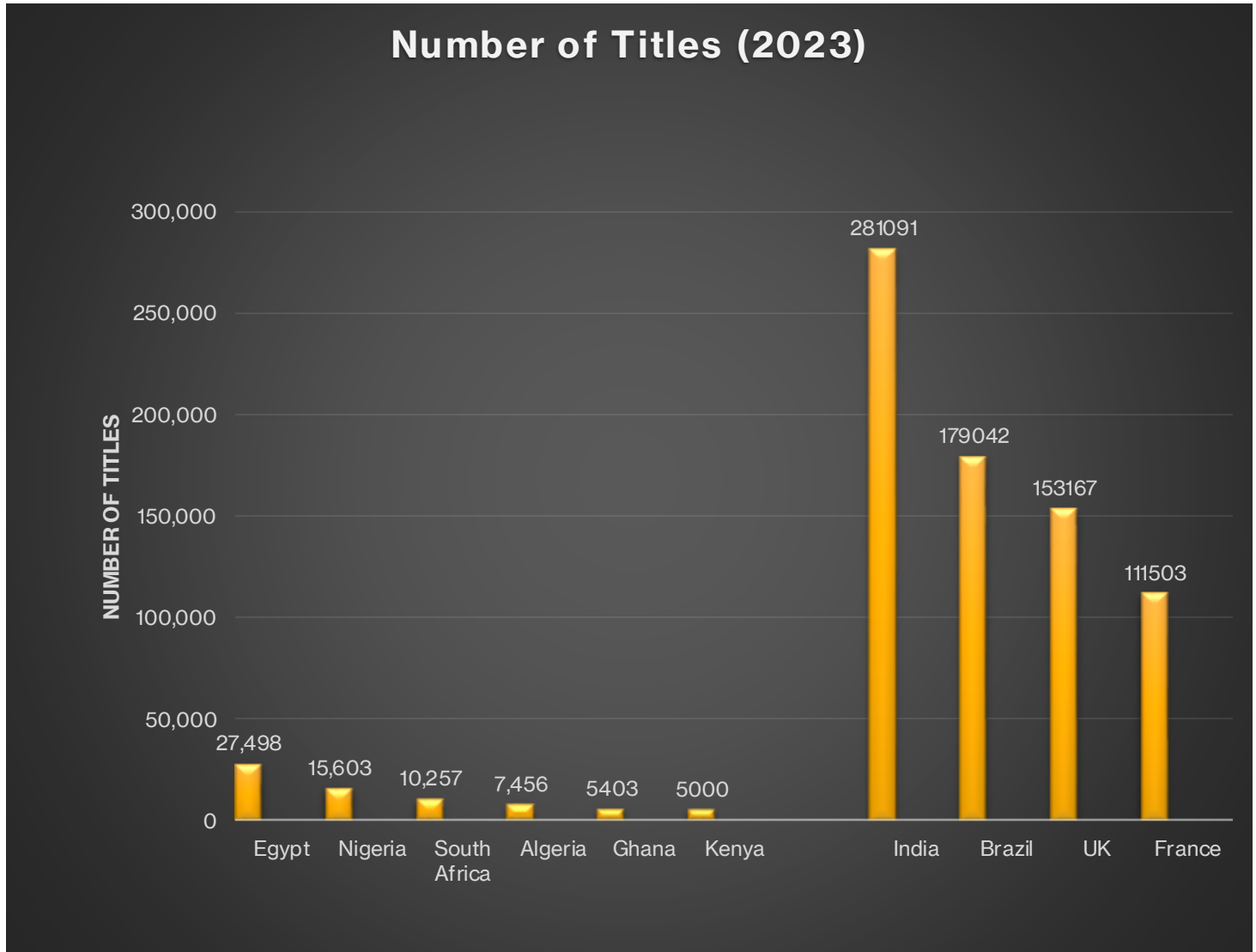
Growing literary festival scene

Young population

Growing digital adoption

Title Production

- Africa's publishing output remains marginal globally.
- Africa produces **~85,000 titles/year**.
- Compare that to:
- **India:** 281,000 titles
- **Brazil:** 179,000 titles
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-  Africa's top publishing countries still lag far behind global leaders.



Public vs Private Support

Access to Books: A Glaring Gap

- **Bookstores:** ~13,000
- **Public Libraries:** ~8,000

South Africa leads with more than 1900 public libraries. Although the library per capita registers at 1/40,000 people.

Illustrates that private sector investment on the continent is much higher than public investment. Furthermore, Africa has a very resilient industry – despite lack of government support, the industry is committed to bringing books to people.

Public Support

Public Support Best Practice

- Botswana's LTDF raised \$363,000 in 2023 via a **levy on tech devices** – used to support local authors and publishers.
- Promising models for **financing the sector**.

Key Recommendations

Enact National Book Policies – alongside Industrial Policy Action Plans (South Africa has a Masterplan)

Strengthen Rights & Royalties Systems

Improve copyright enforcement and establish functioning RROs to ensure authors are paid fairly.

Support Local Publishing & Printing

Incentives and financial support to locally owned publishers to increase domestic production – impose a foreign investment law to limit foreign ownership

Expand Access & Infrastructure

Invest in libraries, bookstores, and digital platforms

Promote Regional Collaboration and promote African Content Globally

Develop export strategies, translation support, and cross-border rights catalogues under AfCFTA.

Regional Insights - Production Capacity

Top Performer: Northern Africa
Lowest: Central Africa

Region	Titles Published	% Dominated by Top Country
Northern	40,370	68% Egypt
Western	22,156	86% Nigeria
Southern	12,515	82% South Africa
Eastern	9,320	54% Kenya
Central	954	75% by Cameroon, Congo, Gabon

Distribution Infrastructure

Region	Bookstores	Public Libraries	Notes
Eastern	5,383	1,089	Mostly in Kenya, Ethiopia
Western	5,058	1,546	Heavy Nigeria dominance
Northern	1,659	2,722	Strong public library system
Southern	490	2,236	87% of libraries in South Africa
Central	147	361	Very limited infrastructure

Legal & Policy Environment



Region	National ISBN	Book Law	Coordinating Body	IP/Copyright
Northern	83%	33%	83%	100%
Southern	80%	0%	30%	100%
Eastern	57%	0%	21%	79%
Western	40%	13%	47%	87%
Central	22%	11%	33%	100%