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What challenges has your library faced? How did you respond?
The Benin case

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I - Introduction

I am Beatrice Lalinon GBADO. writer for children and young people, I am the founder of the publishing house Ruisseaux d'Afrique, and initiator of SELIBEJ: Beninese week for children's books. This paper was prepared in link with Ms. MORA of the Departmental Library of Parakou, the northern capital of Benin ; it describes ten years of activities programmed for children and young people in our library network.

II The problem : A dying library network

II.1 The absence of African books for children

When I was a child, I read in a rather modest environment, third-, fourth- and fifth-hand books, public library books, books borrowed from the school case, books, bits of books, written words... I have read a lot. Books coming from elsewhere, there to tell us the life and dreams of others. I am always fascinated by the beauty of literature; I love literature. In my own personal balance, there were also the evenings, around an elder : the school of moonlight, in the joy and drunkenness of fables, the school of African wisdom, of myths, tales and legends.

In my youth, next to theatre and songs, writing was for me the better way of expression, of communicating with others, of exchanging ideas, of asserting my vision, my thoughts, myself... The taste and the pleasure of writing aroused in myself, as the best way of communication.

When I became a mother, I felt the need to pass on to children and young people the human values I received during evenings in the moonlight, with my parents, my aunts and my grandparents. But when I went in libraries I didn't find any book that talked about my culture, my

land, Africa... Except for school books of course. But I was eager to share a pleasure and a passion, not an obligation or a duty.

This is how I came to publish folktales, adventure tales I had written for myself, for no reason.

It is my conviction that every child has the right to bathe in his own culture, to be nourished by his mother culture before being fed by the culture of others. I believe that children must be made conscious of their identity, so that they can grow from their cultural roots... They must be themselves, so that they can be enriched by others better, so that they can enrich others better.

II.2 The absence of an African publishing house for children: the creation of Editions Ruisseaux d’Afrique.

In the eighties, there was not a publishing house in Benin to produce books for children and young people. To my approaches, sub regional publishing houses responded with unanimous silence. To come out of this dead end, I decided to go into self-publishing. So I created the series Ruisseaux d’Afrique, hoping that one day a publisher would take it over... The reception to the series was good but no publisher appeared.

But authors approached me asking me to publish their books.

It is from abroad that we were baptised as “Editions” Ruisseaux d’Afrique: by La Joie par les livres that had seen some of our works and that I knew vaguely. When I received their first letter, I turned the envelope in every way and I told myself “Why not! Let’s go for a publishing house!”. I began to write in 1982. The first books of Ruisseaux d’Afrique series were produced in 1991, but it is only in 1998 that the publishing house was formally created.

II.3 The absence of partners, of dynamic libraries, of the promotion of public reading

The enthusiasm people showed did not have repercussions on sales. Congratulations abounded but few people bought books. Not families nor the community nor the State. Our books were products for rich people's children or for those of the middle class that wanted them. That was not my goal.

So my problem was not resolved, because:

- Our books did not meet their target readers,
- Ours books were expensive for the average living standards of the population
- Community solutions were necessary, but who was to think about them?
- The public reading network was weak (40 libraries for more than 400 towns and villages),
- The library network was not very alive and its offer (book donations, collections 90% “foreign”) was not adapted to the demand. There was in certain libraries the atmosphere of cemeteries, of book cemeteries. A repellent sadness.

In short, after the challenge of the absence of children's books, there was the challenge of the lack of interest for the book, the exclusion from reading which is a major key for the child's development. We were facing the challenge of a public reading network that was not only little developed but was perishing. No attraction, no stimulation, no life.

What to do?

III The project we implemented : SELIBEJ, the Beninese week for children's books

To face up to this situation, we created the Beninese week for children's books : a cultural week, a week for activities : cultural contests (reading, poetry, “questions for a champion”, questions on the book chain, drawings, etc.), with book prizes pre-bought by our partners, a week of solidarity, of meetings, of focus on books as tools for the construction of the child and the young person.

We started in 1999, that is, on the first birthday of the publishing house. After a tour of the library network and a rise in the awareness of the disastrous situation, we cautiously chose to start with the big cities.

The first SELIBEJ took place at Porto-Novo (the administrative capital) and at Cotonou (the economic capital).

The following years, we have progressed into the interior of the country: the capital cities of the six departments, then the twelve biggest towns, and so on.

We also opened to private promoters of public reading, to youth organizations that shared the concern for reading promotion.

III.1 The actors

The actors of SELIBEJ are librarians, readers, donors, children's book publishers, journalists.

Librarians :

Our collaboration was built progressively:

- The first stage was to create awareness, through meetings. At every meeting, we introduced the project and its goals to them and aroused their support. This stage lasted some three years.
- Next stage was that of adaptation; we spent time with them, listened to them so as to adjust our actions, to adapt them to the real situation and real needs.
- Then came the present stage of supple cooperation, where the librarian is at his place, takes the initiative to organise activities, thinks of rendering his or her library always more attractive.

Readers :

The strength of SELIBEJ is in his slogan: “A book for those who want to read!” Children and young people have understood the message well. Their desire to read can be observed at two occasions:

- When the Book-cheque contest is launched : by taking part in it, they show their wish to have a book, and every year we make sure that every participant in the contest wins at least one book. When we have too many winners -sometimes entire schools participate- we make a donation that is the starting point to create a school library or a school book-bag.
- During the book's week : people actually go to reading centres and libraries, to do the contest and win books. The end of SELIBEJ is heartbreaking because we never have enough books for all the participants.

Donors :

We can classify them in two groups:

- The NGOs, Youth organizations that mobilize the children of their villages (JIP-Jeunes en marche –ACCD). They dedicate time to share with young people their conviction of the importance of reading.
- Individuals, enterprises such as printers, the Ministry of Culture, French Cooperation, international institutions like PLAN Benin... They pre-buy the books that will be given to children during the activities.

Publishers of children's books : the organisers

They have associated themselves progressively to Editions Ruisseaux d'Afrique to create the event each year:

- preparation meetings : conception, planning
- activities during SELIBEJ : visits to libraries, conferences, debates, mini book-fair ...

Journalists

The media, especially local radio stations at the beginning, have played a big part in SELIBEJ.

III.2 The events

There are three important stages:

a. The launching

It coincides with the launching of the book-cheque contest. The posters and texts of the competition are sent to schools, libraries and reading centres. This is when demands for pre-buying of books are sent to potential donors.

b. The preparations

During this stage, we correct the answers to the contest, the cheques are issued, the books are distributed in the different libraries, and the supervisors who will represent the organizers are pointed out and trained.

c. The cultural week

Other than activities around books, this week is also the occasion for

- new books launchings
- workshops
- meetings with authors and illustrators at the libraries

The text describing SELIBEJ that can be found as appendix is that of 2008. For 10 years now our language and our approach have been the same.

IV The results

Together with other actors in the book chain, SELIBEJ has brought the public reading network to life. Today, it is an event very much expected and supported by children and young people.

- Four libraries participated in 1999, with a hundred children,
- Thirty-six libraries have participated every year from 2000 on, with more than 2000 children and young people

- Thirty-six libraries and more than 4000 children and young people en 2007
- The 2008 edition, the 10th, took place from June 16th to 21st : thirty-nine libraries, more than 5000 children's books from Benin (new books, as usual) for an amount of 25.000.000 Cfa Francs, that is, more than 38 200 euros of new African books distributed.

The results of this action, carried every year during ten years, are the following :

IV.1 A revitalization of the library network

- Ten years of presence next to children and young people, to give them the taste of reading for pleasure
- Increase in visitors to libraries between one SELIBEJ and the next one : a percentage of visitors higher and higher, librarians say
- Youth movements' (GNO-JIP-ACCD) commitment to seeing a maximum of children reading
- Book promotion, taken over by children themselves. The winners call their friends, brothers and sisters...
- Fruitful meetings between children, authors and illustrators
- Involvement of private persons, who bought books for children
- Involvement of both the CLAC network (Centres de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle) and of "Public Reading Centres"
- Involvement of French Cooperation
- Progressive involvement of the government
- Punctual involvement of certain NGOs and international institutions

IV.2 A strengthening of the publishing industry

By focusing on children's books once a year, the SELIBEJ together with other actors has participated in the strengthening of publishing for children in Benin:

- By proving that children of today have kept the pleasure of reading intact and that it belongs to adults to propose to them books that fulfil their expectations
- by taking into account the expectations of target groups when creating library book collections and equipment
- By giving value to Beninese creators' work: authors, illustrators, etc.

There is now in Benin a talent pool of authors and illustrators on a permanent training process: nearly a hundred people have participated in one way or the other to the birth of a children's book. Associations are very dynamic, especially in training and promoting their members, for instance AILE Benin (Association of illustrators of children's books), Benin Presse, etc.

At the beginning, Ruisseaux d'Afrique was the only organizer of SELIBEJ. Now, four Beninese publishers unite their efforts so that children adopt and love books, have access to a general culture nourished strongly by the stories, legends, images and sounds of their environment. Creators by nature, publishers provide authors and illustrators the added value of language and image editing.

By taking part in the event, they make Beninese creators' work visible. Twice, Beninese publishing for children has been rewarded by the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, in 2002 and in 2005 with the Alioune Diop Award.

With this reinforcement of the domestic book production, the idea of a larger market was born. The solution has been networking with partner publishers, in Tunisia, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Togo, Madagascar, Senegal, etc.

The “Caravane du livre” project, developed by booksellers members of AILF (Association Internationale de Libraires Francophones) the last four years, has opened our market more, and our books are more and more present in African libraries.

V Perspectives

SELIBEJ has been an appropriate response to the question of the dying public reading network. During ten years, it has contributed to keep alive an ailing network. The most beautiful thing about SELIBEJ is the flux of human values that it conveys to our youth:

- solidarity between those who can buy books and those who need the books but do not have the financial resources
- fair competition to deserve books
- love of books and reading, love of healthy leisure that opens the mind and stimulates creativity

The SELIBEJ might even be one of the State projects to promote reading. But we are not there yet. Today, we hope for our country:

- a book policy stating clearly the citizen’s right, especially young people’s right, to reading for learning and for pleasure. A book law that will liberate and organise energies for future action and for a better radiance of culture, of the culture of books
- that the pool of Beninese creators of children’s books, much in demand abroad, be recognised, valued and involved in library life, through planned activities.

The library network remains almost devoid of life. And the State, with its administrative formalities, makes things difficult for anybody who ventures to put some life into the network, which makes partnerships difficult... No library schools... No recognition of what is done through “self-teaching” but has improved with training...

- that schools for book professions be created officially, to train librarians, illustrators, booksellers, publishers...
- publishing, and particularly publishing for children, is a showcase for our country abroad : book fairs, seminars..., but does Benin even know that the book chain represents the country? Elsewhere, participation in book fairs is inscribed in the budget and organised by a central Direction, in relation with publishers
- for the book to be well distributed, the State must recognize it as a commodity necessary to Benineses’ life, and must organise, together with private actors, its access by consumers. This means a real investment in this outdated network : infrastructures, books and staff (retired personnel are often not replaced). This also means a clear definition of the place of Culture (always placed under the authority of other entities) and a definition of the place of book and reading inside the word “culture” in our country

VI Conclusion

This is, ladies and gentlemen, what we have been able to do in Benin, so that the requiem announced for our public reading network becomes a battle song. We are happy with the road we travelled but aware that the journey is still long. We strongly hope that, as long as one of the children we have nourished with the passion of reading lives on earth, the fire will be alive.

The tools that were useful to us are:

- people engaged in book and reading promotion,
- books that responded to children's and young people's specific needs,
- networking with different partners

To go further, our library network needs restructuring :

- new or renewed infrastructures, more attractive and pleasant
- equipment
- books supplies
- the possibility of opening up more, for example through the venue of guests (librarian, author, illustrator, publisher) to SELIBEJ from other countries

We congratulate all the persons who have believed in this adventure, all those who, in one way or the other, have contributed to SELIBEJ, to its reinforcement. We thank the French Cooperation who, by supporting SELIBEJ, aids to the realisation of the ideals of the Ministry of Culture and at the same time allows the French language we share to continue to express Beninese culture, the creativity and the dreams of people, as far as in the most remote Beninese hamlets, countryside, villages.

VII Note of hope

During the 10th edition of SELIBEJ in June 2008 from 16th to 21st, the government created the Centre National d'Animation et de Lecture Publique, CeNALP.

It was our birthday present. The sign of our victory. During 10 years, we have helped this dying network. It has survived until the government proved his implication by taking in hand the public reading network again. For a network whose only breath came from the private sector, there is hope for a new vitality, with the public and private sectors working in synergy. We have immediately reacted and the launching of the week was done at CeNALP in June 16th by the Minister of Culture's General Secretary.

VIII- Attachements

SELIBEJ 2008 **Semaine du Livre Béninois de Jeunesse** **CHEQUE-LIVRE**

Un chèque pour ceux qui ont besoin de lire...
Une semaine culturelle autour du livre béninois de jeunesse !

En partenariat avec :

- la Direction des Bibliothèques et de la Promotion Littéraire (DBPL),
- les Centres Culturels Français (CCF),
- les Bibliothèques Départementales (BD) et les Centres de Lecture Publique (CPL),
- ORTB, CAPP FM, Golf FM, CANAL 3 et les radios locales,
- le groupe Jeunesse – Initiative – Promotion (JIP),
- la Fondation Regard d'Amour et l'ONG Jeunes En Marche,

les éditeurs béninois de livres de jeunesse organisent la 10^{ème} édition de la Semaine du Livre Béninois de jeunesse : *Selibej 2008*.

Aujourd'hui, les soirées au clair de lune, les rites initiatiques qui subliment nos valeurs et trempent le caractère, disparaissent progressivement. La transmission de génération en génération de notre patrimoine culturel, des valeurs de nos civilisations, face à la globalisation, doit alors se réincarner, prendre d'autres formes. De même, nous avons à ouvrir nos jeunes aux autres cultures...

Pour accomplir cette mission, nous publions des livres de jeunesse.

Seulement, ceux à qui sont destinés nos ouvrages n'ont pas, bien souvent, les moyens de les acquérir. C'est pourquoi ***nous nous adressons à vous pour que vous aidiez les jeunes à lire.***

L'idée est la suivante :

- En nous donnant un chèque ou en nous faisant un virement, vous achetez pour des jeunes béninois, **des livres béninois** (écrits ou illustrés par des Béninois, produits par des maisons d'édition béninoises ou étrangères). **Il s'agit exclusivement de livres non scolaires.**
- Par le biais d'un concours à fondement culturel dont le texte sera largement diffusé par nos partenaires, nous sélectionnerons les jeunes lauréats :

- Les enfants de 3 à 8 ans seront directement inscrits par leurs parents ou leur école.
- Les enfants de 8 à 12 ans, les adolescents et les jeunes prendront directement part au concours.
- Les fonds récoltés à travers vos dons, seront monnayés en « chèques-livres ». Chaque enfant gagnera au plus un chèque.
- Une semaine du livre de jeunesse sera organisée **du 16 au 21 Juin 2008** et aura pour but :
 - de créer un événement autour du livre béninois pour la jeunesse,
 - de promouvoir l'édition de jeunesse au Bénin et en Afrique,
 - d'organiser des jeux culturels dans les bibliothèques, centres culturels, centres de lecture...
 - de distribuer les livres aux lauréats,
 - de créer des rencontres entre les artistes (écrivains, illustrateurs) et les jeunes.
- La liste des donateurs, assortie des dons respectifs, sera affichée sur les lieux d'animation.

Animation simultanée sur toute l'étendue du territoire national :

39 centres sont retenus

- Cette animation aura lieu :
 - ◊ Dans l'Atacora-Donga
 - A la Bibliothèque Départementale de **Natitingou**
 - Au Centre de lecture publique de **Djougou**
 - Aux Centres de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle de **Badjoudé**, de **Bassila**, de **Boukoubé**, de **Cobly**, de **Kérou**, de **Kouandé**, de **Matéri**, de **Péhunco**, de **Tanguiéta** et de **Toucountouna**.
 - ◊ Dans l'Atlantique-Littoral
 - Au Centre Culturel Français (CCF) de **Cotonou**
 - A l'Ecole primaire publique de Mênontin Nord – **Cotonou**
 - Au Centre d'Etude et de Documentation (CED) (**Cotonou**)

- A la Bibliothèque Départementale à **Ouidah**
- Au Centre de Lecture d'**Allada**
- Au Centre de Lecture de la Fondation Regard d'Amour de **Calavi**.
- ◇ Dans le Borgou-Alibori
 - Au Centre Culturel Français (**CCF**) de **Parakou**
 - A la Bibliothèque Départementale de **Parakou**
 - Aux Centres de Lecture de **Kandi** et de **Okouabo** (Parakou)
- ◇ Dans le Mono-Couffo
 - A la Bibliothèque Départementale de **Lokossa**
 - Au Centre de lecture de **Comè**
 - Aux Centres de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle de **Aplahoué**, de **Athiémé**, de **Bopa**, de **Djakotomey**, de **Dogbo**, de **Grand-popo**, de **Houéyogbé**, de **Klouékanmè**, de **Lalo** et de **Toviklin**.
 - A l'hôtel du village Ahémé à **Possotomè**.
- ◇ Dans l'Ouémé-Plateau :
 - A la **Bibliothèque Nationale** et à la **Bibliothèque Départementale de Porto-Novo**.
- ◇ Dans le Zou-Collines :
 - Au Centre de Lecture Publique de **Savalou**
 - A la Bibliothèque Départementale d'**Abomey**

Statistiques 2007 et prévisions 2008

- Environ 6500 (six mille cinq cents) enfants et jeunes ont visité les 36 centres d'animation de la Semaine du Livre Béninois de Jeunesse en 2007.
- 1639 (mille six cent trente neuf) enfants et jeunes ont effectivement gagné des livres.
- Nous disposons de 2129 livres préachetés pour eux par des donateurs, soit une moyenne de 01 à 02 livres gagnés par enfant, comme dotation d'une année de lecture. Car nous savons par notre

- enquête auprès des enfants, que pour la plupart d'entre eux, la Selibej est la principale source d'acquisition de livre personnel...
- C'est dire combien le besoin de lecture est très fort chez nos enfants et combien votre geste est attendu.
 - Seuls les livres de lecture-plaisir sont retenus pour cette semaine culturelle nationale. Ils coûtent entre 1000 et 10 000 francs CFA.

Les organisateurs

MINISTÈRE DE LA CULTURE DE L'ARTISANAT ET DU TOURISME

Selibéj 2008

10^e Edition de la Semaine du Livre Béninois de Jeunesse



Du 16 au 21
juin 2008

39 CENTRES
D'ANIMATION SUR
TOUTE L'ÉTENDUE DU
TERRITOIRE NATIONAL



La Direction des
Bibliothèques et
de la Promotion
Littéraire

La Bibliothèque
Nationale



OPERATION CHEQUE-LIVRE

Un **chèque** pour ceux qui ont besoin de lire...

La Semaine du Livre Béninois de Jeunesse :

Selibej 10^e édition

Les Éditions Ruisseaux d'Afrique, Star Éditions, les Éditions du Flamboyant et le Centre Africain d'Action et de Recherche en Education et Culture (CAAREC), organisent du 16 au 21 Juin 2008, en partenariat avec les Centres Culturels Français (CCF) de Cotonou et de Parakou, la Bibliothèque Nationale (BN), la Direction des Bibliothèques et de la Promotion Littéraire (DBPL) [les Bibliothèques Départementales (BD) et les Centres de Lecture (CL), la Coordination des Centres de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle (CLAC)], la 10^{ème} édition de la Semaine du Livre Béninois de Jeunesse : *Selibej 2008*. Le support de cette animation culturelle autour du livre est l'opération chèque-livre.

Pendant cette semaine culturelle, des livres écrits, illustrés ou édités par des Béninois, achetés par le Ministère de la Culture de l'Artisanat et du Tourisme, le Service de Coopération et d'Action Culturelle de l'Ambassade de France, des personnalités béninoises, des personnes physiques ou morales, seront gracieusement distribués aux jeunes : c'est l'opération « CHEQUE-LIVRE ».

En participant au concours « **CHEQUE-LIVRE** », les enfants et les jeunes gagnent des chèques de 5 000 à 10 000 F CFA monnayables en livres.

Comment gagner un chèque-livre ?

1^{ère} Catégorie : Les enfants de 3 à 8 ans :

Ils peuvent gagner des albums en envoyant un dessin.

2^{ème} Catégorie : Les enfants de 8 à 12 ans

Ils peuvent gagner des livres en répondant aux cinq premières questions suivantes.

3^{ème} Catégorie : Les adolescents et les jeunes

Ils peuvent gagner des livres en répondant à toutes les questions suivantes :

Questionnaire Chèque-Livre 2008

- 1- Donnez trois homophones du mot « Livre » et leur sens.
- 2- Qu'est-ce qu'un signet ?
- 3- Quand a eu lieu le 2^e Salon International des Poètes Francophones (SIPOEF) ?
- 4- Qui est l'auteur du livre : « **La pintade et le serpent** » paru aux Editions Ruisseaux d'Afrique ?
- 5- Quel est le titre de l'ouvrage de M. Jérôme CARLOS publié au CAAREC Editions ?
- 6- Quelle est la différence entre un éditeur et un imprimeur ?
- 7- Dans le livre « **Elle ou personne** », quel est l'événement qui vient assombrir la vie paisible du couple Marius et Ida ?
- 8- Quel éditeur béninois a publié « **Apologie du rire** (*Rire pour mieux se porter*) » ?
- 9- Quel éditeur béninois a publié « **Sarkozy, la France et l'Afrique** » ?
- 10- Donnez la date de création officielle des Editions Ruisseaux d'Afrique.
- 11- Combien de courriers réponses aurons-nous ?

Les réponses seront déposées au siège des Éditions Ruisseaux d'Afrique au C/2186 Kindonou ou adressées par voie postale, à l'adresse suivante :

Opération Chèque-Livre
04 BP 1154 Cotonou BENIN
Téléphone : 21 38 31 86

Au plus tard, le 15 mai 2008 ; le cachet de la poste faisant foi.

Les lauréats pourront retirer leurs livres dans les divers centres d'animation au cours de la semaine du 16 au 21 Juin 2008.

Bonne chance à tous !