

**MÜNA
IKALATI**

**2017 IMPACT
REPORT**



BUILDING THE FOUNDATION: OUR FOUNDING YEAR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

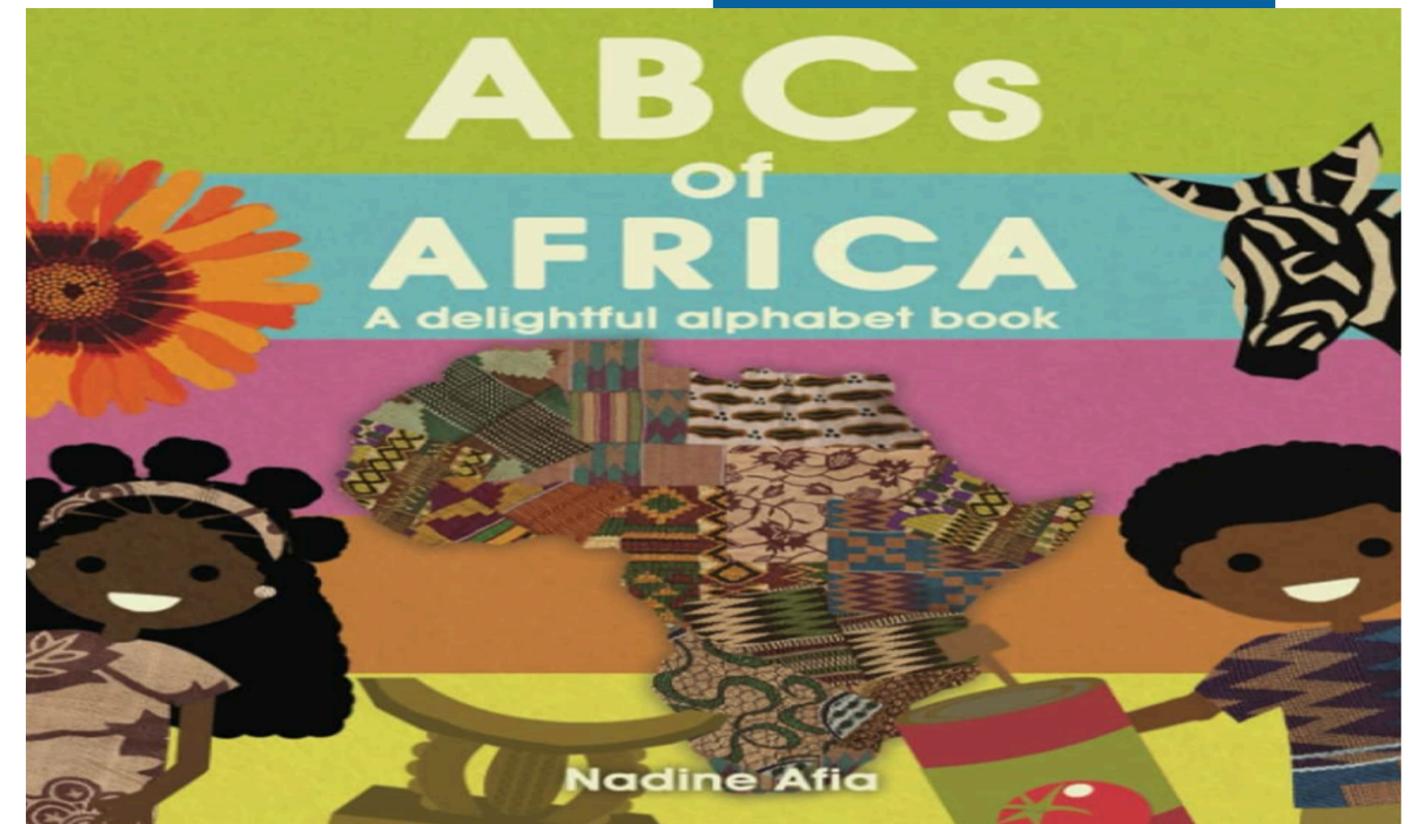
2017 marked the birth of [Muna Kalati](#), a pioneering digital platform dedicated exclusively to promoting African children's literature. Founded in April 2017 by [Christian Elongué](#), our organization emerged from a critical gap: the near absence of centralized information, visibility, and recognition for African children's book professionals across the continent.

In our inaugural year, we established the foundational infrastructure that would become Africa's reference platform for children's publishing news. We documented publishers, authors, and illustrators who had long worked in obscurity, created spaces for dialogue, and began building a pan-African network of passionate advocates for culturally relevant children's literature.

2017 Key Achievements

- Launched [munakalati.org](#) as the first African-based platform exclusively focused on children's literature
- Established presence in Cameroon with plans for continental expansion
- Initiated systematic documentation of African children's book industry actors
- Achieved financial sustainability [through crowdfunding](#) and our own resources
- Published foundational content addressing the visibility crisis in African children's publishing

This report chronicles our founding year—a year of laying groundwork, building bridges, and igniting conversations about the power of culturally relevant stories in shaping African children's identities.



INTRODUCTION: THE BIRTH OF MUNA KALATI

The Problem That Couldn't Be Ignored

Christian Elongué grew up as a voracious reader in Cameroon, devouring nearly six books every week from age 11. His childhood library included Rodeo, Zembra, Kiwi, Tex, Blek le Roc, Picsou, and Mickey Mouse—all foreign comics and books. Through these pages, he learned about France, Belgium, and the United States with an intimacy that far surpassed his knowledge of his own Cameroon.

"I was so obsessed with the idea of going to Paris that I almost had a heart attack when the door to school in France unexpectedly closed," [Christian recalls](#). "I was dangerously ignorant of my country's history, traditions and cultures, yet perfectly aware of Western lifestyles and cultures thanks to the books and media content I devoured."

This cultural alienation—this love for an "elsewhere" that seemed better—was the silent consequence of reading only foreign stories as a child.

The Awakening

Everything changed during Christian's postgraduate studies in African Studies at Université Senghor in Alexandria, Egypt. "It wasn't until I did postgraduate studies in African Studies that I really understood the uniqueness of Africa, the beauty of my identity and the true history of my country," he explains. "It helped me to be bold, confident, more ambitious and not let life stop me. I learned that a correct perception of one's identity is the key to fulfillment and self-realization."

This awakening sparked a critical question: What role did children's literature play in shaping—or distorting—African children's sense of self?

The Research Journey

During his Master's program, Christian's thesis focused on African children's books. His research led him to the Bibliothèque nationale de France, where he worked with the Centre National de littérature pour la jeunesse and Takam Tikou. Over four years of intensive study, he interviewed African book professionals across France, Belgium, Germany, and multiple African countries. His discoveries were troubling:



Christian Elongué



The Visibility Crisis:

- There were more children's books with animals or white characters as protagonists than books featuring Black, Latin American, or Asian children
- White authors accounted for 76% of people working in the publishing industry
- African children's book authors, especially in francophone Africa, were rarely promoted, known, or celebrated
- Many prolific African authors preferred to remain in the diaspora where the children's book market was better structured
- Writing about Africa from outside Africa lacked the same symbolic and sociocultural weight.

The Information Desert:

- No digital platform specialized in promoting African children's book publishing
- Existing platforms covered general reading with minimal content for children
- No systematic documentation of African publishers, authors, illustrators, or libraries specializing in children's literature
- Parents, educators, and researchers had no centralized resource for discovering African children's books.

The Structural Neglect:

- Children's literature was considered marginal—"a ghetto or sector of little interest reserved for amateur authors"
- In most African countries, professional publishers specializing in children's books were difficult to find
- Children's bookshops and libraries were extremely rare
- No media outlet focused specifically on the African children's book ecosystem

The Decision

Faced with these realities, Christian decided: If no one else would build this platform, he would.

In April 2017, munakalati.org was born. The name, from the Duala language, means "children's book"—a fitting declaration of purpose.

"Aware of this, I discovered that the most important thing in Africa was not just to promote reading, but to promote quality reading," Christian reflects. "Before 2017, there were already many book promotion initiatives, but most focused on adult or general literature, or African-American children's literature, which isn't really the same thing as African children's literature. Since there was a need, I decided to fill the gap."

Our platform was designed to serve multiple audiences:

- Parents seeking culturally relevant books for their children
- Publishers and authors needing visibility and market access
- Librarians and educators looking for resources and best practices
- Researchers studying African children's literature
- Policymakers seeking evidence for educational initiatives

Establishing Organizational Structure

From inception, Muna Kalati was structured as a non-profit association with a pan-African vision. While initially based in Cameroon and Togo, our digital-first approach allowed us to transcend borders from day one.

We assembled a dedicated founding team passionate about children's literature and education. Though small, our team worked remotely—a model that would prove prescient and sustainable as we grew.

2017 ACHIEVEMENTS

I. INFORMATION & DOCUMENTATION

Becoming the Reference Platform

In 2017, we established Muna Kalati as the go-to source for information on African children's publishing. Our website became a space where:

- Industry news was shared across borders
- Author and illustrator profiles brought visibility to overlooked creators
- Publisher spotlights showcased houses producing quality African children's content
- Book reviews guided parents and educators toward culturally relevant materials
- Analytical articles addressed critical issues in the children's book ecosystem

Content Production

Throughout 2017, we published foundational content establishing our editorial voice and expertise. Our articles addressed:

- The state of children's publishing in various African countries
- The importance of culturally relevant literature for identity formation
- Challenges facing African children's book professionals
- Best practices from successful literacy initiatives
- Profiles of pioneering authors, illustrators, and publishers

Initiating Systematic Documentation

We began the painstaking work of creating databases that didn't exist:

- Publisher directories for African countries
- Author and illustrator registries
- Bibliographies of African children's books
- Library and bookshop listings

This documentation work, though invisible to casual observers, laid groundwork for researchers, journalists, and industry professionals seeking reliable information about African children's literature.

2. NETWORK BUILDING

Creating Spaces for Connection

Before Muna Kalati, African children's book professionals often worked in isolation, unaware of peers doing similar work in neighboring countries. In 2017, we began changing that reality. We created digital spaces where:

- Publishers could discover each other's catalogs
- Authors could connect for collaborations
- Illustrators could showcase their portfolios
- Librarians could share programming ideas
- Researchers could find interview subjects and data

Bridging Linguistic Divides

One of our early strategic decisions was to operate bilingually (French and English) from the start. This was crucial because:

- Francophone and anglophone African publishing ecosystems operated in parallel with minimal interaction
- Many pan-African conversations excluded one linguistic group or the other
- Best practices weren't being shared across the language divide.

By 2017's end, we had established connections in:

- Francophone Africa: Cameroon, Togo, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Conakry
- Anglophone Africa: Ghana, Nigeria
- The Diaspora: France, Belgium, Germany, United States

Partnership Development

In 2017, we formalized early partnerships with organizations sharing our vision:

- Collaboration with francophone publishing houses
- Connections with literary festivals and book fairs
- Relationships with literacy organizations
- Academic partnerships for research projects

3. RESEARCH & KNOWLEDGE CREATION

Christian's four years of research didn't end with Muna Kalati's founding—it provided the evidence base for our advocacy and programming. In 2017, we began synthesizing this research for broader audiences. We developed materials addressing:

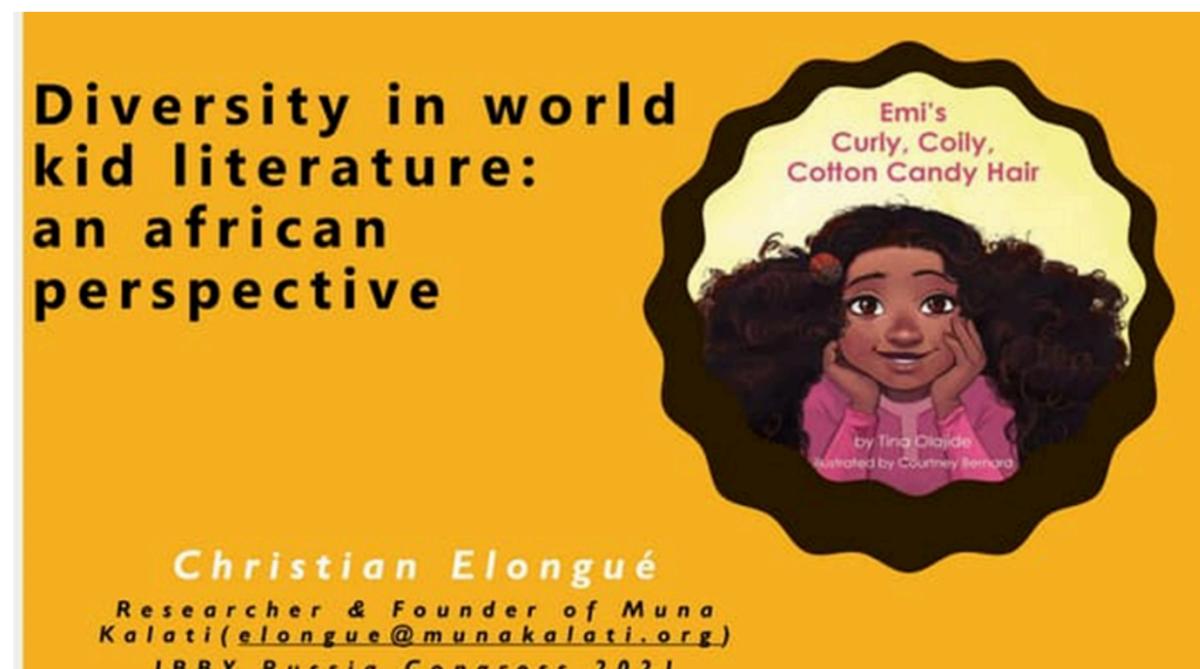
- Historical [evolution of children's publishing](#) in specific African countries
- Economic models for sustainable children's book businesses
- Impact of culturally relevant literature on child development
- Barriers to book access across the continent.

Supporting Emerging Researchers

Even in our founding year, we began a practice that would become a hallmark of Muna Kalati: supporting researchers studying African children's literature. We offered:

- Access to our growing databases
- Connections to industry professionals for interviews
- Platforms to share research findings
- Guidance on understudied topics

Contributing to Global Conversations



Through our digital presence, we began positioning African perspectives in [global children's literature discussions](#). We engaged with:

- International literacy organizations
- Global children's literature networks
- Academic conferences such as [eLearning Africa](#) and publications
- Media outlets covering diversity in publishing

4. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

From day one, Muna Kalati committed to financial independence. We believed that relying on external grants would compromise our ability to speak truth to power and advocate freely for systemic change.

2017 Revenue Sources

- Crowdfunding: We mobilized our initial network of believers who contributed small amounts
- Founder Investment: Christian invested personal resources to establish infrastructure
- In-Kind Contributions: Team members volunteered time and expertise
- Strategic Bootstrapping: We minimized costs by leveraging free digital tools and remote work

2017 Expenditures

- Website development and hosting
- Domain registration and email services
- Initial content creation and editing
- Digital marketing and outreach
- Travel for partnership meetings

The Sustainability Principle

Our 2017 financial approach established a principle that continues to guide us: Muna Kalati must generate value that people willingly pay for. This would eventually include:

- Training workshops for professionals
- Consulting services on children's literature strategies
- Advertising opportunities for publishers
- Premium content and resources

By proving financial viability in year one, we demonstrated that African children's literature organizations need not depend on the charity of foreign funders.

5. CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Many potential supporters didn't understand why a specialized platform was necessary. The Mindset: "Children's books? Isn't any book good enough? Why focus specifically on African books?" We spent significant energy explaining that:

- Representation matters for identity formation
- Cultural relevance increases engagement and comprehension
- Supporting African creators strengthens local economies
- Diverse literature benefits all children, not just African ones

Technical Limitations

Internet connectivity across Africa remained challenging. While our digital-first model allowed continental reach, it also meant that:

- Many target audiences (parents, rural educators) had limited internet access
- Website loading times varied dramatically by region
- Mobile optimization was essential but technically complex
- Offline content distribution strategies were needed

Resource Constraints

As a bootstrapped startup, every decision involved trade-offs:

- We couldn't afford professional designers initially, so early visuals were basic
- Marketing budgets were nearly non-existent, limiting our reach
- We couldn't attend every relevant conference or book fair
- Technology limitations restricted what we could build.

The Chicken-and-Egg Problem

Publishers wanted to see our reach before investing in partnerships. Audiences wanted more content before becoming regular visitors. Funders wanted proven impact before offering support. We had to bootstrap all three simultaneously.

Lessons Learned

1. Start Where You Are

We didn't wait for perfect conditions—we launched with what we had. This meant:

- A basic but functional website
- Limited but quality content
- Small but committed team of 6 people
- Clear vision even with constrained resources

Lesson: Perfection is the enemy of progress. Ship, then iterate.

2. Digital Infrastructure is Liberation

Our digital-first model proved transformative. It allowed:

- Continental reach from day one
- Minimal operational costs
- Remote team collaboration
- Rapid content distribution
- Data collection and analysis

Lesson: For pan-African organizations, digital platforms overcome geography.

3. Partnerships Multiply Impact

Our early partnerships amplified our credibility and reach exponentially. Five respected professionals vouching for us opened doors that would have remained closed to an unknown startup.

Lesson: Build your network before you need it. Invest in relationships.

4. The Power of a Single Story

Every time we shared Christian's personal story—the child who loved reading but grew alienated from his own culture—people understood immediately why Muna Kalati mattered.

Lesson: Personal narrative makes abstract problems concrete and urgent.

5. Financial Independence Enables Bold Advocacy

By not depending on grant funding, we maintained freedom to critique systems and advocate for uncomfortable truths about the children's book industry.

Lesson: Diversified, self-generated revenue protects mission integrity.

6. Document Everything

Even in our chaotic founding year, we tracked activities, built databases, and saved communications. This documentation became invaluable for:

- Demonstrating progress to stakeholders
- Learning from successes and failures
- Building institutional memory
- Supporting researchers

Lesson: What gets measured gets managed. What gets documented becomes history.

STORIES OF IMPACT: 2017

Impact Story #1: Connecting a Publisher to International Opportunities



Meet Ulrich Talla Wamba, Editions Akoma Mba

When we first connected with Ulrich Talla Wamba in early 2017, his publishing house, **Editions Akoma Mba**, was one of Cameroon's leading producers of children's books.

The Challenge

- Limited visibility outside Cameroon
- Difficulty connecting with distributors in other African countries
- Minimal presence at international book fairs due to cost barriers

Muna Kalati's Role

We featured Akoma Mba prominently on our platform, including:

- Publisher profile showcasing their mission and catalog
- [Interviews](#) with Ulrich about his publishing philosophy
- Reviews of key titles from their catalog
- Inclusion on our publisher directory with contact information

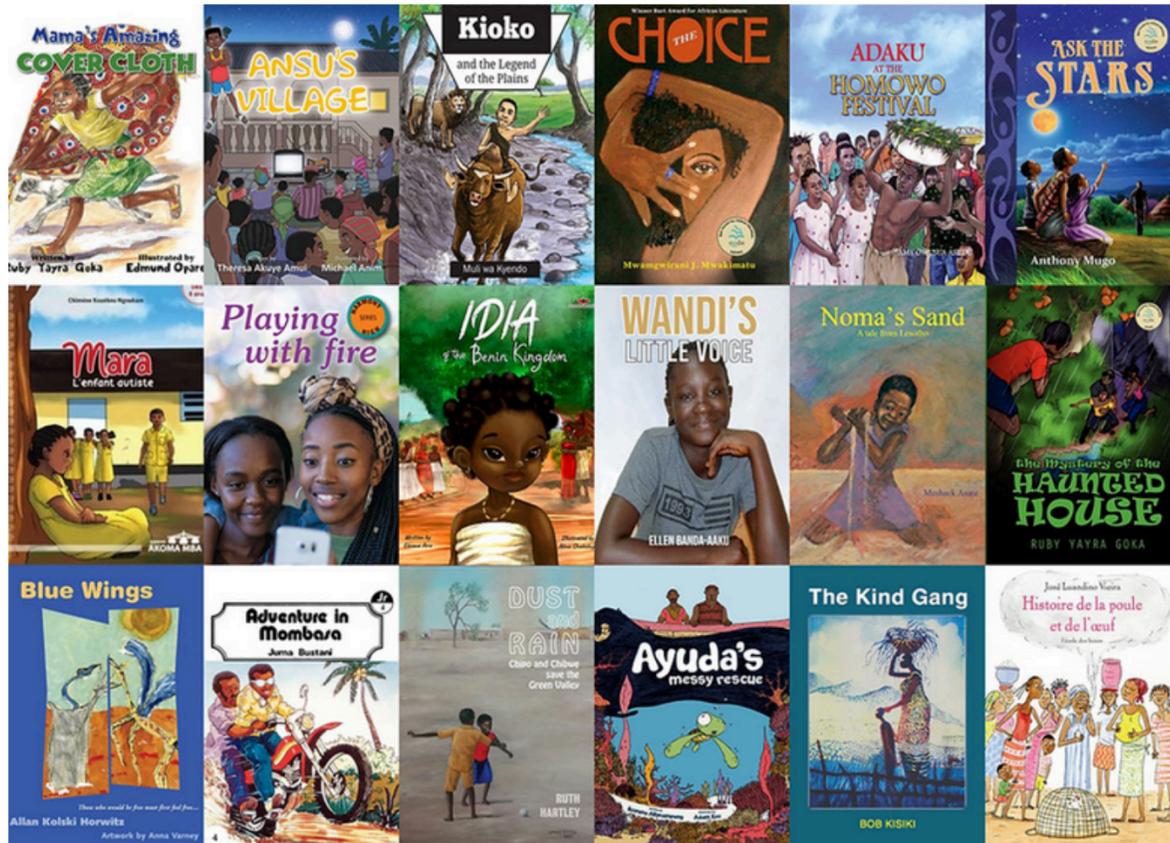
The Impact

Through Muna Kalati's network:

- International researchers discovered and cited Akoma Mba titles
- Publishers from other African countries reached out about distribution partnerships
- Parents in the diaspora ordered books directly
- Ulrich joined our Advisory Board, gaining continental platform for his expertise

In His Words: Ulrich's continued partnership with Muna Kalati—eventually becoming an Advisory Board member—speaks to the value he found in our platform. The relationship that began in 2017 would grow into one of our most important partnerships.

Impact Story #2: Inspiring a New Generation of Researchers



In 2017, several graduate students studying education, literature, or African studies discovered Muna Kalati while searching for information on African children's literature. Before our platform existed, these students struggled to:

- Find comprehensive information on African children's book publishers
- Locate contact information for interviews with authors and illustrators
- Access bibliographies of books from specific countries
- Understand the historical evolution of the industry

The Challenge:

One researcher, working on a thesis about representation in African children's literature, faced a common problem: How do you study a field that's barely documented?

Muna Kalati's Role

We provided:

- Our emerging database of publishers and authors
- Context about industry challenges and opportunities
- Connections to professionals willing to be interviewed
- Platform to share preliminary findings with practitioner audience

The Impact

This support initiated a pattern that would continue beyond 2017. We became known among academic circles as:

- A reliable source for industry data
- A connector to hard-to-reach professionals
- A platform for disseminating research findings
- Advocates for [academic study of African children's literature](#)

By 2017's end, we had supported at least three researchers, planting seeds that would eventually grow into "at least six master's and doctoral theses on African children's literature" supported by Muna Kalati.

Impact Story #3: A Parent Discovers Culturally Relevant Books.

In 2017, a Cameroonian parent living in France—we'll call her Marie—searched online for children's books featuring African characters and settings. She was tired of the limited options in French bookstores: either books by Western authors featuring African children as exotic "others," or expensive imports that rarely reflected contemporary African life.

The Challenge

Marie wanted books that would:

- Show her daughter protagonists who looked like her
- Reflect African family structures and daily realities
- Celebrate African cultures without exoticizing them
- Be age-appropriate and beautifully illustrated
- Be available for purchase online

Muna Kalati's Role:

Marie discovered our platform and found:

- Curated lists of African children's books by age group
- Reviews explaining each book's themes and cultural elements
- Information about where to purchase (publishers' websites, international retailers)
- Context about the authors and illustrators who created the books

The Impact:

Marie ordered several books and later wrote to us sharing:

- Her daughter's excitement at seeing characters "like her" in stories
- Her own pleasure in rediscovering African folktales she'd heard as a child
- Her plans to share our platform with other diaspora parents at her daughter's school.

The Multiplier Effect

Marie became an informal ambassador, introducing multiple families to Muna Kalati. This pattern—one satisfied user bringing others—became one of our primary growth mechanisms.

While we didn't formally track these stories in 2017, conversations and emails revealed them happening repeatedly. Parents, educators, and librarians discovering culturally relevant books through our platform and sharing that discovery with their networks.

LOOKING AHEAD: SEEDS PLANTED IN 2017

Our founding year was about establishing foundations—infrastructure, relationships, credibility, and vision. We planted seeds that would bear fruit in subsequent years:

A. Programs in Development

1. Lecture Plaisir (Reading for Pleasure) Workshops: By late 2017, we were planning hands-on workshops to bring children directly into contact with African books and authors. These would launch in 2019, engaging over 1,020 children across Cameroon, Togo, and Ghana.

2. Lire Pour Guérir (Reading to Heal): We conceptualized a bibliotherapy program to bring books and joy to hospitalized and displaced children. The first edition would reach 34 children at a Dschang hospital in December 2020.

3. Un Orphelinat, Une Bibliothèque (One Orphanage, One Library): We began exploring partnerships to establish libraries in orphanages—starting in Cameroon with plans for continental expansion.

B. Research Initiatives

- **Country-Level Industry Studies:** Building on Christian's original research, we planned comprehensive studies of children's book industries in multiple African countries. By 2022, we would complete reports on eight countries (Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Guinea Conakry, Ghana, Nigeria, Gambia, and Liberia) with Google News Initiative funding.
- **Academic Partnerships:** The research support we began offering in 2017 would expand. We would eventually support researchers toward "at least six master's and doctoral theses on African children's literature."
- **Publishing Our Findings:** Christian's research would culminate in 2019 with publication of *An Introduction to Children Literature in Cameroon* by L'Harmattan—"the first reference and scientific book on the children's book industry in Cameroon."

C. Advocacy & Policy Influence

- **Muna Kalati Talks:** We envisioned regular webinars bringing together African children's literature professionals to discuss critical industry issues. These would launch in 2020, eventually hosting conversations with dozens of publishers, authors, and policymakers.
- **National Policy Campaigns:** We planned advocacy work to encourage African governments to develop national policies on children's books and reading—recognizing that systemic change requires political will and resource allocation.

D. Geographic Expansion

- **Anglophone Africa:** While 2017 operations centered on francophone Africa, we committed to expanding into anglophone regions. By 2022, we would open an office in Ghana, with team members across Nigeria, Togo, and beyond.
- **Continental Network:** We envisioned Muna Kalati representatives in every African country, conducting local documentation and advocacy. By 2021, our network REPLIJA (Réseau des Professionnels du Livre Jeunesse en Afrique) would include 245 members across the continent.

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

Strategic Alliances Established in 2017

While many of our major partnerships would formalize in subsequent years, 2017 saw us building relationships with:

Research Institutions



Figure 1: Children book publishers in Cameroon from 1956 to 2016

- Connections with [Takam Tikou](#) where he published on the [visibility of Cameroon's children literature](#)
- Academic researchers studying African children's literature
- Continuing relationship with Centre National de littérature pour la jeunesse (France)

Literary Organizations

- Initial connections with literary activists and book fair organizers
- Relationships with reading promotion initiatives across Africa

Individual Professionals

- Authors seeking visibility platforms
- Illustrators needing portfolio showcases
- Librarians wanting resources and networking
- Educators searching for culturally relevant materials

MEASURING OUR IMPACT: 2017 METRICS

While comprehensive data collection systems would develop in subsequent years, we tracked several key indicators in 2017:

Digital Presence:

- Website launched: April 2017
- Initial traffic: Visitors from 5+ African countries
- Social media followers: Initial community of engaged advocates
- Newsletter subscribers: Growing list of parents, educators, and professionals

Content Production:

- Published foundational articles establishing editorial voice
- Created initial publisher and author profiles
- Began database development for multiple countries

Professional Network:

- 5 Advisory Board members representing diverse regions and roles
- 10+ publisher relationships initiated
- 20+ individual professionals (authors, illustrators) connected
- Multiple academic researchers supported

Geographic Coverage:

- Primary operations: Cameroon and Togo
- Content accessed in: 5+ African countries plus diaspora
- Partnerships: Francophone and Anglophone Africa

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TESTIMONIALS

From Our Advisory Board

"Muna Kalati addresses a crucial gap in African children's literature. For too long, our authors and illustrators have worked in obscurity. This platform finally gives them the visibility they deserve." — **Advisory Board Member, 2017**

From Early Users

"As a parent in the diaspora, I struggled to find books that showed my children their African heritage in positive, contemporary ways. Muna Kalati became my go-to resource." — **Parent in France**

"Before Muna Kalati, I didn't know there were other publishers doing children's books in neighboring countries. Now I can see what peers are creating and learn from their approaches." — **Publisher, Francophone Africa**

From Christian Elongué, Founder

"2017 was about proving that a platform exclusively focused on African children's literature could exist and matter. We showed that parents want these resources, professionals need this visibility, and researchers require this documentation. We planted seeds knowing they would take time to grow—but confident they would transform the landscape."

ALIGNMENT WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

From inception, Muna Kalati's work contributed to multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals:

SDG 4: Quality Education

- Promoting literacy through culturally relevant reading materials
- Supporting educational content development
- Strengthening educator capacity

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

- Creating market opportunities for publishers, authors, and illustrators
- Documenting the creative economy ecosystem
- Supporting sustainable business models for book professionals

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

- Increasing access to books for marginalized communities (planned programs)
- Promoting representation of diverse African experiences
- Bridging information gaps between regions and linguistic groups

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

- Building networks across countries and sectors
- Facilitating knowledge sharing among professionals
- Creating collaborative spaces for addressing systemic challenges

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CONCLUSION: A FOUNDATION BUILT TO LAST

2017 was our year of genesis—a year of bold beginnings built on careful research and passionate commitment. We launched Africa's first digital platform exclusively dedicated to children's literature, assembled a distinguished Advisory Board, began systematic documentation of an undocumented industry, and started building networks that would span the continent. We did all this while maintaining financial independence, proving that African cultural organizations need not depend on foreign charity to survive and thrive.

What We Proved in 2017

1. The Need is Real: From day one, parents, educators, publishers, and researchers engaged with our platform—proving that the visibility crisis we aimed to address was genuine and urgent.

2. Digital Infrastructure Overcomes Geography: Our digital-first model allowed continental reach without the costs of physical infrastructure. A small team in Cameroon and Togo could serve audiences across Africa and the diaspora.

3. Quality Attracts Quality: By establishing high standards for content and professional operations, we attracted top-tier Advisory Board members and partnerships that would have been impossible for a less credible organization.

4. Financial Independence is Possible: Through bootstrapping and income generation, we proved sustainable operation without grant dependence—maintaining mission integrity and operational flexibility.

The Seeds We Planted

The programs, partnerships, and systems we established in 2017 would bear fruit in subsequent years:

- The **digital infrastructure** would scale to serve thousands
- The **documentation work** would become comprehensive databases
- The **research support** would contribute to multiple dissertations
- The **partnerships** would evolve into major collaborations
- The **brand** would become synonymous with African children's literature

Our Commitment Going Forward

As we closed 2017 and looked toward 2018, we renewed our commitment to:

- **Centering African Narratives:** Every decision filtered through the question: Does this authentically represent African realities and perspectives?
- **Serving the Underserved:** Prioritizing visibility for overlooked creators and access for marginalized children.
- **Building for Sustainability:** Creating systems and revenue streams that would outlast any single grant cycle or individual leader.

- **Collaboration Over Competition:** Viewing other literacy organizations as allies, not rivals, in a shared mission.
- **Evidence-Based Advocacy:** Grounding policy recommendations in rigorous research and documented realities.
- **Celebrating Excellence:** Highlighting the exceptional creativity and quality of African children's literature.

An Invitation

This report chronicles our founding year—but Muna Kalati's story is just beginning. We invite you to join us:

1. Publishers, Authors, Illustrators: Share your work with our growing audience. Let us amplify your voice across the continent and diaspora.
2. Parents, Educators, Librarians: Use our resources to discover culturally relevant books. Share them with the children in your care.
3. Researchers, Journalists, Policymakers: Access our databases and expertise. Help us document and transform this industry.
4. Funders, Partners, Supporters: Invest in our vision. Together, we can ensure every African child sees themselves reflected in the books they read.
5. Everyone: Spread the word. Every share, every recommendation, every conversation about African children's literature advances our mission.

