

## IBBY and Africa in 2006: Life after Cape Town

In 2004 IBBY's international congress took place in Cape Town and was a very successful event – even financially! – and it attracted over 500 participants. Following the IBBY regulations for congress organisers, the profit was divided between South African IBBY (SACBF) and IBBY. The Executive Committee voted to use the money for a project for Africa. Thus, it has become the seed capital for a virtual exhibition of African children's books. The exhibition, **Books for Africa, Books from Africa**, will be presented as work in progress at Bologna Children's Book Fair in March 2006, and the actual books will be exhibited in Beijing at IBBY's 30th international congress in September 2006, and later at the IBBY stand at the Bologna Children's Book Fair in 2007. The virtual exhibition will be available for viewing at IBBY's website.

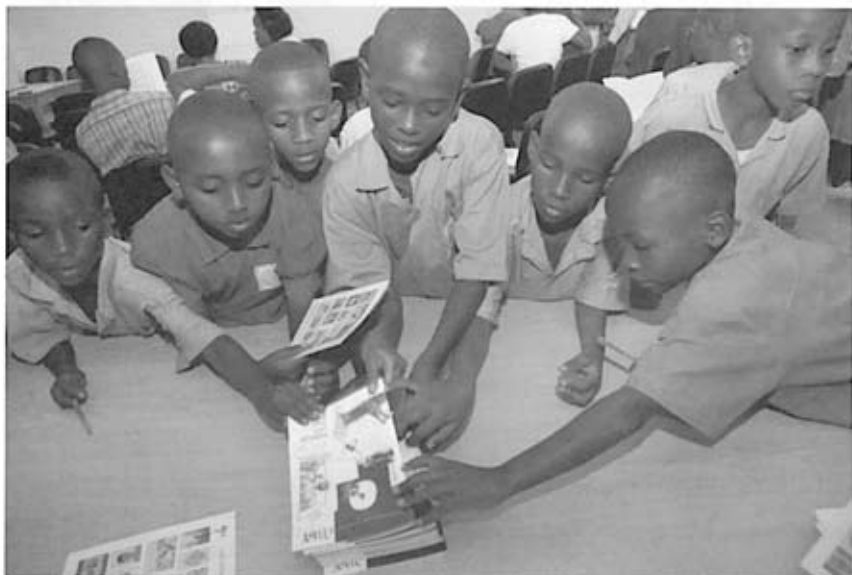
### *Learning with children's literature*

Continuing with the focus on Africa, IBBY, together with Editions Bakame, is organising a workshop in Kigali (the capital of Rwanda): **Bringing Children's Books to the Classroom**. Addressed to educators, librarians and cultural leaders from Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Congo, Tanzania and Burundi, the workshop is scheduled to take place in July 2006.

In the context of Africa this theme can be approached from many different angles. It's important to remember that in Africa the written culture has only recently come to prominence, whereas its oral culture goes back to the beginning of time. This is not only a figure of speech: human beings



*The new Bakame building*



*Children enjoying the IBBY Honour List exhibition at the opening of the new Bakame building in June 2005*

originated in Africa, and there is a linguistic theory that human language also originated there.

### ***Empowerment of African languages***

A great number of languages are spoken in Africa. According to Mr Adama Samassekou, the president of Acalan (the African Academy of Languages) 'the estimates go from 700 to 3000 languages and dialects. Such a big number is a good indication of the high degree of isolation in which all these communities have developed their languages.'

### ***For many years African linguists and cultural leaders have been working towards the empowerment of African languages***

For many years African linguists and cultural leaders have been working towards the empowerment of African languages, as opposed to the colonial languages of English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. The movement for empowering African languages is in a very strong position considering the pervasive effect of the colonial languages in numerous aspects of African lives. 'Many speakers of (South) African languages undervalue their own first or home languages ("mother tongues"). There is a myth that only a few languages are capable of use for high status functions, for example in higher education, the formal economy and scientific, technological, political and philosophical discourse.' This statement was made by the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) based in the University of Cape Town, founded in 1992 as a result of opposition against apartheid education and currently directed by Neville Alexander. IBBY has invited the director of the Early Childhood Development Division, Carole Bloch, to address the

workshop in Kigali on the very interesting issue of literacy in the mother tongue.

### ***Feeling what you read***

Children who learn to read in the language they speak at home, which reflects the most meaningful aspects of their lives, have a better chance of developing good language skills and going on to become readers. This goes back to the fundamental and indisputable link between affection and words. Lullabies, nursery rhymes, soft words whispered with love, are doing much more than helping a baby be at ease. They are forming the child's world, giving her the tools to name and recognise her surroundings and her emotions: her reality. Furthermore, these little poems, songs and nonsensical rhymes are a child's first exposure to literature – to the symbolic use of words.

In Africa, many schools teach in the 'official' language of the country and many countries have more than one official language. Teachers are faced with groups of children who speak and understand several different languages. Carole Bloch advocates what she calls 'additive bilingualism'. It is not a rejection of the colonial languages, but an introduction to literacy through the use of the local mother tongue. Even though it requires total commitment on the teacher's part, the results are more than gratifying for children, teachers, parents and the whole country.

### ***And the books?***

This leads us to another aspect of the workshop: the books. And how to find the books for this bilingual approach? And what kind of books?

Meaningful reading material calls for a comprehensive publishing industry that is lacking in many African countries, even though more publishers are producing books in African languages. Editions



Bakame

Bakame is a good example of a local publisher producing books in the local language. But in many cases teachers have to develop their own materials, especially if the language they want to use is not an official language. This calls for training that starts with the concept of reading for enjoyment – leading naturally to children’s literature books coming to the foreground.

In Europe or America, the idea is well established. Despite the recent emphasis on learning reading skills in the classroom, reading for pleasure remains the most powerful idea to encourage book reading. But in many countries, not only in Africa, the notion of didacticism through stories still remains. Oral tradition took on the function, among others, of cohesion and balance in a social group; from there to the belief that stories must always teach something is only a step. But what will capture the small reader’s attention is precisely what is near to her affection. If reading is perceived as an imposed task it will never be approached willingly.

The virtual exhibition and the workshop programme are the first tangible expressions of IBBY’s commitment to encouraging the publication and distribution of quality children’s books as part of **The Child’s Right to Become a Reader – IBBY’s Books for Children Everywhere campaign.**

*María Candelaría Posada*

## Books for Children in Afghanistan

The Khaas Kitaab Foundation (KKF) was founded by IBBY India’s secretary general and well-known writer Ms Manorama Jafa. With support from IBBY Japan, the foundation has produced the first picturebooks for children in Afghanistan after the war. Contributions were also received from friends in Norway, Spain, the United States, as well as from India. KKF also made a sizeable contribution from own funds.

Afghanistan is a war-ravaged country where people have grown up in

*left: Children at the Ministry of Education, Kabul, 21 July 2005  
right: Manorama Jafa visiting a village near Kabul*

