

Rwandan author sells books 'with power to heal Genocide'



Gyr-Ukunda, head of Rwanda's only children's publishing house

FRANKFURT - How do you write a book for a child who lives in the aftermath of Genocide? Rwandan publisher Agnes Gyr-Ukunda says humour is the answer.

Gyr-Ukunda, head of Rwanda's only children's publishing house, says books can help children and young people scarred by the 1994 slaughter in which over one million were killed.

"After the Genocide...children did not laugh, children did not play," she told Reuters on Saturday at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

"But through our language and stories children can learn our cultural history, and learn of our joy of life." Bakame has printed around 450,000 copies of 27 titles since its foundation in 1995, a year after the Hutu-led government and ethnic militias killed hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

"The books must, in the first place, tell amusing stories," she said. "They need to be well-written stories that do not speak of things that may disturb children, that may put frightening images in their heads".

For younger readers, tales of a beautiful but vain crocodile, a disappearing mother or a magical seed can give children the impulse to become storytellers themselves and bond with others, she said.

"The books allow them to communicate more easily with each other, to learn about their own culture, to bring them out of their shell".

In a country with a children's literacy rate of around 55 percent, according to the United Nations, richly-illustrated books that tell classic Rwandan tales can also appeal to an oral literary tradition - and reach those who cannot afford books.

"Some children will read a story then they want to tell it to other children - then others say, why can't I do that too?" Gyr-Ukunda said.

All the books are published in Kinyarwanda, Rwanda's most widely-spoken language.
Reuters.