

A new approach to contributor growth in Africa



Prepared by:

Asaf Bartov (Community Development)

Dumisani Ndubane (Community Resilience & Support Team)

What is this?

- This is an experiment.
- It aims to try a new approach, not to evolve and refine existing outreach practice.
- We believe it can transform editor retention in sub-Saharan Africa (and potentially elsewhere).
- We are about to test this belief (September through December 2023)
- If successful, we look forward to seeing it adopted by other communities and translated into other languages.
- We welcome your feedback.

What we know

Africa has the [youngest](#)^[1] population demographic in the world, whose access to the internet is [increasing at a fast pace](#)^[3]. It is estimated that by 2030, Africa's online penetration rate will be [similar to global trends](#)^[3].

Despite interest and past investments by the Foundation, it is worrisome that the share of pageviews, unique editors and active editors in the region has hovered [around less than 2%](#)^[5] of global totals.

Regional baselines

15K Total unique editors

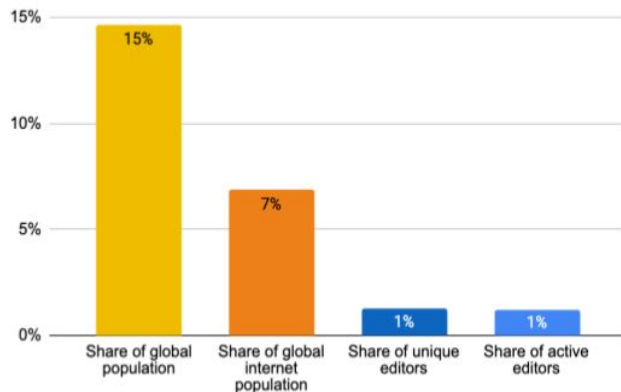
1% of global total

2K Unique [Active Editors](#)*

1% of global total



Editor Shares vs. Potential Equity Targets



Pageview Share in the SSA region

Regional baselines:

<1% of global total annual

CY2021 pageviews across all projects (**56 million**)

We also know

Too much programmatic outreach work in the region is ineffectively carried out by volunteers who have insufficient familiarity with:



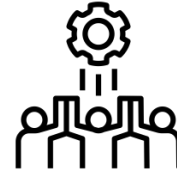
The **platform**

- Language Markup
- Visual editor
- Translation tool



The **Policies**

- Copyright and free licenses
- Notability
- Verifiability



The **Culture**

- Core values
- Blocking/Banning
- Newbie welcoming

Which leads to frustrated organizers and newbies alike and low retention rates.

“ While Let’s Connect participants gave positive feedback learning sessions, some felt **more basic training (for instance on-wiki skills)** and further learning material would be useful. “ [Let’s Connect Learning Report.](#)



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The Goal

“

5000 Active editors
by 2030, through a
structured training and
support intervention plan.”



The Big Funnel approach

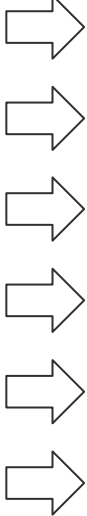
A "big funnel(s)" program(s) -- significant investment in creating a well-resourced induction funnel for editors from SSA, with efficient selection mechanisms focusing effort only on promising volunteers in each successive step/stage of the funnel. Once set up, drive a large number of potential volunteers to the low-investment entry point for the funnel via PR/awareness campaigns.

Input

The funnel welcomes *everyone*.

Experience shows that people with a culture of reading & writing and with at least some interest in digital spaces or a passion for a field of knowledge are likeliest to retain an interest in editing Wikipedia.

The funnel aims to also drive people to other modes of contribution if they choose.



Stage 1:

Public invitations and Wiki Campaigns

Zero-cost after one-off investment

Zero-cost after one-off investment in Public invitation campaign

Stage 2:

General Structured online learning

Unsupervised

Full, high quality training courses rich in A/V.

- General Introduction
- Core curricula: WP, Commons, Wikidata, Wikisource

Unsupervised Structured online learning (zero-cost after one-off investment in material)

Stage 3:

Advanced Structured online learning

Supervised + Human mentorship

Resourcing for in-person training and convenings

- Intermediate curriculum
- Advanced curriculum
- Option to be connected to local wikimedians

Supervised + Human mentorship

Stage 4:

Leadership online learning tracks

Supervised + Network mentorship

Each track has modules cultivating one type of leadership

- On-wiki adminship
- Technical leadership
- Community organizing
- Movement governance

Supervised + Network mentorship

Output

Main goal:

5000 Active editors

Additional goals:

Increased likelihood of:

- Deep and versatile skill base in SSA
- Leaders from SSA
- Increased retention rate in cohort



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But...

Why is this the approach?



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What we observe [1/2]

The **lack of high-quality and up-to-date audiovisual training materials** on core policies and core organizing skills is especially **limiting self-paced learning** in SSA.

- Platform knowledge (tech, wiki norms) **plateaus early** among many SSA contributors; number of wiki-veteran leaders in SSA extremely small.
- Status quo is that materials are any of:
 - Poor quality / actively misleading
 - Overwhelming / pedagogically poor (e.g. no exercises, comprehension Qs)
 - Unintegrated -- single disconnected modules not offering a complete course
 - Nonexistent
 - Out of date



[SSA Grantees Training Materials Review Doc](#)

What we observe [2/2]

Historically:

- Our eagerness to see more programmatic work in SSA has resulted in funding of projects with **moderate to low** effectiveness, sometimes even repeatedly.
- We have been **investing in those who showed up**, sometimes without intrinsic motivation. We suggest we should have instead been:
 - **seeking out** self-motivated contributors and **investing** further resources **only in them**.
 - **Verifying** organizers **possess the skills to effectively deliver** their programs (edit counts and time-since-first-edit are insufficient indicators)
- We have been slow or reluctant to **recognize and stop resourcing** ineffective organizers.
- If proven effective, our proposed approach would **increase the pool of skilled contributors** and potential **leaders and organizers**, thereby **increasing programmatic funding opportunities**.

1. Validating the value of training

To establish the relevance and expected efficacy of **high-quality audio-visual tutorials** on creating a competent and empowered editor base, we propose to:

- Invite a cohort of interested **existing** SSA volunteer contributors to undergo training.
- Establish a baseline of confidence about core policies with a carefully-framed survey as well as stats about the cohort's contribution levels in preceding six months (number of edits, number of surviving edits, number of talk page contributions, etc.)
- Deliver a **human-led series of live online trainings**, covering introduction to peer collaboration, diversity of ways to contribute to Wikimedia, and two core policies to said cohort.
- 3 months after the trainings end, repeat the survey with the cohort and gather stats for their contributions.
- **Compare** deltas to our hypothesis that such trainings can significantly encourage and empower SSA volunteers to participate more fully and more confidently (=retention) in Wikimedia.

Phase 1 of the pilot



Phase 1 curriculum

The course consists of **two introductory modules for everyone**, and then **two modules on core policies of Wikipedia**, for those who express interest in contributing to Wikipedia. (It is expected that following module 2, some would self-select themselves out of Wikipedia training and pursue contribution on Commons, Wikisource, etc.)

The modules are:

1. **Preparing to participate in Wikimedia projects** ([outline](#))
2. **101 Ways to Contribute to Wikimedia** ([outline](#))
3. **The Voice of Wikipedia: Neutral Point of View** ([outline](#))
4. **Sourcing knowledge: Verifiability on Wikipedia** ([outline](#))

Phase 1 of the pilot



Just SSA?

Everything such a funnel would achieve would be valuable outside SSA as well.

We are building it for SSA, because we think it's the most effective way to reach the goal in SSA.



Just English Wikipedia?

We're piloting only in English.

If this works, we expect it to be adopted widely in the movement, in other regions and languages.



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Thank you for your attention!

Questions?

Contact us:

Asaf
Dumisani

asaf@wikimedia.org
dndubane@wikimedia.org

