

TOWARDS A FLOURISHING COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVEL INDUSTRY IN AFRICA

In my opinion, there are numerous opportunities to publish comics and graphic novels in Africa. The primary target audience is African youth. They are active and resourceful, but are often lacking direction. They are exposed to the many vices that plague society like alcohol abuse, immoral sexual behavior, violence, laziness and rebellion.

At the same time, young people are interested in their history. But they also have their own daily struggles and fears, their own questions about the future. **Comics and graphic novels can be an appropriate means of responding to these questions. They can provide information young people need. They entertain, raise awareness and educate.**

Comics and graphic novels are particularly attractive because of the way they use text and images together. This makes them a powerful communication and conscience-stimulating tool that can reach a broad range of audiences. Through them young people can be warned about the dangers they are exposed to in society. Through them and more importantly, the hope found in God's Word can be communicated to them so they can be enlightened, freed and transformed.

Knowing this, we can understand the value of innovative projects like the African authored and illustrated graphic novel Bible to be published by PJA. Such a Bible harnesses the power of comics along with culturally contextualized content that will speak to hearts of African youth. A Bible that skillfully combines the message of the Bible and images that resonate with African young people will help to educate them. They have a growing need for direction in societies that have their way. Such a Bible allows them to make steps toward a future filled with hope thanks to the life-giving nourishment of God's Word depicted in its pages.

Some thoughts on comics and graphic novel publishing in in Africa

As an **author**, when one of my books is released, I participate in book signings:

- In bookstores
- In schools (elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools)
- At book fairs
- At conferences organized by Comix35 and PJA

My work as a young **publisher** starts only after I've done my work as an author, that to say, after the files I've created that make up the pages of my book have been sent to the printer.

Even before this step, I have to read and correct all of the text in my books. I spend a lot of time on this aspect. I am a writer after all!

— Next, I hire one or two freelance proofreaders that are paid to read and correct any errors I have missed.

— After that, I hire a graphic designer. I can do this kind of work too, but I prefer to give this work to someone who does full-time graphic design. This allows me to move on to the next step...

— I deliver my book files to a printer.

Please note: I make it point of not asking people to work for free or that I am unable to pay. That's not good practice! Doing so would be unprofessional, unhealthy and void of Christian attitude. For that reason, I hire freelance specialists on an order-by-order basis that I can pay as I go.

I have traveled as an author to Senegal, Kinshasa, Yaoundé, Abidjan, Bouaké, Abengourou, Yamoussoukro, Daloa... Everywhere I go, kids love comics! It's an undeniable fact.

This enthusiasm has encouraged me to keep going, to continue to create comics and even to add another arrow to my quiver, publishing, specifically, the comics and graphic novel publishing.

Currently, there is no other publisher that specializes in the publication of comics and graphic novels in Ivory Coast and there are very few in West Africa. My experience as an author and publisher has taught me that the publication of comics and graphic novels in Africa is not an easy road! However, my experience as Christian allows me to look to the future with hope knowing that with God much can be accomplished.

I am also an art **teacher**. This gives me a big advantage when I am with young people, teaching and educating them through my books.

Money Misery (*Galère pécuniaire*) is Kbenjamin Studio's first publication. Money and people's attitude toward it is the main theme. (1 Timothy 6:10 addresses these issues). I published and printed 2,000 copies of this book in Ivory Coast and at my own expense. I have many other projects in development and waiting to be financed. It is my goal to progressively become a financially autonomous publisher. At present, I don't receive any funding from outside sources. This proves that it's possible! This also shows that my commitment to publishing comics and graphic novels is serious.

I am a prolific, rigorous and meticulous author. I spend four or five years working on each book project. From the writing of the scripts all the way to putting on the final colors, nothing is left to chance.

The comics and graphic novel publishing profession has many **obstacles** like:

- High printing costs
- And because of this, High book prices
- High cost of access to media in order to promote books
- Having a target market made up of people that can barely afford to eat three times a day, much less buy books

- The limited financial resources of comics and graphic novel publishers

As you see, in comics and graphic novel publishing, there is a lack of substantial financial means, And the road is long and strewn with pitfalls. Because of this, often, the result is that the adventure ends before it is given the chance to get off the ground. This said, I am not without hope that the tide will turn for comics and graphic novel publishing in Africa.

My **vision** for the publication of Christian books in Africa is one that is full of hope. The comics industry is just in its early stages. We need more financial means in order to print and to promote books. We need to let people know about our books by using existing social networks, by creating blogs that inform people and raise the profile of the industry. This is what I do to make my work as an artist and to make my comics around the world.

In Africa, the governments must work to reduce the cost of the materials needed to produce books (ink, paper, etc.). They should work to provide subsidies for publishers that would help publishers pursue their publications and allow them to sell books at lower costs. These things could help publishers become autonomous. A book is not a commodity like bread. In publishing, becoming economically profitable takes time; return on investment takes longer to achieve. This requires perseverance and courage on our behalf. Although publishing is not easy, it is exciting!

With GOD, we will be victorious.