

The case for Publishing & (with) Nsemia Inc. Publishers		
Remarks to Graduate Students at Ontario Institute of Studies in Education (OISE) October 1 st , 2010		By Dr Matunda Nyanchama matunda@matunda.org www.matunda.org

“I put forward formless and unresolved notions, as do those who publish doubtful questions to debate in the schools, not to establish the truth but to seek it.”
- Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), French essayist.

I want to thank Professor Njoki Wane for this opportunity to meet with you and share our experiences and explore ways we can possibly collaborate in the business of publishing; this is a subject that I am sure is dear and close to your hearts as academics and teachers. It is very dear to me and hence the reason I am in the business.

Publishing is mainly about the capture, recording and transmission of knowledge. It offers a chance for us to share with others, in the present and in the future, that which we know/observe. It is especially needed in the fast-paced world that we live in today. Most of you can testify that today, we don't have nearly enough time for ourselves, let alone sit around the fireside and tell tales from a long time ago, as did our ancestors.

Rather, we find ourselves in far-flung places, interacting with people unrelated to us but with whom we share common interests that bring us together. In such reality we need substantial effort to capture, record and transmit that which we know and learn.

Nsemia Inc. Publishers: who we are

As a way of introduction, you have been told my name: Matunda Nyanchama. My background is in engineering and computer science, and information technology in general. I specialize in information security, which pays my bills. I also have considerable passion for the capture, recording, articulation and transmission of knowledge in any form that can be communicated to others, now and in the future.

We started **Nsemia Inc. Publishers** more than four years ago. Initially, we wanted to help, especially, non-mainstream writers reach their audiences. We long realized the impediments that that (especially) young and upcoming writers face with established publishers. This is especially so when subjects may deviate from what is traditional with those established publishers.

Charles Caleb Colton, who lived a number of centuries ago captures the challenge authors face when he says that:

*“To write what is worth publishing, to find honest people to **publish** it, and get sensible people to read it, are the three great difficulties in being an author.”*
- Charles Caleb Colton quotes (English sportsman and writer, 1780-1832)

It is our intention to be the voice of the voiceless – the honest “people” that would publish others’ works, and especially for non-mainstream authors; it is our commitment to give opportunities to those that today don't have the chances they need and deserve. We expect that, in that process, we can contribute to knowledge recording and transmission, even if for posterity, and hence our motto: *bringing untold stories*.

We constantly face the question of whether there is room for yet another publisher in the space we are targeting. And what with the proliferation of technology when self-publishing has become extremely easy? Our answer is simple: there is too much uncaptured knowledge that we need to capture and hence there is room for, perhaps,

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hundreds of thousands of publishers. The challenge is to find a good niche for our brand and ensure that we can distinguish ourselves from others that compete in the space.

Why publish?

I may be preaching to the choir when I speak of the need to publish. I am sure that scholars like you have a very good understanding of the need to get published. In the academic world, which I share with you, we have the mantra: *publish or perish*.

As academics, as a necessity, you must publish in order to enhance your career and justify the position(s) you occupy. As society, we expect that you will pursue productive research whose outcomes would be shared with peers and beyond; these would serve you and society well, underlining your contribution to society.

That said publishing goes beyond career advancement. Writing can make you famous. For instance president Barack Obama, aside from winning the American Presidency, is also an outstanding author, something that made him famous before he ran for public office, and perhaps assisted his successful run for the White House.

Further, publishing can help secure your rights. Releasing your work for publication puts a stamp on your ownership of the associated intellectual property. This would forestall situations that arise where others may claim rights to your work. I am told there have been cases where professors have been accused of appropriating their students' work. Now imagine you published the results of your research, you would be ahead in terms of potential claims to your work.

I must reiterate the issue of recording knowledge for posterity's sake. It is a passion for me and I would like you to underline this point and for good reasons: I believe that we are duty bound to serve humanity and we do so by leaving this world a better place than we found it. Advancing knowledge and leaving "something" for posterity is one way of leaving the world a better place than we found it.

It is even more pertinent considering the humbling fact that we are here for only a snapshot of time. Like happened to our forefathers, our time on earth would come to pass, and perhaps faster than we ever imagined. It behoves us, therefore, to leave future generations the benefit of our experiences and insights. This would help them not reinvent the wheel when their time comes. Remember, all progress is a culmination of incremental knowledge application. And rapid progress happens when there is a confluence of synergistic ideas that usher in changes like we have seen technology realize for humanity.

Finally, on the subject of why you need to publish is the possibility of making some money. You may never know whether that book you write may one day become a best seller, triggered by a confluence of factors.

In this respect again, Barack Obama is a good example. I am not sure he imagined *Dreams from my Father* would one day become a best seller when he was penning the work back in the 1990s.

Well, it could be your work that could become a future hit at some juncture, at a confluence of some factors in the future.

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What we have published to date

In the past short while of our existence, we have published works of fiction (novels) and poetry (search Nsemia Inc. on amazon.com) for a complete catalogue. Although English is the main language of publication, we have recently released a novel in Gikuyu, one of Kenya’s indigenous languages. We also have an upcoming work in Kiswahili while there are other works under consideration written in other languages. As well, we are contemplating translations into languages like French and Spanish, where it makes sense to do so.

We have also called for biographical works: biographies, autobiographies and memoirs. As well, we have recently sought to publish academic theses, which I will speak to later.

Our catchment source is firming up around the regions of Africa, North America and the Caribbean. We have works published and under review from Barbados and Jamaica; Egypt, Botswana and South Africa; Ghana, Kenya and Malawi. We believe that our expanse would continue to grow.

Although we are Canadian-based, most of our works are by African and Africa-Caribbean authors. This is more by design rather than accident for reasons that, today, the African continent is perhaps the last frontier for *cultural mining* and story-telling. The challenge we have as Africans, both on the continent and in the Diaspora, is to tell our stories in our language: in our words, in our interpretation and in our perspective. This is important because for too long, others have spoken on our behalf. And often, in speaking on our behalf, they have misrepresented us for they wear lenses coloured by their foreign, and in some respects, alien experiences. Often they analyze their observations using their own templates, rather than our own; and use their “vocabulary” that is substantially unrelated to ours.

In essence, we largely don’t own our story-telling.

So we have been calling for African tales, and especially those of challenges and heroic successes. We are asking for capture of tales from far back and ones that portray the struggles and triumphs of our people. (By the way people ask me how one can capture such tales when memories are long-faded and those closer to origins of the legends have long died. I say, create even fictionalized accounts of the same and let’s have the debate on the content and the merits, or otherwise, of publishing such works and in the form described. With debate, we would gain other perspectives.)

Call to Action

By now you may be asking “what is in it for me” as a graduate student at OISE?

There are many ways you can engage with us. You can work with us an author, reader, editor or book reviewer.

As a start, be an **author** and send us the poetry, works of fiction and any other works you deem interesting. Don’t forget biographies, personal and those of others. We are constantly accepting manuscripts for review and recommendations; we accept some. In many respects, authors are asked to make improvements on some while a few get

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rejected all the same. The fact is that if you have a good story to tell, we are likely to be a good avenue to your audience.

Nsemia Inc. Publishers is always looking for **readers**. These are people that read and advise on acceptability of pieces of work submitted to us. Readers have the privilege of appraising material in its raw form and make substantive, effectual recommendations that shape the substance and form of a piece of work once fully finalized. Readers play a similar role to peer reviewers in academic publications.

As well, we can engage you as an **editor** if your line of expertise coincides with the work under preparation for publication. Editors play a crucial role in shaping the outcome of a piece of work; the quality of a final piece of work largely depends on diligence of an editor. They work closely with the author to ensure that the “story-telling” is well told and that it can capture the attention of the intended audience.

You could also help us in the last stages of manuscript preparation: **copy editing**. Here you would summon your knowledge of the language and its syntax. This would allow you to walk through edited text with a fine “comb” looking for missing punctuation, poor sentence structure, etc. We welcome inquiries on this from people that know the language well and can help finesse manuscripts in readiness for release as books.

You can also do **book reviews** for us. These may be reviews of books we have released or about to release for purposes of raising visibility in the market. We also accept book reviews from other publishers but these should have synergy with our works. (NB: if you would like to a review of a non-Nsemia Inc. Publishers book, ensure to consult in advance on acceptability of the publication of your review.

Back to getting published

My advice is that as you write your thesis; consider submitting it for publication as a book soon after your examination and acceptance by your academic committee. This is an area we have recently resolved to get into. We believe that there are opportunities for our academic researchers to find a way to readers beyond academic conferences and journals.

As you prepare to submit your thesis for publication we suggest you consider working with us to do a book format. The process for doing so goes thus: submit an abstract of the work, a preface, chapter headings, along with a short description of each chapter, and a bibliography.

This process is important in order for us to evaluate the work, its contribution and overall alignment with our approach to publishing. Once your submission is accepted, we then assign an editor to work with to prepare the material for publication.

In Summary

We outlined the need to get published, which include name recognition, career enhancement and contribution to the humanity’s collective knowledge repository. We discussed some roles you can play in our publishing business, including being authors, readers, editors and book reviewers. We also made the case why you may wish to publish with us.

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I thank for the time you spared to listen to me; I encourage you to go out there and send us some quality work to put in the market.

Before I take questions, I would leave the following as food for thought:

"In matters of truth the fact that you don't want to publish something is, nine times out of ten, a proof that you ought to publish it."

- Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874–1936), British author.

Many thanks!

*Matunda Nyanchama is a past president of Kenyan Community Abroad and a partner at **Nsemia Inc. Publishers**, a Canadian-based, Africa-focused publishing business. He can be reached at Matunda@nsemia.com*