



Writing and Editing a Book Which Requires a Very Short Production Time-Line

By Samuel Kahura Chege

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I spent almost five years before finishing the final draft of my first novel, *Hope at Dawn*, published in 2006. But in January 2008, I spent only two days to complete the first draft of my new book, *Let's Save Our Nation*.

Why so fast?

During Kenya's post-election violence, Mark Carpenter, chairman of Media Associates International (MAI) [<http://www.littworld.org>] in Carol Stream, Illinois, USA, encouraged me and other Christian publishers all over the world: "In recent hours and days we have heard from members of the MAI network who are suffering in Pakistan and Kenya due to strife arising from political turmoil and violence ... Let us pray for our friends in these

countries—for their safety and well-being, and also for clarity as they seek the will of the Lord.

Let us not forget the power of the Word in promoting understanding, healing, restoration and hope."

The last phrase challenged me. Kenya was on fire and something had to be done. I wept as I witnessed the ethnic clashes destroying the peace, economy and stability of my beloved Kenya.

This was an emergency. I felt like a doctor waiting to attend a patient in the Intensive Care Unit. The doctor works around the clock as he closely monitors the progress of his patient.

I woke up at dawn to intercede for Kenya. I prayed, "God, what do you want me to do to help save our nation?" From that prayer I got the working title, *Let's Save Our Nation*. I decided to write a message of hope and peace.

Writing the first draft

In the presence of God, I started to develop the idea by asking myself the following questions:

1. What is the root cause of the problem in our country?
2. What does the Bible say about life and murder?
3. Who can restore peace in our nation?
3. How can we cultivate love?

4. Where can we get peace?
5. How can people pursue forgiveness and reconciliation?
6. What are the biblical responses to crisis?

As I pondered the answers, I relived the memory of my beloved dad who was killed in a similar ethnic skirmish in 1993. I decided to write through my own experience.

I wanted to write a 20-page booklet, but by the end of the second day, I had written 54 pages. The next week I spent two hours per day rewriting the book, which ended up being 84 pages long.

When I completed my final draft, I gave it to Shel Arensen, an author and the former managing editor for *Today in Africa* magazine. Within two weeks, my editor went through the manuscript and gave me his comments on how to improve the book. I made the necessary changes, and it is ready to print.

Writing an emergency book

In my experience, the following points were of great importance when writing and editing a book that requires a short production time-line:

1. *Treat the subject as an emergency.* This will give you permission to drop other things on your schedule and write with passion.
2. *Give your writing first priority and let money come second.* When writing this book, my main goal was to get the message out and help in saving the situation. When a patient is taken to an emergency room in a hospital, doctors treat the case without asking for payment first. Their first concern is to save a life.
3. *Give yourself a deadline.* A firm deadline helps you to sacrifice your time, change your daily program, and set everything else aside. Give

yourself a date to start doing research, writing, editing and finishing.

4. *Develop your book's vision using the 5-Ws.*
 - a) Why do you want to write?
 - b) Whom do you want to reach with the message? Having a clear picture of your readers helps you put the message in a way that will interest them.
 - c) What will fascinate your readers? What will make your book unique?
 - d) Where will you start and end?
 - e) When should you have the manuscript ready?
5. *Allow God be the source of your writing.* When you keep quiet before God and listen to what He tells you, words will freely flow through your fingertips. In your first draft, write down the thoughts that come into your mind freely, uncritically, without minding the order.
6. *Be keen to follow what is happening around you.* Listen to radio and television; read daily newspapers. Current news makes your book real. Be aware of other books on the subject so you will write a unique book from others already published.
7. *Read the Bible.* Since you are writing a Christian book, your conclusions and solutions must have sound biblical principles. This is only possible if you are well versed on what Scripture says on the subject.
8. *Give real examples.* Draw on your personal experience in your writing. Strengthen your message by including other people's real experiences, interacting with them by visiting them or conducting interviews through phone or email.

9. *Write the facts.* Facts will make your book interesting. You must do thorough research.
10. *Rewrite your manuscript.* Since your first draft was written in a rush, rewrite your book by joining your thoughts and ideas. Even with an urgent writing project, try to leave the draft on your shelf for two or three days. This gives you time to relax and refresh.
11. *Improve your writing.* After setting aside the manuscript for a few days, read it and then edit your work. The following questions will help you in editing your own work:
 - a) Does my book have a striking lead that immediately hooks the reader's attention? Does the end grow out of the beginning?
 - b) Have you repeated yourself?
 - c) Is the book language readable?
 - d) Have you clearly identified the problem(s)?
 - e) Have you clearly stated solution(s) to the problem(s)? Is your solution based on the Word of God?
 - f) Is there continuity? Are all the events in the book linked with each other?
 - g) What does your story say? Read your manuscript once more to see if you have inadvertently communicated a different message from that you intended to give.
12. *Check spellings, quotes, and active verbs.*
13. *Allow at least two people to comment on your manuscript.* Accept their criticism positively and include what you feel will add weight to your book.

14. *Rewrite your final draft* and give it to your editor for the final editing and proofreading.
15. *Do the corrections from your editor.* Your book is ready for publishing, so run the manuscript to the press.

An answer to prayer

When the book was completed, I asked my brothers [and sisters] in Christ to pray. I asked God to pave a way for the message to reach His people. That evening, I received a call from a missionary working in a nearby school.

"I have been praying for God to show me how I can get involved in helping to restore peace in Kenya," Mark Buhler, the missionary, said to me. "I thought of you. Are you able to urgently write a tract on forgiveness and reconciliation that I can fund and distribute to pastors around our area?"

I told him about the book I had already written, and we agreed to excerpt some portions to form two tracts. I selected a chapter on forgiveness and reconciliation and removed some sections to get an A4 double-sided tract that would be readable and have continuity. I did the same for the tract on peace.

I felt God had answered my prayer.

Looking forward

I thank God the message is already reaching my intended audience and is helping in restoring peace by encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation.

Now, I am looking forward to seeing God provide funds for the printing of the book, *Let's Save Our Nation*. My prayer is that the book will not only help to restore peace in Kenya, but will also help other nations facing similar ethnic clashes.

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