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# LEGAL ALERT



**Write It. Own It. Protect It: Why World Book and  
Copyright Day 2026 Matters for Kenyan Authors**



# Write It. Own It. Protect It: Why World Book and Copyright Day 2026 Matters for Kenyan Authors

## Introduction

On this World Book and Copyright Day 2026, the world will once again pause to celebrate the power of books as vehicles of knowledge, culture, entertainment and creative expression. Established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the day is a reminder of the essential role copyright plays in sustaining creativity and ensuring that authors can derive recognition and economic benefit from their works.

Celebrated every year on 23rd April, the day highlights how books can connect people across cultures and generations. Beyond celebration, however, there is an important reality that is often overlooked: that books are not merely stories or sources of knowledge, but the product of someone's time, effort and creativity i.e., the proverbial sweat of the author's brow.

As the literary world becomes increasingly digital, the risks to authors have evolved just as rapidly. For instance, manuscripts are now created, shared and distributed in digital form within seconds, often before adequate legal safeguards are in place.

For Kenyan authors, this raises an important question: how can one truly own and protect a work in an environment where duplication and unauthorized circulation are so easily achieved?

## The World Book Capital Initiative

Beyond the annual celebration, UNESCO also advances its mission through initiatives that promote reading and publishing at a city level. One such

initiative is the designation of a World Book Capital.

Launched in 2001, the initiative recognizes cities that demonstrate a strong commitment to books, reading and the wider publishing ecosystem. Once designated, a city is expected to showcase its leadership in supporting creativity, promoting linguistic diversity and encouraging knowledge-sharing through books and storytelling.

Over the course of the year, the designated city implements a range of impactful activities aimed at strengthening the role of books in society, including promoting literacy, supporting authors and publishers, and expanding access to reading. These efforts are closely aligned with UNESCO's broader mandate of using culture and education as tools for sustainable and inclusive development.

For a city to be eligible for designation, an application is submitted to UNESCO for review by its advisory committee, comprising one representative from UNESCO, the International Authors Forum, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, the International Publishers Association and the European and International Booksellers Federation. The final designation is made by the Director-General of UNESCO, with attention given to ensuring geographic balance across regions over time.

For 2026, the designated World Book Capital is Rabat, Morocco, reflecting the city's clear commitment to literary development, the empowerment of women and youth through reading and the fight against illiteracy, particularly among underserved communities.



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## How Kenyan Authors Can Protect Their Works

While global initiatives like the World Book Capital underscore the importance of books and reading, they also remind us that behind every book is an author, whose work deserves legal protection. For many Kenyan authors, the joy of finishing a manuscript is often followed by a quiet fear: will this work still be mine once it is published?

For Kenyan authors, safeguarding creative works requires both an understanding of legal rights and the adoption of practical measures of protection, particularly in a digital environment where content can be easily shared.

Set out below are some practical steps Kenyan authors can take to protect their works:

### a) Register Your Work and Keep Clear Evidence of Creation

Although copyright protection in Kenya arises automatically once a literary work is created and fixed in a tangible form, authors are encouraged to formally document their ownership through registration on the National Rights Registry Portal (the “Registry”) managed by the Kenya Copyright Board (KECOBO) and available at [nrr.copyright.go.ke](http://nrr.copyright.go.ke).

This option is provided under section 22D of the Copyright Act (Cap. 130) Laws of Kenya, which allows authors of copyright works or an owner of copyright to register their works on the Registry. Registration strengthens proof of ownership and simplifies enforcement if infringement occurs.

The Registry is user-friendly and allows individuals or

corporate entities to create accounts, submit their works and search the copyright database.

Once an application is submitted and reviewed, a copyright certificate is issued for the registered work. The certificate can then be downloaded using the email address provided at the time of creating the account. The certificate serves as a formal evidential record of copyright over the work and may be useful in the event of a dispute.

In addition to registration, authors are encouraged to keep clear supporting evidence of the creation of their works, including:

- dated drafts and revisions;
- notes, outlines and earlier versions;
- email trails or submissions showing timelines; and
- secure storage with version history.

This evidence is often the practical proof of authorship and the creation timeline, and it can be relied upon in determining the outcome of disputes. It helps establish who created the work first, how it evolved over time, and whether any unauthorized copying has occurred.

### b) Control How Your Work is Shared

In many cases, authors lose control of their work through how the work is shared. When circulating digital copies of their works, authors should be intentional not only about who receives the work, but also how the work is accessed and distributed.

Some practical approaches that can be used when sharing digital copies include:

- limiting distribution to sample chapters before full release;



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- controlling access to works shared in soft copy; and
- tracking who receives each version of a work.

In commercial contexts, authors may also:

- offer paid digital downloads instead of free distribution;
- restrict the number of devices on which an eBook can be accessed; and
- use platform controls that limit copying, printing or forwarding.

These measures help authors retain both control and value over their digital works.

## c) Use Digital Safeguards and Clear Licensing Terms

Beyond access control, authors should rely on both technology and legal terms to protect their work. With the rise of self-publishing, online literary platforms, and widespread sharing of PDF books on messaging applications, Kenyan authors face multiple risks of unauthorized circulation.

Some examples of digital safeguards include:

- using passwords or encrypting works – this involves converting the files into unreadable formats that can only be accessed with a decryption key or password, thereby preventing unauthorized access;
- watermarking works – this involves embedding a visible or invisible identifier that helps identify ownership or track distribution;
- providing restricted access links to the works with expiry controls; and
- disabling downloads and the "copy-paste" function, preventing printing or sharing where platforms allow it.

An additional measure is setting clear licensing terms or usage conditions when sharing a work. These need not always take the form of formal legal agreements. Even simple written instructions can define how a work may be used, including whether the recipient may reproduce, distribute or adapt the context, and whether the use is limited to review purposes or extends to commercial use.

## d) Recognize the Limits of Digital Protection and Act Quickly When Needed

Even where digital protection is in place, no system is fully secure. For instance, encrypted files may be bypassed and once accessed, content can still be copied, forwarded or shared.

For this reason, protection is ultimately about deterrence, control and enforceability. If unauthorized sharing occurs, authors should act quickly by preserving evidence, identifying the source, issuing takedown notices where appropriate, and taking steps to stop further distribution, including filing suits and obtaining injunctive orders if necessary.

## Conclusion

In the end, books are more than just an aggregation of written words on a number of pages. Books carry thought, memory, imagination, style, wit, humour, language and identity and in doing so, they connect us across time and experience.

As Alberto Manguel notes, “Maybe this is why we read, and why in moments of darkness we return to books: to find words for what we already know.”

As we mark World Book and Copyright Day 2026, the message is clear. Celebrating books is not enough.

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Protecting the creative people behind them is just as important. In a digital age where ideas travel faster than ever, safeguarding creative work through copyright protection, among other practical control measures, is part of preserving the value of literature itself.

## DISCLAIMER

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