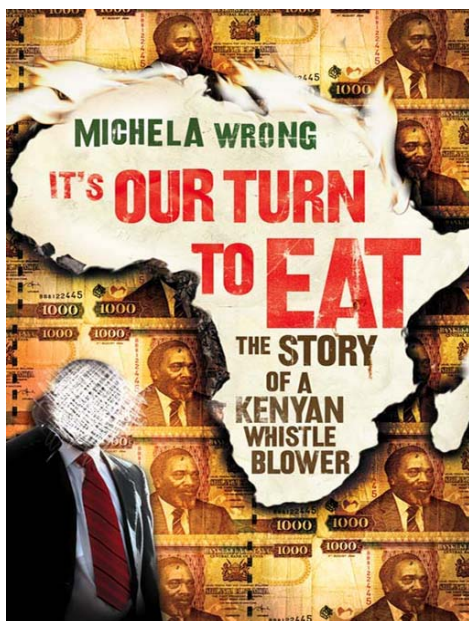




SUCCESS STORY

It's Our Turn to Eat



Fearing reprisals, booksellers in Kenya were reluctant to carry Michela Wrong's book.

“We held the reading to be defiant so that people would get to know what the book is about, get them to talk as well as get a copy.”

**—Philo Ikenye, President
PEN Kenya**

June 2009 – As Michela Wrong’s controversial book made headlines in early 2009, Kenyans rushed to local booksellers to purchase it. Alas, there were no copies to be found.

It’s Our Turn to Eat: the Story of a Kenyan Whistleblower was causing a muted uproar on the political scene, and certain political players were keen to keep the exposé out of the bookshops.

The book details John Githongo’s thoughts, triumphs, frustrations, and experiences as Kenya’s highest anti-corruption boss, and the furor could be attributed to the book’s thoroughness in implicating political leaders who were caught with their hands dirty.

The nature of the problem was not news to Kenyans: Githongo had submitted a report to the president in late 2005, and the report was widely published. The book, however, provided explicit descriptions of the shady deals going on while the average Kenyan was struggling just to earn enough for the day, uncertain of tomorrow’s bread.

USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) awarded five grants to civil society organizations that were interested in disseminating the book—and its shocking details—to the public, and *It’s Our Turn to Eat* began to see the light of day in Kenya. Instead of being sold under the counter for more than \$30, the book was given away or sold at wholesale prices (\$10–\$12) on the street. Grantees included the Kenyan chapter of PEN International, church groups, Peace Net, and the Nairobi Star/Radio Africa Group.

In supporting the publication, the program sought to break the unofficial ban imposed by booksellers fearing retribution, raise the public’s awareness of the culture of impunity in Kenya, and show the depth and breadth of corruption in the country.

On June 14, PEN Kenya held a successful book reading at the country’s National Theater. According to promotional materials, the organization sought to encourage Kenyans to “reflect on who we are as a country and as a people—our values, practices, institutions and lives—which will be vital in the movement towards sustainable and lasting change.”

The effort to break the ban appears to have been successful. In Nairobi, one distributor sold a thousand copies in ten days, and other sellers are beginning to order the book for distribution in Kenya. Furthermore, reports on Facebook and via text messages indicate that people are starting to buy the book openly.