

# Bookshare Arabic

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## Background

For Arabic speakers there has been very few accessible ebooks produced in the past. Those that have been produced have been human narrated with a lengthy production process. Bookshare.org has created a major repository of accessible books in Daisy format in the English language and had experience in other languages. The project agreed between Mada and Bookshare sought to establish processes and tools to support the production of significant volumes of accessible digital books to support Arabic speakers with a print impairment.

## Activity Report

The development and distribution of accessible Arabic books was identified as a matter of interest by Mada in 2011. Significant work had been done to build services in assistive technology and Mada had begun to engage locally with website owners to address issues of eAccessibility on the web. However it became clear that there was little available accessible digital content to support people with a disability in education or employment, or to support social and cultural activities including reading for leisure.

A series of discussions were held with stakeholders who reiterated the need for a higher volume of digital content to be made available, there had been concern that the small amounts of Arabic content that were available were generally manually produced through human narration, or by being retyped into Braille. At one major National Library in the Middle East, they reported that they were able to produce 30 Daisy books a year in this way.

This suggested that a series of elements needed to be addressed to build a model that would allow accessible Arabic books to be produced and distributed much more widely. These key elements were

- To identify sources of digital books that could be made available in alternative formats
- To develop the tools for conversion into alternative formats for Arabic content
- To manage and protect the digital rights of publishers
- To store accessible content in a repository that could be easily searched and content retrieved
- To promote and distribute books on an on demand basis

With these thoughts in mind it was decided that Mada would enter into a partnership with Bookshare.org who held the largest library of accessible books in English and to build upon the experience of Bookshare to create the tools that were needed to fulfill our ambitions.

Mada had already purchased licenses for people with print impairments within Qatar to access the English content available online through Bookshare. Feedback had been positive and a partnership was agreed to extend this relationship to incorporate Arabic content.

The process of support for Arabic has been ongoing and working relations between Mada and Bookshare have been maintained throughout this period.



A number of challenges emerged in the process that had to be addressed. Some of these remain areas for future research and collaboration and both Mada and Bookshare have remained committed to continuously seeking to increase the availability of books and to improve the quality of production.

The challenges to be addressed included



- Poor quality of Arabic OCR – leading to books that needed significant retyping in electronic formats
- Addressing the right to left nature of Arabic, and the ability of existing tools to cope with this.
- Ensuring that books made available through Bookshare were approved by the Ministry of culture for distribution in Qatar

We also recognized that the growth of accessible Arabic books would require future partners to be sustainable. Most notably that the planned Qatar National Library would need to engage with Bookshare to ensure the ongoing production of content. This was encouraged by the requirement within the Qatar eAccessibility policy produced by the Supreme Council for Information Communications Technology (ictQatar) for 10% of books available through the library to be available in accessible formats.

## Conclusions

At the heart of the program was the building of a long term relationship between key partners. Most importantly a relationship had to be built between Mada and Bookshare initially. But it is clear that stakeholder engagement had to be addressed at a number of levels. Understanding the range of stakeholders was critical to building success. In this case we needed to address the expectations and needs of publishers, the Ministry of Culture, Supreme Education Council and of people with a print impairment themselves. Future development of the project will see Mada maintaining the engagement with people with a print impairment but that the development and sustainability of content will become the shared responsibility of Bookshare with Qatar National Library.

## References

Mada website

[www.mada.org.qa](http://www.mada.org.qa)

Bookshare Arabic Site -

[www.bookshare.org/browse/collection/43/Mada%20Collection%20%28in%20Arabic%29?offset=100&resultsView=TABLE&](http://www.bookshare.org/browse/collection/43/Mada%20Collection%20%28in%20Arabic%29?offset=100&resultsView=TABLE&)

Bookshare and Mada Launch Accessible Arabic eBook Collection -

[www.bookshare.org/cms/about/news/press-releases/bookshare-and-mada-launch-accessible-arabic-ebook-collection](http://www.bookshare.org/cms/about/news/press-releases/bookshare-and-mada-launch-accessible-arabic-ebook-collection)

Bookshare and Accessible Technology for the Middle East and Beyond -

<http://www.techshareme.org/files/2014/11/Betsy-Beaumont-Bookshare-Benetech.pdf>

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