

# Sustainability Guidance for Educational Publishers

*Practical guidance for LTSM and schools publishers operating in Sub-Saharan African markets.*

## Why this sector needs its own guidance

Most PASA members active in South Africa are educational publishers producing Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) for government tender or private adoption. This work has structural features that general sustainability guidance doesn't address: large, tender-driven print runs; distribution into markets with uneven connectivity and infrastructure; multi-year curriculum adoption cycles; and pricing set by procurement processes the publisher doesn't control. Sustainability action in this segment has to work within those constraints rather than assume a discretionary marketing or trade-publishing budget.

This guidance sits alongside PASA's Resource Hub materials as a sector-specific companion, and links directly to SDG 4 (Quality Education) as well as SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

## Where the impact actually sits

For an LTSM publisher, the largest share of environmental impact typically sits in production volume and distribution logistics rather than in office operations. Tender print runs can be an order of magnitude larger than trade runs, and titles are often shipped to hundreds of individual school sites rather than a smaller number of distribution hubs. Prioritise action in this order:

- **1. Print volume** — Print-run accuracy against confirmed orders — the single largest lever, since over-printing against a tender ceiling is the most common source of waste in this segment
- **2. Distribution** — Freight consolidation for school deliveries — part-loads to remote or rural schools carry a disproportionate emissions cost per unit delivered
- **3. Materials** — Paper sourcing and weight — certified stock and lighter basis weights compound across large runs
- **4. Adoption-cycle waste** — End-of-cycle materials management — what happens to stock made obsolete by curriculum or edition changes

## Stage-by-stage: typical practice vs. lower-impact alternative

| Stage                 | Typical practice                                                                               | Lower-impact alternative                                                                          |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Print-run planning    | Runs sized to provincial tender maximums, with high pulping rates after adoption cycles change | Phased/split runs against confirmed order + short-run digital top-ups once uptake is known        |
| Paper & materials     | Heavier stock chosen for perceived durability in high-use classroom settings                   | FSC/PEFC certified stock at the lightest weight that meets curriculum lifespan requirements       |
| Distribution          | Multiple part-load deliveries direct from printer to individual schools                        | Consolidated regional drops via district depots or shared distributor routes                      |
| Format mix            | Print-only delivery even where connectivity and device access exist                            | Blended print-plus-digital, matched realistically to each market's connectivity and device access |
| End of adoption cycle | Superseded stock pulped or landfilled                                                          | Donation to non-adopting schools, libraries, or literacy NGOs before pulping                      |

## Working with the realities of these markets

### Connectivity and device access vary by district, not just by country

A blended print/digital strategy has to be planned at district or school level, not assumed nationally. Digital-first is not automatically the lower-impact option where it drives device purchase, replacement, and charging infrastructure that wouldn't otherwise exist — weigh the full lifecycle, not just the paper saved.

## Tender cycles limit flexibility, but not entirely

Print-run size and delivery schedule are often fixed by tender terms. Where there is room to negotiate — phased delivery, split runs against confirmed uptake, or regional consolidation points — raise it at the proposal stage rather than after award, when it's much harder to change.

## Distribution partners are usually shared across publishers

Because several PASA members often use the same distributors or courier networks into the same regions, consolidation opportunities are frequently available across publishers, not just within one publisher's own list. This is a natural area for PASA-level coordination rather than each member negotiating alone.

## A starting checklist for LTSM teams

- **Print planning** — Print-run figures are checked against confirmed tender or adoption numbers before final sign-off, not carried over from the previous cycle by default
- **Materials** — Paper specification defaults to certified stock at the lightest weight meeting durability requirements for the expected classroom lifespan
- **Distribution** — Delivery routing is reviewed with the distributor for consolidation opportunities before dispatch, particularly for rural and multi-school regions
- **End of cycle** — A plan exists for stock made obsolete by curriculum change — donation and redistribution pathways identified before pulping is authorised
- **Digital mix** — Blended format decisions are based on district-level connectivity and device data, not a single national assumption

## Related PASA resources

These sit in the PASA Resource Hub and should be read alongside this guide:

- **Sustainability Handbook** — Resource for creating industry baseline this guidance can build on
  - **Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025** — Resource for framing PASA members' commitments against the UN SDGs
  - **Publishing Accelerator 2030 whitepapers** — Sector-wide strategic direction that this guidance operationalises for LTSM specifically
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