

# Publishing for the greater good

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FINDING the next JK Rowling, publishing the next bestseller and raking in the profits – that's what most book publishers strive for. But not Akasaa. This is a totally different operating model.

"The questions we ask are, is there a reason for the book to be published? Is there a bigger, more compelling story? Is there a value to what you're writing? Is it worth the time trying to get people to read it and put your message out there?"

"If you fulfil these criteria, I would say let's go. It's not about whether it becomes an overnight bestseller. Our assessment is very different," says Angela Yap, Akasaa founder and director, during a recent interview in Kuala Lumpur.

Basically, for Yap, nothing matters more than making a difference in society and perpetuating good values in business and governance.

This is reflected in the Sanskrit-influenced name Yap chose for her venture. Akasaa means "space" or "emptiness", and "what Akasaa does is vast, it defies everyone's expectations of

what a business is or should be".

Even before the KL-born Yap, 39, founded Akasaa in 2008, she was already walking the talk while making it big in the finance and commerce sector by partnering with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

What she did not know was that her corporate training and her passion for social work would one day create the perfect storm for her to set up a social enterprise of her own.

Yap says her departure from the finance sector was not planned but she somehow knew setting up Akasaa was the right next step, as scary as it seemed.

"To take everything that I learnt from the business and commerce sector and to put it together with my works with NGOs – for me, this was the culmination of it all, to merge them together," says the affable Yap, before quickly adding with laughter, "But it took a long time!"

With just four people in her team (she believes in keeping things small), Yap has been steadily building up Akasaa, starting off as a content creator and providing editorial consultancy and training. Becoming a publisher as well, however, was "accidental", says Yap.

"At that time, I had written my first book. I had this manuscript and didn't know what to do with it. I didn't know anything about publishing.

"So I asked Ritchie Ramesh, a publisher we work closely with, what to do and he simply said, 'Why don't we just go ahead and do what we want?'"

"And that's what we did. We published the book and it had quite a successful run," says Yap, referring to *Managing Yoo-Hoost*, a book that questions the way we think and how nobodies can make a big difference in the world.

"People then started approaching us, asking us if we could publish their works and it just snowballed," Yap adds.

All of Akasaa's editorial works focus on social values that they think people should have.

"We'll look if there's a value to what you're writing and if there is, we'll publish it. I think what we are trying to do is promote good content, things that have a social mission to it, and for us, in the long run, that's what's going to make the biggest difference," says Yap.

Pushing its social focus further, Akasaa is partnering with the Southern Africa Development



For Yap, nothing matters more than making a difference in society and perpetuating good values in business. — MUHAMAD SHAHRIL ROSLI/  
The Star

Community (SADC), an inter-governmental organisation of 16 African states, to assist disaster recovery.

The partnership is a fundraising venture by Akasaa in aid of victims of Cyclone Idai and

Kenneth that hit the nations of Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique early this year.

Yap says the humanitarian drive, which began in April, aims to raise RM100,000 by year end. To that end, 20% of Akasaa's book sales



will be channelled to the SADC.

"We have two ways in which people can support this. One is on the individual level. By purchasing our featured books and our limited edition notebooks, 20% of your payment will be channelled to the SADC.

"Next is the corporate programme where a minimum of RM7,000 is required.

"I would like to urge more corporations to come forward and help. You see, the corporates have this mentality of 'what's in it for me?'"

"What they should understand is that the corporate that wins in the long run is one with a vision that everyone today is part of the

global community.

"It's no longer about what's in it for me but how everyone else is going to benefit here. This needs to be a global effort and it's all about shifting the mentality," Yap explains.

The featured books for the cyclone humanitarian drive are *Answering Is An Art*, *Dining With Dragons*, *Doodle Journal! Journey To Self-Discovery*, *Managing Yoo-Hoost*, *Meanwhile In Zambia*, *The Girl Who Wears Two Watches* and *The Legal Lion Of The Commonwealth: Judgements*.

All the books are available at larger bookstores nationwide as well as through Akasaa's website, [akasaa.com](http://akasaa.com).