

# THE BOOK INDUSTRY AND LOCAL INITIATIVES IN HARD TIMES

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## INTRODUCTION

Information has emerged as the most important resource for development in this age. As a result of this, the book industry has become a very important economic sector. The leverage it provides for organisation, documentation and dissemination of information puts it in the forefront of the means for pursuing economic, educational, social and technological progress.

It is therefore imperative that if Nigerians must participate in the global information activities, the development of the book industry must be aggressively pursued for the industry to grow to a level at which it can adequately play its roles in national development today, and in the future.

The history, nature and problems of Nigeria's local book industry have been subjects of numerous publications.<sup>1-15</sup> This paper therefore is not concerned with history, but focuses attention mainly on strategies that could sustain local initiatives in the book industry in Nigeria.

At present, Nigeria is suffering from acute shortage of books of all forms and the condition is worsening at such a rate that if nothing drastic is done the country's development aspirations will die as a result of information starvation. Given the pervasive role of information, there is the possibility of negative compounding of underdevelopment handicaps in future.

## The Economic and Technological Situation

The world economic doldrums have persisted in spite of optimism expressed by international financial institutions and experts as to rapid global economic recovery. Hardest hit in this condition are the oil-exporting developing nations of which Nigeria is one.

The people of these countries which were bouyant with petro-dollar in the 1970s tied their economic life with imports from advanced countries; as a result, sudden change of their economic fortunes have been very shocking, shaking every aspect of life in these places. The economic apron strings are now very difficult to break and the economic conditions are worsening.

For Nigeria, foreign exchange has suddenly become very scarce as the world oil market crashes; combining low output with very low prices. With oil accounting for up to 70% of the country's foreign exchange earnings and considering the

present inflationary trends, devalued Naira, and high cost of imports, one can easily see the present predicament clearly. Added to the low value of income, servicing of loans taken in the oil-boom years demand a high proportion of the foreign exchange earnings.

In real terms the turn-around of the economic fortunes of this country is tremendous. Under such trade difficulties some items of import like books, printing equipment and raw materials for book production face a high danger of being removed from imports or get their allocation cut down drastically because the people in government financial management circles may not consider books things of high value in which the scarce resources of the nation should be invested.

Apart from economic difficulties, Nigeria is plagued by technological underdevelopment manifested in overdependence on foreign technology. Technology being a factor of production *par excellence*, is a limiting factor for industrial production and management of natural resources. The hardware of production, knowledge about production, machines, and processes, are not indigenous to this country. They have to be bought and in most cases, only simple technology can be acquired. This pervades the whole gamut of the economy from steel plant construction to paper making.

The so called transfer of technology is a day dream for the condition of transfer are so strict that they make little difference to the technological development of a country. An UNCTAD survey showed that Nigeria has experienced considerable discomfort in attempt to acquire foreign technology.



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Devices employed by foreign concerns to block efficient technology transfer process include: tied purchases of imported inputs, equipment and spare parts; restriction of exports; requirement of guarantees against charges in taxes; tariffs and exchange rates affecting profits; royalties and remittances; and limitation of competing supplies by restriction of competing imports, preventing competition from local resources and obtaining patents to eliminate competitors.



Other devices to restrict gains from technological transfers employed by foreign suppliers include placing of constraints limiting the dynamic effect of the transfer through demand for excessive expatriate quota and discouragement of the development of legal, technical, research and development capabilities. Apart from all these, large sums of foreign exchange are expended in annual payments for the imported technology. These have made it difficult for technology transfer to operate with any real benefits.<sup>16</sup>

The book industry is not exempted from these restrictions and therefore cannot get accelerated development through foreign technology. Under this international technological relations, Nigeria will have to crawl with under-developed technology for book production for a long time.

## A THRUST FOR CHANGE

Under these economic and technological woes, what strategies can the people of Nigeria employ to continue to produce and circulate enough reading materials to continue educational, social, economic and cultural activities, and go further to search and provide information and techniques that will raise the technological culture to keep pace with global development trends? Pervading changes have to take place.

In any crisis condition of this nature, the political leadership of the nation concerned is the first to be alerted, advised and supported in any meaningful move to bring about a change for the better. Development programmes, good intentioned foreign aid activities and political revolutions in the developing countries have a fundamental thesis. The basic proposition of this thesis is that pre-industrial and relatively stagnant economics could be launched on a course of economic and political transformations without prolonged dependence on concessional aid.

Further, that this process could be set in motion, broadened and accelerated by the efficient use of internal resources and combinations appropriate to the particular case, in an environment of policies and leadership conducive to sustain development. One of the most demanding but rewarding tasks of leadership therefore must be to secure the renewal of economic and social progress where it has stalled and to extend it into the lives of millions of the population largely by-passed by the wheel of development.<sup>17</sup>

Based on these basic beliefs about the way meaningful national transformations must go, we have the view that all sections of the community have their own important bits to contribute. The following strategies if employed and well coordinated will help local initiatives launch the nation into a more comfortable plane in book production and use.

## GOVERNMENT SUSTAINED SUPPORT FOR BOOK PRODUCTION

In developing countries where capital accumulation by individuals is still small; government must provide the industries that produce raw materials, promote and support the extractive-sectors and build basic amenities for industrial activities. The government should regard paper and other information materials as strategic resources and therefore should consider the development of the pulp and paper industries as a top priority project.

The three paper mills at Jebba in Kwara State, Iwopin in Ogun State and Oku-Iboku in Akwa Ibom State will not be able to provide enough paper for the book industry; they are too few. If we must produce the bulk of our books here we must have enough paper, therefore more mills rolling out the materials should be established.

If the government cannot afford all the finance needed, it could mobilize notable business organisations to move into the area. Factories for book making should equally get attention. Small scale engagement in these areas is possible and should be explored. This grade of enterprise must be the basis of self-sufficiency in this area.

Forestry development geared towards the production of softwood should be stepped up, for if factories are erected without consideration for the basic raw materials they are bound to die.

Factories for the manufacture of printing equipment should be established. Though electronic printing is desirable, the printing technology is diverse and we could build a low technology printing factory from mineral raw materials if adequate efforts are directed to it.

If we can afford steel complexes; paper mills, giant refineries, why not printing equipment factories? These establishments which are less demanding ventures than many already completed, if done with all seriousness, will make a considerable impact on the book industry.

The book industry is a low-profit business sector and requires conducive business environment to flourish. Government should therefore provide adequate incentives to printers and publishers to encourage them to stay in business. The following incentives could be provided.

**Credit Preferences:** This may be provided in form of loans at preferential interest rates to printers and publishers to expand their activities or to keep their businesses going. Government may also establish interest ceiling for bank loans and may interfere with the allocation of credit to favour the industry.

**Tax Preferences:** This device could be used to attract new investment to the book industry. Such preferences could be in form of tax holidays for new businesses or complete exemptions for those publishing such important items of information like school books and scholarly works that may not yield much profits. Tax policies have been counted as one of the strategies that was used to raise Singapore to a high level of industrial development.<sup>18</sup> It is now one of the world's biggest book printing centers.

**Control of Manufacture:** Government could evolve a mechanism to co-ordinate the industrial aspects of the book business, by using its powers to spread industries to the various areas of book production. For instance, more facilities could be provided for the establishment of more ink manufacturing firms than for printing firms; by so doing strengthen the industry by forcing a diversification of activities.

**Renting Industrial Plants:** One of the costliest factors of production is the physical plant. Sites and machinery could be acquired and loaned to businessmen who will pay moderately for them. This form of limited government involvement would serve national goals quite smoothly without undue political control.



## Government Protection of the Local Book Business

Government should make policies that would protect the industry from excessive foreign competition. Since Nigeria's *Lingua Franca* is English, local books face undue competition from those published abroad. A policy that restricts importation of books that do not have much to offer technologically, would improve the chances of local publishers growing to serve us better. However, simultaneous publication of editions of quality books with foreign origins should be encouraged to ensure free flow of information.

## CO-OPERATION IN AREAS OF TRAINING, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

There should be improved training for printers, editors and other people in the book industry; better training would increase the capability and potentiality of the industry to respond to the varieties of demands made on it. There should be co-operation in this area. Government, and professional and occupational groups in the book industry should also approach the industrial research institutions to pay attention to the technical and organisational problems facing the industry.

Collaborative research among industries, the institutes and the professionals in the areas of design and testing of alternative sources of raw materials, techniques and programmes will increase the chances of the industry growing to maturity. Without increased efforts in the areas of training, research and development; and co-operation the scenario of poor quality products and inadequate supply of books will remain with us.

Co-ordination of information dissemination on new technology, foreign or local, will be enhanced by co-operation. Establishment and monitoring of standards of production and services would be facilitated if librarians, printers and publishers co-operate. This collaboration if well-developed will increase acceptability of the Nigerian books by the various sections of book users.

To achieve co-operation and co-ordination in the industry, there should be Book Industry Research Association organised by librarians, printers, publishers, bookseller and book research scientists. This organisation can succeed if managed by the Nigerian Book Development Council. With the various professional and occupational groups to be involved having their own associations this, if organised at associations level, will be successful.

## USE OF LOW QUALITY PAPER

There is a consensus amongst development strategists that it is of basic importance that local initiatives to solve local problems may require opting for less "efficient" technologies and materials in the short-run in recognition of the long-term benefits to be gained from learning to be self-reliant.<sup>19</sup>

Paper is a major limiting factor in book production. If the cost of paper is low, books will be cheap to local users and also available for export. This is one of the strategies that has bailed India from book supply problem. We are all witnesses to the quality of the paper of the Indian book, but the Indian text books, journals and magazines enter the Nigerian markets, and the people buy them, because they are cheap, and also contain the subject matter the books claim to contain.

If India, Brazil, USSR, China and some other countries more industrialized than Nigeria, use newsprint and other low quality paper to mass-produce books, there is no reason why we should continue to suffer acute book shortage because we want to use high quality paper. Indian journals coming out in newsprint are acquired, abstracted and indexed all over the world and this has increased the prestige of the Indian scholar.

If there is a policy that makes it compulsory for certain categories of book to come out in low quality paper, the books will be affordable, and the publishers will have a better market. School books and novels are not for the archives, why look for permanent paper for them? Let books of "archival" value use high quality paper, they can afford to cost more.

The adoption of this strategy requires attitude change; librarians, booksellers and users must be ready to accept these books as what are affordable under the present circumstances.

## WRITING PROGRAMMES AND CO-OPERATIVE PUBLISHING

The higher institutions of learning and professional bodies should evolve writing programmes to help produce books for higher education. If there are programmes sponsored by groups of or all higher institutions and involving reputable scholars and professionals, the books produced would have publishers' blessing, and would have reliable market.

Another way publishing of scholarly and higher education books could be sustained, is by co-operative action in publishing. If professional and learned societies can form co-operatives to publish their journals, proceedings, technical reports and specialized academic books, publishing in this country will go a step forward.

Co-operatives could be organised according to academic disciplines and professions. For instance, institutions and societies in social sciences and humanities may form one, and those in physical sciences and engineering, and those in biological, agricultural and medical sciences form one each.

These co-operatives, if organised on sound business and professional principles, will be successful. This will reduce the burden of management of publishing on the societies and academic institutions. In Japan and the United States such co-operation exists.

The Japanese Scientific Societies press and the publishing arrangement existing between United States' National Bureau of Standards, the American Chemical Society and the American Society of Physics.<sup>20</sup> Another successful arrangement exist between American Society of Agronomy, Soil Science Society of America and Crop Science Society of America.

## THE USE OF INFORMATION POLICY

Information policies should be made to extend to "non-mass media" activities. Nigerian ministries of information tend to concentrate on the mass media, and neglect the other less popular information channels. Government policy focus on the book would have an impact on the industry. Such policies should provide for author's welfare, book quality in terms of content and format, and book supply and distribution.

Certain policies of government departments operate to



restrict the growth of the industry. An example is the practice whereby the ministries of education or the school boards, set out a number of books as the recommended books for use in schools. In a country where the bulk of the market is with the schools system, that kind of policy is inimical to the growth of publishing.

Students and teachers should be encouraged to use any book available to them for whatever information they require in their learning and teaching activities. The idea of recommended books does not engender the habit of independent learning. It also dampens and kills publishing initiatives in school-level books since a book which fails to get recommended will not have a market.

This is an important area where public administration will aid the book industry, by creating an atmosphere of equal opportunities for all publishers.



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## POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

For any of the strategies enumerated above to operate, the librarians and others in the book industry must have the power or could stir up a power source, to change the existing unfavourable practices or conditions. The political set-up is the supreme power source for national development, therefore any strategy taken by any group for its survival or for the achievement of any set goals within a polity, must have a strong political appeal for it to be effective. All those who are concerned about the sustenance of the industry must therefore work hard to raise and sustain as a political priority, the availability of books and the development of the industry.

This as a strategy itself, has a public education aspect which involves the presentation of the book industry to the public in

order to bring about desirable level of attention to national book needs, and portraying the book industry as being important to the short-term and long-term interests of the people, and the fundamental objectives of the government.

This is achievable through mass media debates and features that directly touch on key objectives of governance as they relate to the book. Other methods include direct talks with public officers; programmes for senior government officials, politicians, and political office holders; and the injection of politics of book supply into the society to elicit public support.

Another aspect is the establishment of direct contact with politicians, be they civilian or military, and other people in government. Through this, concrete consideration could be given to the desires or proposals expressed about the industry which need government reaction. Government could also be assured that programmes adopted to increase the availability of books through local production will serve national development goals without putting unequitable burdens on the economy.

Through contact again, prompt accounting for resource allocations to the book industry could be rendered giving government financial managers confidence that the industry is not being used to dupe the people.

The need for political involvement by librarians and other information professionals is becoming an object of emphasis. To Nigerian librarians, Azubuike<sup>21</sup> wrote:

"... let it be understood that there is need to get political support for our ideals. If we fail, we will not influence any far-reaching changes that will benefit our communities; our activities will remain largely academic; and finding funds for our libraries, and information activities will remain the uphill task it has been".

Major Owens, the first librarian to enter the United States Congress in his report to librarians had this to say:

"... the survival of libraries with the modern budgets, facilities and materials necessary for them to make the contribution to the age of information that only libraries can make requires that the library profession have power ... The proposition is not that all librarians should run for office or even become members of partisan organisations. The mandate is for a more intensive involvement in the political process".<sup>22</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Nigeria, faced with serious economic and technological constraints for national development, and with dwindling foreign exchange earnings, could still develop and sustain its book industry, through coherent programming, national-level co-ordination, and total political commitment by all sections of the book industry, the government and the people.

Librarians and other professionals concerned with the book industry should co-operate in areas of production, research and standardization. Political attention for the industry will help it grow. If enough faith and will is mobilized, the local book industry would be developed and sustained to support our national development efforts.

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