

PUBLISHING AND BOOK MARKETING IN NIGERIA

Paper read at Annual Lecture Series Organized by the
Kano State Library Board on the 28th August 1987

INTRODUCTION

Publishing plays a significant role in the developing countries. Although it does not contribute much in terms of gross national product, its importance to community outweighs its economic cost and benefit. The provision of books is crucial to the educational programmes, development and maintenance of literacy and the growth of a national culture.

It is also important to the production and distribution of knowledge quite relevant to the countries and to a sense of intellectual community. It has been recognized that publishing is a complex enterprise, being both a business venture and a cultural institution. It has external relationship that has a tremendous cultural impact.

Publishing is considered complex for the fact that it involves a variety of enterprises and issues. It is usually linked with the educational systems of the developing nations which is the major purchaser and user of books. Publishing depends on the institutional infrastructures of education and libraries to provide the basic market for books.

Government policies do have impact, to a significant extent, on the book industry in the developing nations, Nigeria is not an exception to this rule. For the fact that public funds provide much of the basic economic support for publishing, the industry is directly or indirectly influenced by government policies in relation to the libraries, the cost of paper, the purchase of school books, and the emphasis on literacy programmes and non-formal education.

There exists quite a number of issues that affect publishing in all parts of the world regardless of economic realities or literacy rate. The unusual act of international markets, in paper, technology and even tastes affect them substantially, and the inter-relationship between the book industry and educational systems is of special relevance. Publishing in Nigeria is more often than not a fragile enterprise.

ON THE CONCEPT OF PUBLISHING

Publishing (to publish) ordinarily defined as "to make known".¹ Even though the phrase doesn't begin to suggest the dimension of the task, the three words indicate the central job; which is to make an author's work known, that is to bridge the gap between the author and the reader.

But What is a Book? Dictionary definition suggest that it is a number of printed sheets of paper bound together between covers. Such definitions fall short. Most recently the book has certain other technological as well as cultural characteristics. As an artifact, a physical product, book represents investments of the author's time, talents, at times life; and of the publisher's money, time, and talents.

Publishing then is not an art, it's a business and accidentally a profession, in that it makes no formal professional demands for study, internship, admission by examination, or expulsion for any form of violation.

'Business', too, may not be quite sufficient a term to describe an enterprise in which the commodity is the product

of human thought and creativity. Most of the publishing activities are considered as "commercial" while others are recognized as "non commercial".

Some companies seek to "maximize profit" as a primary objective; many feel fortunate to achieve what could be called reasonable profits, and some exist not to make a profit but to fulfill some defined need (i.e. social, scholarly, or religious) on a break-even or subsidized basis.

What is important is that whether they are "in business" or not, if they are to carry out their chosen purposes, all publishers have to be businesslike. Publishing could then be declared to be rife with paradox and rich with contradictions. Many writers about the book industry such as Grannis² consider publishing of books as a business, a profession, a gamble, or all three, and that for many people it is a vocation or calling.



MOHAMMED IBN MOHAMMED
Lecturer, Department of Library Science,
Faculty of Education,
Bayero University.

For our purposes, therefore the basic structure or common procedure that brings all books into existence is to be considered: a sequence of creating, producing, and disseminating them, along with financial management and administration. Similarly, in publishing houses of any size, the functions are those of:

- (1) Planning a programme, commissioning or selecting manuscripts and book projects, evaluating the material and editing it for printing.
- (2) Designing, specifying and overseeing manufacture;
- (3) Marketing in all aspects; and
- (4) Managing and co-ordinating these activities.

PUBLISHING AND BOOK DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Publishing has come of age, and the last decade has seen several significant developments on the Nigerian scene. The

output is increasing dramatically, and although no up-to-date and reliable statistics are available, production is probably increasing by about 40% annually.

New companies are emerging all the time, and there is evidence of a great deal of imaginative entrepreneurial skill, as well as rapid growth of some indigenous firms. Altback and Rathgeber³ are of the view that, Nigeria has the most prolific and best-developed book publishing industry in black Africa.

Zell⁴ is also of the opinion that "in any survey of publishing activities in West Africa, Nigeria must come first and it is the country that probably has the liveliest publishing scene on the whole of Black Africa."

Publishing in Nigeria must be seen in the light of several social and infrastructural elements, a very limited per-capita income, a diversity of languages, a low rate of literacy, an insufficient retail outlets, customs tariffs on most of the essential printing equipment and supplies, balance of payments problems, and other obstacles, some of near impossible dimensions.

But despite the problems facing the Nigerian book industries, there is no doubt that over the past decade, indigenous publishing has become an established reality in this country.

The introduction of "Universal Primary Education" (UPE) came with it a high demand for school books; and in response to this many publishers continued to struggle to cope with the staggering demand for books for the scheme. By the end of 1983 the country had about 20 established Universities, in addition to several Colleges of Education, Polytechnic's and Colleges of Arts, Sciences and Technology.

As at the beginning of 1984, the total enrolment in all of Nigeria's secondary schools alone was estimated at 14 million pupils. Thus posing a great deal of challenge and also an opportunity for both indigenous publishers, as well as the foreign firms.

When people talked about indigenous firms, Onibonoje Press at Ibadan was usually the first to be called. It was established in 1958. It is in fact one of the most enterprising and successful ones to date. The company publishes a wide range of textbooks, it has also launched an 'African Literature Series'.

In 1973, the company took an innovative step by establishing the "Onibonoje Book Club", the first ever in black Africa. Onibonoje Press is not short of competition from other major indigenous firms, such as Fourth Dimension, Ilesanmi Press, Nwamife, Al-Hudahuda etc.

Beside textbooks and other published scholarly works, there exists religious imprints which includes Challenge Publications, Islamic Publications Baraka Press. Another religious publisher is the Dayster Press. This firm is very enterprising and has ventured well beyond conventional religious and theological publishing, and has a lively publishing programme in relation to scholarly monographs.

Large scale scholarly publishing output comes basically from four of the Nigeria's Universities, which includes Ibadan, Ife, Lagos and Ahmadu Bello, A.B.U. Press, though relatively new to the scene, but has already made a mark, for it has built up a substantial list of academic monographs in a wide variety of disciplines.

Not much has come from Ife press in recent years, but it has the credit for having organized and hosted in 1973, a major international conference on publishing and book development in Africa. The proceedings, have now been accepted as a key document in the literature on the book

industries in Africa. The largest scholarly publisher in the whole of Africa is the Ibadan University Press. It was established in 1952.

The 1980 Frankfurt Book Fair marked the beginning of women participation in the publishing industry. The Tana Press, belongs to the distinguished Nigerian Woman novelist Flora Nwapa. Her list consists of several illustrated picture story books for children and collection of her own stories.

A Lagos-based imprint was launched in 1981, and again headed by a woman, Ivie Osahon's Obobe Books which concentrates on children's books. There are yet other imprints that are too many to be mentioned in this short piece.

Despite the fact that, there are many active and efficient indigenous firms in Nigeria, the greatest part of the market is still dominated by the multi-nationals, like Longman, Heinemann's, Oxford (which is now known to be trading as University Press Ltd), Evans, Macmillan (with its subsidiary Northern Nigerian Publishing Company for its Hausa Publications) and Thomas Nelson.

All the companies mentioned have got extensive local publishing programmes basically for the school book markets, in addition to this, they do produce a wide range of scholarly and general interest titles, children's and creative writings by indigenous authors.

These companies also have many other publishing programmes in the major national languages. Macmillan has of recent moved into the field of popular fiction with the launching of their "Pacesetters' series."

Following this overview of the publishing activities in Nigeria, we can now take a critical look at a number of areas and issues, that have been particularly in the forefront, in relation to the role of the multi-nationals.

CYCLE OF DEPENDENCY

Nigeria, like any other developing country, is at a distinct disadvantage in the international publishing system. This cycle begins with the fact that, the technology relating to publishing, book markets, key expertise and many other areas of publishing are centered in the advanced nations. The major languages of written communication are European Languages.

Altback⁵ has referred to this a neo-colonialism. Nigeria is dependent on the industrialized nations in many ways. We are large users of imported books, printing equipment, spare parts, and paper.

The international commerce in books and published materials is an important part of the book trade, this commerce is controlled by the metropolitan nations, and the balance of payments is very much in their favour.

In an intellectual context, this means that most of the universities, publishing houses, research budgets and general intellectual infrastructure is located in the industrialized nations. Their wealth, highly developed educational systems, coupled with higher literacy rates make this situation almost inevitable.

THE ECONOMICS OF PUBLISHING IN NIGERIA

The economics of publishing in Nigeria has received much attention, most of it on either the activities of multinational publishing firms or on the financial difficulties faced by indigenous publishers. These focuses are inter-related for the following elaborated reasons.

Book publishing, like any other enterprise in this country that produce goods for which there exists little internal demand, entails considerable financial risk. This is because the number of potential buyers of books is very small and publishing markets are, consequently, and relatively inelastic.

Lack of appreciable economic growth have had the effect of restricting the real expansion of this market. In such circumstances, there is limited scope or incentive for attaining the economies of scale that might increase book consumption by lowering unit costs.

Despite the intention of all the levels of governments to eradicate illiteracy, the literacy rates remain low in most states - especially in the metropolitan languages usually used in book publishing. The result is that books are very expensive; editions are small, further restricting markets.

Thus, Nigerian publishers are caught in a circular effect. Low literacy and purchasing power and high unit costs necessitate small editions, which in turn necessitate small markets and limited distribution. These factors put together, allows the indigenous publishing houses profit margins as estimated by Altbach to be in the area of 10 percent.⁶

Furthermore, indigenous publishers are reported to experience a high rate of business failure.⁷ There are a good number of factors contributing to this among which is the large initial capital investments of publishers, more especially where they establish their own print shops.

In view of this, the publisher has to wait for about three years to realize a return from his investment and usually, costs of production must be paid in advance because of the inability to make Long-term credit arrangements.

As a result, indigenous publishing firms are frequently under-capitalized thereby increasing the likelihood of financial insolvency. The large initial capital investment allows publishers to distribute their financial risk. This is done by way of contracting different parts of the publishing process; i.e. composition, press work, and binding to other firms.

However, in Nigeria and many third world nations, a production facility of this nature does not exist and the publishers are forced to personally undertake all aspects of the process.

In this regard it is important to note that, our publishing firms are obliged to import paper and other materials from U.S. and Europe. These expenses represent a larger proportion of their operating cost than in the case of foreign firms. This is further complicated by the fact that they must be paid for with scarce resources in hard currency.

Because of the uncertainty of foreign exchange regulations and the exchange rates it is often impossible to control or even realistically predict production costs. It is equally difficult to predict sales income because of limited markets and inadequate distribution channels.

The greatest and costliest error made by most of our indigenous publishers is the tendency to seriously underestimate the expenditure for overhead and promotion in fixing list prices. In a survey of publishers, Datus Smith found that publishers showed an overhead (including advertising) of 10 to 26 percent, depending on the geographical area and size of the edition.

In contrast, U.S. publishers routinely allocate up to 40 percent of sales income for these purposes.⁹ The financial risks of book publishing are also inherent to bookselling, as discussed earlier. There is limited internal demand for books

even the well-educated tend not to be book buyers.

For most people, reading is associated with utilitarian purposes and is not regarded as a leisure activity. Rather ironically, bookselling in Nigeria is a highly competitive business, in spite of the paucity of potential book buyers. For this reason most booksellers prefer to stock popular books, which tend to have faster turnover than more specialized publications.

Most publishers, require books stores to prepay for their orders. This sort of arrangement has a dual effect. On the one hand, it ties up book sellers' available capital and consequently limits their inventory; on the other hand, it encourages them to deal only in best selling books that are assured a rapid turnover.

Books are often poorly displayed and soon become dirty as a result of excessive customer handling. Even with the relatively low cost of books compared to prices in advanced cities, prices are still high in proportion to disposable income. All this has the effect of further constricting the demand for books and further discouraging the acquisition of the reading habit among the literate populace.

For most part, publishers rely on booksellers to do their promotional task. Datus Smith notes that publishers invest very little money in publicizing their books.¹⁰

To some extent this can be justified because there are quite a few forums for publicizing books. There exist, a few professional journals, books review columns in newspapers or magazines or T.V. and radio talk shows that the 'metropolitan publishers' are able to utilize in promoting their publications.

The development of foreign markets for their publications is rather difficult. Our publishers usually lack the facilities to help them effectively publicize their books in the foreign market. In addition to this, the subject matter of their books is often too specialized to be of interest beyond a local or national market.

Our university presses do produce books that would be of interest in the foreign market but unfortunately their limited promotional and distribution capabilities often prevent them from fully exploiting these markets.

Rathgeber¹¹ found in a study of the Nigerian University Presses that up to 20 percent of their sales were in the foreign market. Our discounting practices (35%) does not make room for high profits for either booksellers or wholesalers, thus neither have much incentive to promote sales of books.

Libraries are the major purchasers of books. They are, as Barker and Escarpit note, "a vital link in the chain of distribution ... transferring a book from a publisher's warehouse to the ultimate reader".¹² According to Abul Hassan, "almost three quarters of the total book trade in developing nations is accounted for by institutional purchases"¹³

Although library purchases are an important part of the book trade, funding is often inadequate because book acquisition has low priority in educational budgets. For this reason, appreciable purchases can not be achieved through the library.

In view of the above factors, book distribution remains one of the main bottle necks in the development of viable publishing industries in Nigeria. To overcome some of the difficulties, it merely suggested that booksellers should co-operate in promotion and advertising, that publishers should adopt uniform discount policies and the pricing policy.

Indeed, the distribution dilemma is perhaps the most

serious of all the problems facing Nigerian publishing. if he is unable to effectively present his books to a book
Regardless of the professional efficiency of a book publisher, buying public, he will soon go out of business.

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