

NIGERIAN BOOK FOUNDATION

A Non-Governmental, Non-Profit Book Development Organization
Reg. RC 13,447 Affiliate Member, African Publishers' Network
(APNET)

1. Mission

With an irrevocable commitment to indigenous book development, anchored in the conviction that books build the nation, the NBF has as its mission the development of a vibrant indigenous book industry in Nigeria. The Foundation adopts a holistic approach to national book development in order to ensure that all components of the book chain-the author, the publisher, the printer, the bookseller, the librarian, the producer/importer of raw materials for book production, et cetera-function maximally, and that the State provides a conducive environment for the book to flourish in.

2. Birth of the Foundation

The NBF came into existence in 1991, propelled by the urge to save the Book from going into extinction in Nigeria. The founding fathers had observed the crisis facing the book industry in Nigeria and the often counter-productive fire-brigade methods adopted as remedial measures. They had come to the conclusion that the crisis stood little chance of resolution without the emergence of a non-governmental, non-profit organization committed to indigenous book development that would bring together key practitioners of the industry and adopt a holistic approach to indigenous book development.

Imbued with abundant zeal, the NBF achieved paper existence in 1991. The year 1992 saw the unqualified failure of the Foundation's attempt to launch a ₦100 million endowment fund. The Board of Directors of the Foundation ceased to exist after four futile attempts to form a quorum of three members!

The tide turned in 1993 when the President of the Foundation received a grant as seed money. Immediate and judicious investment of the entire amount enabled the Foundation to commence skeletal activities in 1993 and full operation in 1994. A resurgence of interest in the Foundation followed when it seemed set to succeed.

3. Establishment of Administrative Structure

With no local or foreign models to copy, the NBF had no option other than to fashion its own administrative structure in order to enable it to function with optimum results.

A Board of Trustees was constituted in place of the defunct Board of Directors, to exercise general superintendence over the policies, finances, and physical assets of the Foundation, to raise additional funds, to ensure proper keeping of books of accounts, to fill any vacancy in the Office of the President, and to authorize the use of the Common Seal of the Foundation.

The initial eleven-member Board, appointed as individuals rather than as representatives of associations, reflected Nigerian federal character and ethnic and religious plurality. It made available to the NBF men and women who distinguished themselves in authorship, bookselling, publishing, printing, law, public service or in business/banking/industrial management. I have the privilege of serving as President of the Foundation and Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

The second key organ of the Foundation is the National Advisory Council which, as the professional arm of the Foundation, identifies and prioritizes projects and activities in which intervention by the Foundation would be desirable and in the interest of indigenous book development. The Council is also required to offer professional advice to the Foundation on the Foundation's annual programme and activities, as well as on other matters referred to it, in order to ensure relevance, timeliness, and effectiveness.

The membership of the Council earns the Foundation the appellation of apex- or umbrella organization for book development in Nigeria. The Presidents of the five major professional associations in the book industry--Authors, Publishers, Printers, Booksellers, and Librarians--are members of the Council *ex officio*. So are the National Librarian and the President of the Foundation. The two Honourable Ministers whose Ministries relate closely to book development--Culture and Education--nominate a representative each to the Council. Four organizations relevant to book development, as may be determined by the Board of Trustees, also nominate a representative each to the Council, for a two-year term. The organizations are subject to review. The current members are the Raw Materials Research & Development Council, the Nigerian Educational Research & Development Council, the Academic Staff Union of Universities, and the Nigeria Union of Teachers. Three persons are appointed to the Council on merit for a two-year term.

As soon as we can resolve the problem of funding, the National Advisory Council will meet frequently, to enable it to respond promptly to major

developments affecting national book development, and to propose lines of action for the Foundation and the entire book community.

4. Major Activities and Projects

(a) Nigeria International Book Fair

The Annual National Book Week, inaugurated by the NBF in April 1994 and usually held in the second half of April, metamorphosed into the Nigeria International Book Fair (NIBF) in May 2002. The NBF is a founding Trustee of the Nigerian Book Fair Trust (NBFT), which organizes the fair, and participates in its activities.

(b) Book Data Centre

The NBF Book Data Centre was established in 1995 to serve as a data bank on book related matters. The maiden edition of the Directory of Nigerian Book Development, edited by Chukwuemeka Ike and published in 1998, was the first publication of directories of Nigerian published Authors, Publishing Houses, Book Printers, Book Selling and Distribution Organizations, and Libraries. Inadequate funding has hampered the work of the centre.

(c) Promotion of Reading

Funded by Heinrich Boll Foundation of Germany, the NBF operated pilot reading promotion projects (1996 and 1997) and a three-year (1998-2000) programme to promote the reading habit among Nigerians. Operating through three Reading Promotion Units in Ibadan (West), Jos (North), and Ndikelionwu (East), the NBF organized three-day holistic reading promotion events in urban and rural centres in eighteen States of the Federation between 1998 and 2000.

The NBF handed over the mobile library set up at Ibadan as part of the programme to the Oyo State Library Board in 2002 at the request of the Board, which transformed it into Bodija Community Library, Bodija, Ibadan.

The NBF has the capacity to mount new reading promotion programmes as funds become available.

(d) Book Aid Nigeria (BAN) Project

As a follow-up to the NBF/Heinrich Boll Foundation Reading Promotion Programme, which expired in December 2000, the NBF launched a Book Aid Nigeria (BAN) Project aimed at receiving free donations of a wide range of new

books for distribution to public, institutional, community, and other libraries, organizations, and (in approved cases) individuals, to facilitate access to books. The first container of imported books for the project came from International Book Bank, Inc., Baltimore, U.S.A. Three Nigerian publishers-Macmillan, Longman Nigeria, and University Press Plc-also donated books.

A three-year project with the Sabre Foundation, Massachusetts, USA, will enable the NBF to receive and distribute two consignments of books from the USA annually.

A grant from the Education Tax Fund (ETF) has facilitated the acquisition of an NBF warehouse for the project.

The NBF welcomes more book donations and funds for the purchase of books to meet the ever growing demand for books for formal education and informal lifelong education.

(e) Sourcing and Dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge

Through organized interviews with identified experts (literate and illiterate) in indigenous knowledge, the NBF has sourced hitherto unpublished information, which it transformed into reading materials for the reading public. Seven Igbo language booklets have been produced.

Inadequate funds have held back quality publication of the booklets as well as expansion of the scope of the Project to other Nigerian language groups.

(f) National Book Distribution Organization

The NBF is playing a catalytic role in attempting to establish a National Book Distribution Organization to meet the recognized, top-priority need of the Nigerian book sector.

(g) Publications

With funds from Heinrich Boll Foundation of Germany, the NBF published the following books in its first decade of existence:

Making Books Readily Available and Affordable (edited by Ezenwa-Ohaeto), 1995;

Creating a Conducive Environment for Book Publishing (edited by Chukwuemeka Ike), 1996;

Meeting the Needs of the Rural Family (edited by Chukwuemeka Ike), 1997;

Directory of Nigerian Book Development (edited by Chukwuemeka Ike), 1998;
The Book in 21st-Century Nigeria (edited by Chukwuemeka Ike), 2000;
Creating and Sustaining a Reading Culture (edited by Chukwuemeka Ike), 2000.

Academy Press Plc, Lagos, subsidized the cost of printing the Directory. Funding is required to update the Directory and publish new books.

(h) Resource Centre

With books kindly donated by Book Aid International and furniture provided by the Heinrich Boll Foundation, the Foundation has equipped a modest Resource Centre for the staff of the Foundation and for outsiders. It is envisaged that, subject to the availability of funds, the Centre will be upgraded to a Research and Training Centre.

5. Funding

Inadequate funding has been the Foundation's most serious handicap since its inception. The annual income that the Foundation derives from its investment of the entire initial seed money received from the Federal Government is barely adequate to keep the Foundation alive with minimal staff, making it impossible to engage in meaningful activities/ projects without external funding. ALL the activities listed in Section 4, above, were funded by external donor agencies. Other worthy activities/projects conceptualized by the Foundation could not take off because of lack of funds and donor support.

6. Conclusion

Establishing a non-governmental, non-profit book development organization has not been easy in a ravaged economy, an environment in which the importance of the book is hardly appreciated, and one in which well-considered recommendations on book development do not receive serious attention from the government.

The NBF, now in its eleventh year of operation, owes a debt of gratitude to the following non-Nigerian organizations for what the Foundation has been able to achieve: the Heinrich Boll Foundation of Germany, the British Council, International Book Bank, Inc. (and the TEW Foundation), Book Aid International, the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), Sabre Foundation (and MacArthur Foundation), the African Publishers' Network,

the Bellagio Group. Without the seed money from the Federal Government of Nigeria, we could not have taken off at all. Thanks to the Education Tax Fund (ETF), set up by the Federal Government, we have recently constructed a modest building of our own, saving us from paying annual rent.