

BOOK PUBLISHING IN NIGERIA

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1. Introduction

On the face of it, Nigeria has a vibrant book publishing industry, with perhaps the largest number of publishing houses in any African country. At one stage, prospects for the book industry in Nigeria appeared rosy. The Federal Government established paper and pulp making industries, and an elaborate plan was drawn up for achieving self-sufficiency in the production of books for the nursery/primary, secondary, and tertiary tiers of education. Unfortunately all that, or most of it, collapsed following the nation's economic downturn of the 1980s. Book famine descended on Nigeria.

One indication of the unhealthy state of the book sector in Nigeria since 1981 has been the number of task forces, study groups, conferences and committees set up to make recommendations on various facets of book production and distribution, including ways to equip the book sector and make it meet the needs of the educational system. Let me list some of these task forces, etc: 1983 Nigerian National Congress on Books, 1984 Task Force on the Scarcity of Books and Stationery, 1987 Panel on a Book Policy for Nigeria, 1989 ODA/ World Bank Books Sector Study, 1990 National Council on Education Committee Report on the Rationalization of Textbooks in Primary and Secondary Schools, 1990 British Council-sponsored Conference to debate the Books Sector Study, August-September 1990 Ministerial Committee on Provision of Books to Schools and Colleges, August 1993 Nigerian Educational Research & Development Council Review Workshop on Preferred Recommendations for solving the problems of the Nigerian Book Industry and Formation of Implementation Strategies, April 1994 National Conference on Book Development organized by the Nigerian Book Foundation on the theme "Making Books Readily and Affordable," et cetera. The famine persists, notwithstanding these efforts.

2. Indigenous Publishing

The 1978 Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree provided that at least 60% equity participation in book publishing must be by Nigerian nationals. With effect from that year, book publishing in Nigeria became indigenous, making it unnecessary to distinguish any longer between indigenous and foreign publishing in the country. The foreign publishing companies (notably Oxford University Press, Longman, Macmillan, Heinemann, Evans) which dominated (and still dominate) the

publishing scene in Nigeria, reduced foreign equity participation to 40% or less, and some took new names (e.g. University Press Plc in place of Oxford University Press).

Book publishing in Nigeria is essentially a private sector affair. Because of the absence of pre-determined qualifications or conditions to be met, book publishing is one of the most unregulated industries in Nigeria. All you require to become a publisher is to erect a signpost outside your office or residence. Expectedly, the book industry in Nigeria is grossly undercapitalized. The Federal Military Government made an unsuccessful attempt in the 1970s to set up a government publishing company. Some government agencies, State Ministries of Education, and professional associations have played an active part in developing primary and secondary school textbooks, but they have generally done so in collaboration with book publishing houses. There were occasions when the government assumed the authority to appoint new “publishers” to mass produce for educational purposes books not previously published by such publishers. Apart from the fact that books “published” under this arrangement tended to come out with higher unit costs than the unit costs of the same books when produced by their original publishers, there is also the problem that the method contravenes the Provisions of the Nigerian Copyright Law.

3. Associations in the Book Sector

The Nigerian Publishers' Association (NPA)-the main professional body for Nigerian book publishers-was established in 1965. Membership is open to publishers registered in Nigeria as limited liability companies that have published a stipulated number of books. Membership in the association (currently 103) is not mandatory: there are probably more publishers outside than within the Association.

Alongside the NPA, Nigeria has the following major professional associations in the book sector: Association of Nigerian Authors, Nigerian Booksellers Association, Association of Nigerian Printers, and Nigerian Library Association. Authors have additional writers' associations including the Academic & Non-Fiction Authors Association of Nigeria, the Association of West African Young Writers), and Women Writers in Nigeria.

4. Copyright Protection

Nigeria has a well-articulated copyright law, administered by the Nigerian Copyright Commission. Copyright enforcement leaves room for improvement, resulting in high incidence of book piracy. Sporadic efforts are made to fight the

pirates by the Nigerian Publishers Association and by the Nigerian Copyright Commission.

5. National Book Policy

Primarily through lack of will on the part of the Federal Government, Nigeria has neither a National Book Policy nor a National Book Development Organization or Commission, explaining why indigenous book development has been unplanned and uncoordinated. During the year 2000, the Federal Ministry of Education announced the establishment of a National Book Council and actually convened the inaugural meeting of the Council in Abuja on 15 September 2000. The Council has not functioned since. The Nigerian Book Foundation, which began to operate in 1993 as a non-profit, non-governmental organization, has tried to fill the gap as a national book development organization, bringing together the key stakeholders in the book sector to adopt a holistic approach to national book development. Drastically reduced sources of funding since early 2001 have, however, hampered its effectiveness.

6. Book Distribution

A handful of publishers have warehouses in different parts of the country, with their own fleet of distribution vehicles. Most publishers have no capacity to promote and sell their own books nationwide, drastically reducing the sale prospects of their books. Efforts by the Nigerian Book Foundation to bring about the emergence of a national book distribution operation have not yet materialized.

7. National Book Supply Situation

An estimated 90% of the annual output of books published in Nigeria is in the area of textbooks for primary and secondary education. This results in lopsidedness in favour of primary and secondary school texts and against tertiary education (including polytechnics, colleges of education, and universities). It also militates against the availability of professional books, reference books and general books (including creative writing, general interest books, and books for lifelong education). Even in the primary and secondary school texts, it has not been easy to produce them in the vast quantities required. Publishing in Nigerian languages is also severely limited. Several intervention attempts have been made by the government to provide books for the school system, including the ₦70 million 1989 Federal Government Book Aid Programme to Schools, the 1991 World Bank US \$120 million credit facility for the provision of suitable and appropriate foundation for the implementation of a 6-year Primary Education

Improvement Project, and the multi-million U.S. dollar World Bank credit facility to enable the outright importation of foreign textbooks and journals for federal universities. The Education Tax Fund currently provides funds to enable the various educational institutions to buy library books. Government intervention schemes did not cater to the general reader, or, put differently, to the millions of Nigerians outside the formal education sector.

Many intervention efforts have also been made by non-governmental organizations and individuals. The Book Aid International/ British Council effort ranks among the biggest and best known. A newspaper publication quoted a British Council representative as estimating the cost of books shipped into Nigeria through that source at between one and two million pounds sterling. In recent years the United States of America has emerged as a major source of book donations for Nigeria, from book aid agencies, church organizations, groups of Nigerians, and individual donors. The Sabre Foundation, Inc., U.S.A., has come into the picture in a big way, tackling head on a major stumbling block to foreign-sponsored book donation projects-namely the inability of the local partner to pay the freight costs.

Foreign book donations help to fill yawning gaps in the publishing output of Nigerian publishing houses and will continue to do so for quite a while. The ultimate goal must, however, be for Nigerian publishers to publish the bulk of the books required for formal and non-formal education in the country, particularly in areas in which suitable foreign books are unlikely to be available.

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