

Publishing in Africa: where are we now?

Part Two: Accomplishments and failures



Hans M. Zell

Hans M. Zell has been author, editor, and publisher on African topics for almost four decades. He has published several reference resources on Africa, African literature, and African studies, including *The African Studies Companion: A Guide to Information Sources*, currently in its 4th edition. He is the founding editor of the quarterly *African Book Publishing Record*, which he edited from 1975 to 2002. His most recent publication is *Publishing, Books & Reading in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Critical Bibliography*, published in both print and online formats — and which is given an extensive review in this issue, in the preceding article, “A magnum opus on African publishing”, by Kelvin Smith.

Email: hanszell@hanszell.co.uk

Website: www.hanszell.co.uk

It is difficult to articulate the issues relating to African publishing and the book sector – the successes and the failures, and the prospects for the future – and one must be careful to avoid generalizations. Each country is different; some countries have a relatively sophisticated publishing infrastructure, while in others indigenous publishing has barely taken off the ground. There is in any event not the space to write about the numerous topics as they relate to publishing in Africa, and I will concentrate here on reviewing the activities and achievements of a number of African book trade and book promotional organizations (also drawing attention to a number of notable publications and resources), thereafter take a look at some particular issues, and examine the progress that has been achieved in some areas affecting the book sector.

Donors and African libraries

It has already been stated in Part One of this article, that the climate of African book development has shifted and support for book related programmes in Africa is becoming more and more difficult, although there continues to be significant donor aid for African public libraries, for example generous support by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. This has included support for collection development, automation, staff training, public Internet access, access to global databases and networks, e-resources, digitization projects, model libraries, and community services.

Other donors and foundations assisting the library and information sector include Canadian CODE, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Sabre Foundation, UNESCO, NGOs such as the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP, at www.inasp.info), a variety of French government support schemes and initiatives, in addition to the major book charities and book donation programmes such as Book Aid

* This is the second instalment of a two-part article. “Publishing in Africa: where are we now? Part One: Some spurious claims debunked” appeared in LOGOS 19/4 (2008): 187–195.

International (www.bookaid.org). Another charity, BookPower (www.bookpower.org) provides relevant textbooks to university and vocational students in low-income countries in English-speaking Africa and elsewhere at prices which students and their institutions' libraries can afford, by subsidizing publishers' production costs in these countries.

Donors and African book trade organizations

Much of the donor support for the book industry sector has gone to African book trade organizations and it would be pertinent to ask what has been achieved. What is there to show for all the effort and donor money poured into African publishing?

African Publishers Network (APNET)

In the case of the African Publishers Network (APNET at www.apnet.org) perhaps not a great deal, although it did achieve a measure of success in some areas, for example in training for the book professions. Founded in 1992, it is a pan-African organization which brings together national publishers associations and publishing communities to strengthen indigenous publishing throughout Africa. APNET is governed by a General Council which elects its board members (the executive arm of the Council), and approves all questions of policy. The Council is supported by an administrative Secretariat and an Executive Director.

The Council has met every two years, with all its members represented, i.e. the representatives of the national publishers associations, founder members, affiliates and associates, to guide or approve board decisions, policies, and amendments to the constitution. While this has provided a democratic structure for the organization it has also been hugely expensive to convene these biennial General Council meetings, which, it could be argued, were never really very productive in terms of tangible outcomes.

APNET has been very generously supported by several donor organizations, from its inception until the end of 2005. However, once the donor funding had run out, was not renewed, or was significantly reduced, it slithered into a serious financial crisis and now seems to be in terminal decline. APNET relocated from Harare to Abidjan in the Côte d'Ivoire a few years ago, but were then

unfortunate to be caught up in the political crisis in that country; they subsequently relocated again, to Accra in Ghana, but currently have just one member of staff, its Executive Director, and work from temporary premises.

I think it is fair to say that APNET has suffered from poor leadership in recent years, there has been wasteful use of donor funds, and lack of accountability. This was recognized by several of the original founder members of the organization, and a new APNET board was appointed in 2006. A new three-year strategic plan was launched, which promised a bold start for "a new APNET", to get it on the road again, with a different work ethic, a higher degree of professionalism, much improved accountability, and offering services APNET members and others "will want to pay for". A Task Team, responsible for formulating a different structure for the organization, submitted a new strategy report in 2006. A new programme of activities set out a series of proposed revenue streams. These were richly embellished, presumably to please the donors, but were quite unrealistic for the most part, for example expectations of very significant subscription income from APNET's *African Publishing Review* (APR) and paid advertising in that journal.

In the event nothing at all materialized in the new three-year plan and as far as I am aware no further donor funding has been pledged to date. APNET's *African Publishing Review*, still billed as "Latest publications" on the website, has been dormant for the last three years at least. Although APNET no longer have core donor support, through some grant or another they continue to spend money to attend major international book fairs, for example the Cape Town and Frankfurt book fairs in 2008. Yet the feedback that has been provided about business opportunities arising from attendance at these book fairs, and dozens of earlier ones, has been rather feeble, hardly amounting to the kind of marketing intelligence APNET members might be entitled to expect.

Meantime there continue to be periodic press releases issued by the new board, still talking about generating more income from membership fees and "various projects", without, apparently, any hard-nosed examination, or market research, whether the expectations of revenue streams are in fact realistic.

Back in 1996 this writer donated his archives of books, articles, reports, complete runs of African book trade journals, ephemera, and more, to APNET, covering 35 years of publishing and book development in Africa, from 1960-1995, as well as providing them with software containing the database of all records. However, APNET's poor stewardship of the collection has been a source of great disappointment to me. Its so called Research and Documentation Centre never really took off in earnest, and failed to offer the services it was intended to provide. The collection was never properly catalogued, there was no systematic collection development in any shape or form, and APNET has failed to build up a corpus of reliable data on the African book sector.

The bottom line is that, sadly, APNET never took research and documentation seriously. The collection, or what's left of it, is now languishing in storage in Accra, although attempts are currently being made, through an initiative by Roger Stringer in Zimbabwe, to find a new home for the collection (possibly at the University of Botswana Library) and to digitize some of the material held with the support of the British Library's Endangered Archives project.

While APNET seems to have failed, it could also be argued that donors' expectations for APNET to become fully self-sustainable have always been unrealistic. It would be reasonable to expect the organization to contribute a certain amount of self-generated income, above all from annual membership dues payable by national African book trade associations, but APNET, unlike the African Books Collective (see below), is not a trading organization, and it has few publications or resources that could be expected to create a significant amount of income on a regular basis. And its other activities, such as training and consultancy, were never likely to create revenue streams of some magnitude.

Whether APNET can still be rescued I don't know, but it seems to me the failure of APNET, above all, has been a failure of collective will. For example in 2005 only a handful of APNET member organizations had reportedly paid up their membership dues. APNET members representing the different African book trade associations were happy to accept free travel to and exhibit space at many book fairs, free airline tickets to attend meet-

ings and conferences, as well as enjoy other benefits provided by APNET, but when donor funding run out to support such activities and APNET got into financial trouble, these same representatives seem to have been quick to abandon the sinking ship.

National African book trade associations

These are still weak, and would appear to be unable to achieve sustainability without continuing donor support on various fronts. As in APNET, there seems to be a lack of serious commitment among members of national book trade associations; for example, the Nigerian Publishers Association reportedly has a membership of over 120, but less than 30 of these have actually paid up their membership dues.

Many African book trade organizations would also appear to be reluctant to make their activities widely known and are poor communicators for the most part; e-mail communications addressed to them requesting up-to-date information, details about publications, book promotional activities, or verification of contact personnel, frequently fail to elicit a response.

African Books Collective Ltd.

Apart from APNET, the other major African book trade organization, albeit based outside Africa, is the African Books Collective (ABC) (www.africanbookscollective.com). Founded in 1985, and owned and governed by African publishers, it seeks to strengthen indigenous African publishing through collective action. It started trading in 1989 and has, over time, made a very significant contribution to disseminating African scholarship, African literary output, as well as promoting African-published general and children's books. Its extensive sales and marketing activities have generated substantial income, in hard currency, for the many publishers it distributes.

Like APNET, ABC has enjoyed generous donor support for many years, but was forced to reconfigure its business model following reductions in funding at the end of a five year donor-funded strategic plan in 2006. While currently still supported by a terminal grant from Dutch HIVOS, operations have been dramatically downsized, with staff now working from their homes, full-time or part time, and a key component in its restructuring is that almost the entire list of over 1,000 titles distributed by ABC have now

been digitized and are available on a print-on-demand (POD) basis, and through POD wholesale channels. Inventory still held in physical stock, or titles unsuitable for digitization (such as colour illustrated art and cultural books) are available through Gardners, the major wholesale vendor. In North America ABC titles are distributed by Michigan State University Press. Two major benefits of digitization and the new POD methodology is that (i) all books that ABC distributes are now available for immediately supply, and (ii) production quality of many titles is now significantly improved. Publishers only pay for the printing of the titles for which ABC receives a customer order, and printing costs are then deducted from sales remittances. From the point of view of the publishers one huge advantage is the fact no physical stock needs to be shipped and there are no freight costs, all they need to provide are electronic files for their titles for subsequent POD production.

Another change in policy is that ABC is now focussing on *titles* which it thinks it can sell, rather than distributing a publisher's entire list, and therefore requires exclusive marketing and distribution rights for specific titles only rather than complete lists. Other than that, ABC says its ethos and aims remain unchanged, that it continues to be not-profit making on its own behalf and only seeks to cover its costs, while aiming to increase visibility and income in hard currency for its participating publishers in Africa, although the percentage level of the net returns to African publishers has had to be reduced in order to adapt itself to a new business model, changing markets, and methodologies. However, while one must applaud ABC for its tenacity and its determination to stay afloat, the new business model involves a chain of partners for every sales transaction that includes the African publisher, ABC, its US distributor, wholesalers, and library suppliers. Making provision for a reasonably generous net return for participating African publishers, covering ABC's overheads and marketing costs, and allowing for a fairly substantial discount to a US distributor as well as further discounts to wholesalers and library suppliers, one suspects that the margins must be getting very slim indeed. Only the future can tell whether, without donor support of any kind, using a business model that relies largely on POD and operates primarily through wholesalers, is sustainable and

at the same time provides a sufficiently attractive net return for the African publishers whose books are distributed by ABC (quite apart from the issue of author royalties due on the net proceeds). Clearly much will depend on how significant a volume of sales can be generated using this new business model, and what sort of income targets will be required to make it viable.

Other book promotional bodies

A regional African book trade organization, the East African Book Development Association (EABDA www.eabda.com), a forum for co-ordination of book sector activities in East Africa, seems to have fared rather better than APNET, possibly because it is less encumbered by a complex constitution and a highly bureaucratic structure as that of APNET. It has done some very good work, and activities have included advocacy and networking, organizing annual book week festivals in the East African region, and hosting of seminars and skills transfer workshops. Another of its projects, EABDA's Children's Reading Tent Project, provides an environment where children can freely interact with books and participate in reading and writing activities; it aims to encourage a love for reading among children by adopting leisurely approaches such as storytelling, music and dance, reading and writing competitions. EABDA is currently supported by Swedish Sida, and whether it will be able to continue its activities once donor funding ceases, or is reduced, remains to be seen. It is really up to the book professions in East Africa to ensure it will survive once donor funding comes to an end.

UNESCO and other organizations have repeatedly stressed over the years that in order to ensure that book development is integrated in overall national development planning, the establishment of national book development councils is a vital component to guide national book policies; to serve as an intermediary between the book professions and the government, to provide coordination between the different players in the book sector, formulate standards for the book industry, conduct research, and systematically collect and disseminate information, data, and statistics. National book development councils now exist in several African countries but only a few are

currently active, primarily because their funding is based either on government support, or dependent on continuing financial aid from donors.

An exception is Senegal – one of the few African governments which seems to have a more enlightened attitude to supporting the book and reading sector – where a Conseil Supérieur du Livre, and a Direction du Livre et de la Lecture under the Ministry of Culture (www.culture.gouv.sn/article.php?id_article=19) was recently established. It is responsible for driving the country's national book policy, providing direction and coordination for all segments of the book sector. It has assisted collection development in public libraries, hosts seminars and workshops for the book professions, supports a variety of reading schemes, and organizes the biennial Dakar International Book Fair. Among its other activities are the publication of a series of useful online directories of publishers, booksellers, and libraries in the country, each with full address and contact details. Amid the generally dismal picture of government assistance for the book industries, it is an encouraging sign that the Senegalese government is providing positive support for the “book chain” and the promotion of a reading culture in the country.

Some other book promotional organizations, not formally linked with the government of their countries, have also achieved a good measure of success and visibility, and a number of them have published a range of valuable reference resources. For example, the Nigerian Book Foundation (NBF), has done excellent work over the years, although not much has been heard of them lately. Its *Directory of Nigerian Book Development* published in 1998 was a remarkable and pioneering publication, and probably was the first reference work published anywhere in Africa that aimed to provide a wide range of information about the entire book community in a single country, published in a single source. The project formed part of the NBF's mission to establish a comprehensive database on all aspects of book development in Nigeria, and the directory brought together a massive amount of information, although unfortunately no new editions have appeared to date.

In South Africa, some of the innovative projects of the Centre of the Book (which is part of the National Library of South Africa, www.nlsa.ac.za/NLSA/centreforthebook) have in-

cluded a Community Publishing Project, which provides funding and technical support for small publishers, individual writers, and writers' groups in South Africa and helps them to develop publishing skills. It has published a number of valuable resources, including *A Rough Guide to Small Scale and Self-Publishing* and a *South African Small Publishers' Catalogue*. The latter is a publishers' directory with a difference, providing a showcase of the diversity, vitality, and enterprise of small-scale publishing in South Africa today, and at the same time offering a forum for lively, and sometimes quirky and controversial debate about small scale publishing.

South Africa has been well served by its Print Industries Cluster Council (PICC, www.picc.org.za, now about to be integrated with the South African Book Development Council), who have published a wide range of industry profile studies that monitor changes in the South African “book value chain” and its impact on the country's national book policy. Other publications have included a retail industry survey, a study investigating the factors that influence the cost of books in South Africa, as well as a pioneering national survey of the reading and reading behaviour of adult South Africans.

Mention must also be made of a marvellous reference resource recently published by the Publishers' Association of South Africa (www.publishsa.co.za), entitled *Writings in Nine Tongues. A Catalogue of Literature and Readers in Nine African Languages for South Africa*. Published in both print and electronic formats and produced in collaboration with the National Library of South Africa, it is a comprehensive and very attractively produced catalogue that showcases over 4,000 titles in nine African languages.

Some other organizations, outside the continent, that have actively supported the book sector in Africa, are the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), through the activities of its Working Group on Books and Learning Materials (www.adeanet.org/adeaPortal/publications/en_pubs_wgblm.jsp), the Southern African Book Development Education Trust (SABDET, at www.sabdet.com), and the Bellagio Publishing Network Secretariat (www.bellagiopublishingnetwork.com) They have all done good work, and

have published a wide range of useful studies, resources, and online documents. While both the Bellagio Secretariat and SABDET have now been wound up, their Web sites are still up, and which means that access to a rich *Bellagio Newsletter* archive, as well as a series of valuable online documents from SABDET workshops and conferences, are still accessible, for the time being at least.

The World Bank

The World Bank continues to be a major player in African publishing, and in a welcome shift of its previous policies, it has encouraged private sector publishing over the last two decades for primary and secondary school books. The Bank's practice to place textbook money in schools and directing schools to procure textbooks through local bookshops – as opposed to some state monopoly distributor, as has been the case in the past – has also significantly benefited the retail book trade.

While the changes in World Bank policies were generally welcomed by indigenous African publishers, some concern has been expressed that the Bank's influence in the school textbooks area is now too dominant, and that African governments and their publishing industries are pushed off the driving seat. Veteran Kenyan publisher Henry Chakava says "World Bank consultants have tended to prescribe the same medicine for every publishing ailment without full understanding of the realities on the ground." At the same time there has also been some criticism that the Bank has driven up book prices by insisting on what publishers perceive to be unrealistic production specifications, thus compelling publishers to print in Asia and the Far East, at the expense of local printers. However, on the positive side, it has been recognized that the technical specifications policy has improved the physical appearance of African textbooks, although the trickle down effect of this funding on the local printing industry seems to have been lost.

In 1997, the Office of the Publisher of the World Bank launched its African Publishing Initiative (API, <http://go.worldbank.org/MPLH6G3200>) designed to expand local publishing capacity of sub-Saharan publishers and strengthen distribution networks. Activities to date have included a staff

exchange and Internship prize programme, regional seminars, the hosting of a number of workshops devoted to acquiring good business practices, as well as the development of distance learning tools for the book sector. The pilot of these learning tools was *Editing Educational Materials. A Course for Editors in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Developed in association with the Commonwealth of Learning (www.col.org), this is a very useful resource for all those keen to acquire editorial skills. Further such self-learning programmes are promised, each consisting of a CD with examples, exercises, videos, modules for face-to-face training, together with an accompanying manual for self study.

The World Bank, through its African Publishing Initiative, has also been a strong proponent of print-on-demand (POD). A few years ago it announced an ambitious pilot project that called for the establishment of a POD centre in one major city in each of six sub-Saharan countries. The Bank planned to offer two kinds of support: an investment in equipment, and the commitment to provide electronic files on subjects of interest to the local community. However, these plans seem to have been shelved for the time being.

* * *

Digital media and African publishing

Although a large number of African publishers now have a Web presence and make frequent use of e-mail, it appears that for most the Internet's potential has yet to be fully exploited. This is in part attributable to communications infrastructure problems, slow connection speeds, and the still very high cost for accessing the Internet. There are other factors as well. One is that, while many librarians, as well as journal editors, have received training in how to use the Internet to serve their needs, there has been little comparable training offered to those who work in book publishing. As a result, for a good proportion of African book professionals their interest in the Internet, and more specifically the World Wide Web, has been limited and remains largely underutilized. There is perhaps still insufficient understanding of the many uses, opportunities, and benefits of the

Internet in all its dimensions, and how to exploit it as a free and immensely rich information resource. This contrasts with the experience of librarians, writers and scholars, who on the whole have been rather quicker to find ways the Web can serve their needs.

There has been a measure of debate on the opportunities offered to African publishers by electronic publishing, although online publishing, at this time, is still mostly confined to journal publishing, for scholarly as well as literary and cultural journals. Other than in South Africa, there has not been a great deal of experimenting as yet with e-publishing models, but East African Educational Publishers in Kenya have recently launched their first e-book as a pilot project (www.eastafricanpublishers.com/News/ebooks.htm), a popular title on accounting that meets the requirements of courses taught at tertiary colleges and universities in East and Central Africa and beyond. The first chapter of the book is available free-of-charge as a downloadable PDF file from its Web site, with subsequent chapters costing Kshs. 50 per chapter, or a download of the full book will cost Kshs.600 (ca. £5.20). It will be very interesting to monitor the success (or otherwise) of this pilot project. Meantime African Books Collective also plans to make some of its distributed titles available as e-books.

A number of papers have suggested that if attractive electronic business models are developed and Internet access improved, book publishers might well be enticed into electronic publishing to capture a potentially lucrative market, and create valuable new revenue streams. However, little thought seems to have been given to the nature of such digital products. Attractive business models are all very well, but the issue of content development for commercial exploitation still needs to be addressed much more thoroughly. For example, what kind of products do potential customers really want, and how much are they prepared to pay for it? Before venturing into such uncharted territory publishers will also need to bear in mind that any electronic products they might be offering on a commercial basis – for example databases of indigenous knowledge, digital collections of photographic images and objects, or sound archives – might well be competing with several digital

archives and a growing number of digitization projects that already exist or are under way, are freely accessible, and most of them generously supported by institutional or donor funding. So there has to be a firm understanding of the market constraints and opportunities, competitor activities, and customer needs.

While most African publishers now use e-mail as a primary means of communication, it can also be said that there is frequently no proper grasp of what constitutes good working practice and a positive e-mail culture. African publishers will need to take better control of their e-mail environment and make it work more effectively and more efficiently for them.

Internet access, bandwidth, and connection speeds

While it is probably correct to say that African publishers in many countries have still not fully embraced the Internet, part of the reason, as already indicated above, is related to the still very limited bandwidth and slow connection speeds to the Internet available in most countries of Africa (apart from South Africa, and one or two others such as Mauritius, Namibia, and some North African countries). Moreover, connectivity is still hugely more expensive than it is in the countries of the North.

To put this into perspective, modest amounts of 1 or 2Mbps of bandwidth – as, for example the 2.2Mbps broadband connection that this writer has here in the Scottish Highlands, for just a single household – are often shared by hundreds or thousands of users, students, faculty, and library staff at African university institutions. An added problem is that enormous amounts of incoming e-mail traffic is spam which, even if filtered out, uses up valuable network capacity and available bandwidth. Furthermore, while many computer users at African institutions are using the Internet facilities for academic research and access to electronic journals and online resources, there are also a large number of users who use it for Webmail (i.e. for Hotmail or Yahoo email accounts) during working hours and which, despite the institutions' attempts to curtail or restrict such access, also takes up a great deal of already very scarce bandwidth.

So access to the Internet in Africa is still of a totally different magnitude than what we are used to here in the West, and there is simply not enough bandwidth to meet demand. For individuals, or publishers, who access the Internet through a dial-up service via their own ISP, the situation is probably even worse.

There has been a whole succession of initiatives designed to provide free or substantially reduced-rate journal access, or access to databases, offered by commercial publishers in the West, by NGOs, or through JSTOR, the unique digital archive of back runs of a very large number of core scholarly journals, which has recently adopted a plan to waive participation fees for any academic or not-for-profit institution on the continent of Africa (www.jstor.org/about/africa/openafrica.html). Therefore students and scholars in Africa theoretically have free access to numerous valuable resources and journal archives, but in practice I suspect probably only a relatively small number will actually download material. Or, if attempts are made to download, it is likely to be agonizingly slow in many countries.

Several donor-supported initiatives and projects are currently grappling with this problem, and the whole issue of bandwidth management and optimization in Africa. While initiatives to connect African universities to high-speed Internet connections are commendable, at the end of the day it really is down to African governments to bring about significant improvements. Unless they take positive action and embark on enlightened strategic policies to improve Internet access I suspect the picture will not change a great deal. And so, sadly, the fact is that despite all the talk and euphoria about 'levelling the playing field' and 'bridging the digital divide' the majority of African universities and research institutes, at this time at least, still remain digitally isolated from the rest of the world.

Bandwidth has been fittingly described as the petrol of the new global economy, but the high price of international bandwidth in Africa remains a key concern. Equitable electronic access to scholarly and scientific resources by libraries and scholars in Africa is hugely important, but in view of the still very limited bandwidth in most African countries, and the consequent slow connection

speeds, this also makes the ongoing debate about open access somewhat academic at this time. Open access may well be the answer for African scholarly communication, theoretically enables research and information dissemination to effortlessly cross borders and overcome the marginalization of African research publications, but if download speeds to view open access journals, and/or download other freely available digital resources and databases, remain frustratingly slow, it is not going to be a very liberating experience.

Collaboration and knowledge sharing

It always strikes me how little willingness there seems to be among African publishers to share information, professional experience and know-how, much less that of marketing intelligence of any kind; and APNET has largely failed to provide a platform for such a forum of information and skills exchange. The absence of information sharing is also demonstrated by the fact that various attempts to set up online discussion forums and mailing lists for the African book professions – for debate, comment, and knowledge sharing – have all failed. The Bellagio Publishing Network (when it was still active), other organizations, as well as a number of individuals, have tried to generate interest in online discussion lists, but have not succeeded.

Many attempts at collaborative publishing initiatives in Africa have failed, or have collapsed as soon as initial donor support came to an end. Yet collaborative ventures, co-publishing projects, partnerships, or networks at national and regional levels, surely are the key: pooling editorial and management expertise, sharing production costs and consolidating strength in production skills, fully exploiting the benefits of new digital printing technology, and sharing marketing, distribution and Internet know-how. As South African publisher Brian Wafawarowa has put it when speaking at the Cape Town Book Fair in June of 2006, and when he argued that the successful development of indigenous publishing in Africa is possible if only publishers worked more closely together, "we must stop moaning and ask what we can do ourselves."

Production quality

Overall, production quality of African-published books has improved, and enhanced through use of print-on-demand technology, as successfully used, for example, for most of the books now distributed by African Books Collective.

However, standards of production quality vary significantly from country to country, and there are still far too many new books published that are of very poor production and finishing quality, particularly from publishers in Nigeria. This writer has received books from Nigerian publishers sent to him as review copies, which have contained several pages that are completely blurred and unreadable, while page numbers for some other pages were partially trimmed off. The excuse that is usually offered is that publishers and their printers can't do better because of outdated printing and binding equipment, whereas in most cases it is simply lack of care and apparently a total absence of quality control in the printing and finishing process. It is difficult to comprehend how books of such shoddy and amateurish quality can be sent out for review. Moreover, after dozens of workshops, training programmes, or donations of professional training manuals and resources, several publishers still don't seem to be familiar with even the most basic standards of book production, for example in the presentation of imprint and prelim matter.

African books in the international market place

Thanks largely to the activities of the African Books Collective, African publishing output now enjoys wide international visibility, vigorously promoting African scholarship, African writing and African culture. Many hitherto little known African writers have had their work read and widely disseminated outside Africa. Indeed, it can be said that ABC has not only successfully marketed African books in the countries of the North, but has helped stimulate a *creation* of a market.

The Noma Award for Publishing in Africa (www.nomaaward.org) founded by Japanese publisher and philanthropist Shoichi Noma in 1979, is now well established as Africa's premier book prize. It enjoys a high reputation for the quality of

the works it has crowned over the years, and the substantive success it has achieved in the promotion of African publishing, giving wide exposure to a broad spectrum of African writing and scholarship.

The quarterly *African Book Publishing Record*, founded in 1975 as one of the outcomes of the 1973 Ife conference on publishing and book development in Africa, has also made a very significant contribution to disseminating and promoting African publishing output, as a bibliographic, selection, and book review tool. This quarterly publication, currently in its 34th year of publication, publishes some 30 book reviews in every issue – covering scholarly works, African literature, as well as general books – drawing on a large pool of reviewers, including a good number in Africa. *ABPR* is still the only publication that reviews African-published material on a systematic basis, and there is a need for more review outlets for African books. CODESRIA's *Africa Review of Books*, launched in 2005, while a much needed new review forum for books in the African studies field, has not thus far lived up to its pledge to give due prominence to African-published scholarly titles.

While publishing output from the continent now enjoys much greater international visibility, publishers must do more to put African publishing squarely on the world map, and take advantage of the many opportunities offered by the World Wide Web, both as a rich information source as well as a marketing tool. As Kelvin Smith points out in his thought-provoking article "African Publishing from the Outside", if African publishing is to get on the world map, "it might do well to focus energy on the creative and energetic use of information and communications technology, to make sure that more information on the Internet is from African sources"; and that "more of the messages need to originate in Africa, rather than rely on the intercession of organizations in other continents."

Research and documentation

This remains a seriously neglected field. There is a vital need for ongoing research and systematic development of reliable data on the whole book sector in Africa, and on all aspects of the "book chain" in Africa. It is imperative that either an African book promotional organization, or a library

at an academic institution in Africa, accepts responsibility to act as a centre of knowledge about African publishing, systematically collects and acquires new material pertinent to the book sector, generates reference resources and builds up databases, and makes these widely accessible to the book professions, as well as to those undertaking research into the many aspects of publishing and book development on the continent.

* * *

Epilogue

While two or three decades ago it might have been correct to describe African publishing as extremely underdeveloped, this is certainly not the picture now. It is true of course that many formidable obstacles and challenges remain, including weak technology infrastructures, high distribution costs, the lack of coherent national book policies, high tariff barriers, illiteracy, extreme poverty, and little disposable income, among them. Nevertheless, significant gains have been made, and there have been several collective efforts to build capacity. Not all of them have been successful, and there have been many setbacks and disappointments too, notably APNET, but it is vital to build on the gains.

While both governments and donors have heavily invested in education over the years, support for the book sector and library development, paradoxically, has remained quite dismal for the most part. Sadly, thirty-five years after the Ife conference, most African governments still don't seem to appreciate that a flourishing book and reading culture is central to, and an indicator of, development in any country.

As Henry Chakava has aptly put it

African book development is part and parcel of African development itself, and cannot be seen in isolation. The book does not reside where there is extensive poverty, where people have no access to medical care; where there is inadequate shelter and poor roads, where there is no food. The book thrives where there is a responsive government that provides security, good governance, shies away from graft, and constructively engages its citizenry in nation building—in such an environment it will be possible to develop strategies that can enable government and industry to marshal the resources and manpower needed to take African book development to the next stage. □

Sources

- Adesanoye, Festus A. "Rebuilding the Publishing Industry. Rebranding the NPA". *The Publisher* [Lagos] 14, no. 1 (November 2007): 12.
- The Africa Review of Books (ARB)*. 2005—Twice yearly (in English and French). Edited by Bahru Zewde & Hassan Remaoun. Print and (partially) online. Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). Online: http://www.codesria.org/Links/Publications/review_books/current_issue.htm Note: this URL changes for each issue; the last issue published in print format is volume 4, number 1, March 2008, but online versions are currently only available up to Volume 2, Number 1, March 2006. According to an inaugural mission statement in the first issue, the new review journal would seek to "bring interesting work published in Africa, but which are not sufficiently well disseminated, to the attention of a wider reading audience both within and outside the continent."
- The African Book Publishing Record (ABPR)* 1975—Quarterly. Edited by Hans M. Zell & Cécile Lomer; from vol. 28, no. 3, 2002—edited by Cécile Lomer. Munich: K.G. Saur. <http://www.degruyter.de/journals/abpr/detail.cfm> Online: (as from vol. 27, 2001) <http://www.atypon-link.com/WDG/loi/abpr> (online access requires subscription).
- African Publishers Network (APNET) <http://www.apnet.org/>
- African Publishers Network. Strategic Document of the Task Team. http://www.apnet.org/documents/strategic_document.pdf
- Cape Town Book Fair: 14–17 June 2008. A Report. http://www.apnet.org/documents/CAPE_TOWN_BOOK_FAIR_08_Report.pdf
- Book Aid International/Nyariki, Lily "The Intra-Africa Book Trade Project". *BookLinks*, no. 7 (August 2007): 8–9. http://www.bookaid.org/resources/downloads/booklinks/BookLinks_7.pdf

- British Library. Endangered Archives Project. "Preserving and Digitising the Documentation and Resource Centre of the African Publishers' Network (APNET). Mr Roger Stringer, Independent Researcher 2007 Award – Pilot Project ".
<http://www.bl.uk/about/policies/endangeredarch/2007/stringer.html> and Outcome of project:
<http://www.bl.uk/about/policies/endangeredarch/2007/outcomestringer.html>
- Chakava, Henry. "African Publishing: From Ile-Ife, Nigeria, to the Present". Introductory essay in *Publishing, Books & Reading in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Critical Bibliography*, by Hans M. Zell. Lochcarron: Hans Zell Publishing, 2008: xliii.
- Chakava, *ibid.* p. 1.
- Courtney, Dana "African Books Collective, an Interview". http://www.ybp.com/acad/features/0208_african_books.html
(Interview with Justin Cox, Marketing Manager of ABC, by a senior buyer at one of the leading library suppliers, Yankee Book Peddler/YBP).
- Fisher, Maire, and Colleen Higgs, eds. *South African Small Publishers' Catalogue*. Cape Town: Centre for the Book, 2006.
Online: <http://bdg.org.za/blogs/saspb> (these pages not currently accessible; a new online version may become available when a new second edition of the print version is published)
- Higgs, Colleen, ed. *A Rough Guide to Small-Scale and Self-Publishing*. Cape Town: Centre for the Book, 2005.
- Ike, Chukmumeka *Directory of Nigerian Book Development*. Awka, Nigeria: Nigerian Book Foundation and Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., 1998.
- Nigerian Book Foundation (NBF) (No Web site as yet; 4 Ezi-Ajana Lane Umukwa PO Box 1132, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria nbkfound@infoweb.abs.net)
- Publishers' Association of South Africa *Writings in Nine Tongues. A Catalogue of Literature and Readers in Nine African Languages for South Africa*. Green Point, South Africa: Publishers' Association of South Africa, 2007. Print, CD, and online. Online: <http://www.publishsa.co.za/index.php?cmd=nineLang>
- Smith, Kelvin "African Publishing from the Outside". In *From Papyrus to Print-out: The Book in Africa Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. Bibliophilia Africana 8 Conference Proceedings. Centre of the Book Cape Town, 11–14 May 2005*, edited by Cora Owens. Pretoria and Cape Town: National Library of South Africa/Centre of the Book, 2005, 272–285. Also published in *African Research & Documentation*, no. 100 (2006): 3–10. Slightly different and shorter online version also available as the text of a paper presented at the African Publishing and Writing Conference panel, British Library, 17 October 2005, online at <http://www.sabdet.com/afrpubwritconf.htm>
- Wafawarowa, Brian, as quoted in a Cape Town Book Fair 2006 press release. <http://www.capetownbookfair.com/pressmedia-article-4.php> [page no longer accessible]
- The World Bank. Office of the Publisher. African Publishing Initiative (API) <http://go.worldbank.org/MPLH6G3200>
Note: according to a news item in *The Bookseller* (19–26 December 2008), US producer On Demand Books (ODB) has helped to found a non-profit organization, Books On Demand Books for Africa (BODA), to be headed by Dirk Koehler former publisher of the World Bank. BODA is undertaking an exploratory project researching the viability of three pilot centres in Africa (Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa) for the Espresso Book Machine, http://www.ondemandbooks.com/the_ebm.htm, which prints, binds, and trims paperback books, on demand at point of sale, inclusive of full colour covers.
- Zell, Hans M. *Publishing, Books & Reading in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Critical Bibliography*. Lochcarron: Hans Zell Publishing, 2008. Print and online. <http://www.hanszell.co.uk/pbrssa/index.shtml>