Introductory essay

African Publishing: From Ile-Ife, Nigeria to the Present

by
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INTRODUCTION

The first major conference on African publishing was held in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, in December 1973. It was hosted by the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), and attracted participants ranging from publishers, booksellers, and librarians, to writers (a host of them, with Chinua Achebe giving the opening address), literary critics, and academicians. The conference resulted in the publication of a book, *Publishing in Africa in the Seventies* edited by Edwina Oluwasanmi, Eva Mclean and Hans Zell [2] which, for the most part, was a catalogue of the litany of problems facing the African book industry.

In this essay I will attempt a state of the art analysis of the (sub-Saharan) African book industry today, exploring most of the key issues from a historical perspective. Achievements, failures and the challenges that lie ahead will be highlighted, and a way forward suggested. My approach will be that of an insider, having been at Ife, and having continued both as a participant and a witness to the industry all these 35 years. A fair question to ask is: Has African publishing come of age? As we shall see, some progress has been made, but the general picture is one of mixed fortunes.

Overall, the industry recorded considerable growth in the 1970s, declined in the 1980s, and has been growing in leaps and bounds since. True, there have been many other conferences since Ife, in and out of Africa, addressing the industry in whole or in part. Books and monographs have been published analyzing and providing solutions to challenges encountered. Support has come from foreign governments, international lending institutions such as the

World Bank (➔ **124**), UNESCO (➔ **118**), and donors such as the Bellagio Group, led by SIDA (➔ **115**).

As a result of these interventions, new book fairs have emerged in Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Indeed, one can say that every African country now has an annual book event of some magnitude. Continental organizations such as the African Publishers Network/APNET (➔ **5**), the Pan African Writers Association/PAWA (➔ **22**), and the Pan African Booksellers Association/PABA (➔ **21**) have emerged. Regional associations such as the East African Book Development Association/ EABDA (➔ **13**), national bodies such as book development councils, and stakeholder associations of publishers, printers, writers, booksellers, librarians, etc. can be found in most countries. They offer training, facilitate trade, and network among themselves, along with other activities. On the flip side, these associations are still very weak in structure and management, and the majority cannot survive without donor support.

In spite of this support and local initiatives in some countries, Africa has not achieved its potential, and remains at the bottom of the world book production chart. An analysis of book production statistics from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UNIS) shows that the United Kingdom, the world's leading book producer in 2005, published a lot more books than the whole of Africa combined. In order to appreciate fully the level of achievement of African book publishing, I offer below a quick survey of the book chain. Problems such as lack of capital, training, equipment and raw materials, an underdeveloped market, and competition from multinationals – all identified at the Ife conference – may have subsided, but they have not gone away, as we shall see.

WRITING
There has been steady growth in all categories of African writers since the 1970s. The highest increase has been in those authoring textbooks, which have increased substantially, and where expatriate writers have given way to local ones. Also gone up has the number of children's books writers who, although they made a late start, have been very prolific since the 1980s. Drawing their inspiration mostly from traditional folklore, they have now produced a rich repertoire of African children's books. Currently, the tertiary and scholarly areas are still dominated by foreigners, with local authors only beginning to gain confidence to venture into them through university presses, some of the larger commercial houses, and, increasingly, through the publishing activities of the Dakar-based Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa/ CODESRIA **(**http://www.codesria.org/Publications.htm), the independent Pan-African research organization.

African publishing houses are swamped with works of fiction for which they do not have capacity to handle. The majority are rejected, either because they do not meet the required standards, but mostly because editors do not have the time and patience to advise authors on how to revise and rewrite to an acceptable level. In other words, Africa's fictional output, and its quality, could rise significantly if African writers were nurtured and guided in the art of writing and script presentation.

It is fair to say African writers lack publishing capacity within the continent. Some set their sights abroad because they feel they will get better services, will be more effectively distributed, earn bigger royalties, and gain international recognition. The fact that more and more African writers publish abroad is evidence of the intellectual wealth that abounds in Africa, and which should be a challenge to its publishing industry. At its peak, the Heinemann African Writers Series (AWS) was an attraction and an incentive to African creative writers. Its demise has given rise to local imprints, especially in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe, but all of which are struggling to generate an Africa-wide appeal, and international recognition, such as the AWS enjoyed.

In addition to lack of publishing outlets and international exposure mentioned above, Africa is yet to develop an environment conducive to writers and writing. Below, I take a random look at some of the constraints:

Training: There are few opportunities for professional or full-time training for African writers. Some of the writers' workshops which used to be held in Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, no longer take place. A few writers have had the opportunity to attend writers' workshops outside the continent, in particular, the Iowa Writers' Workshop, a two-year residency programme at the University of Iowa in the USA (www.uiowa.edu/~iww/). A welcome development is that the winners of the Caine Prize for African Writing (www.caineprize.com/) have normally been assisted to further their careers through training and publishing opportunities in journals, magazines, and books.

Freedom to create: African writers do not have the freedom to create freely. They are not given the space to critically analyze the ills in their societies. African governments are particularly sensitive to criticism, and some still retain censorship boards. Books are frequently banned, and writers imprisoned. For this reason, many writers have fled their countries and now live abroad. Indeed, at one time, most of Malawi's writers were living in exile in fear of Banda's regime.

Incentives: There are many ways in which writers can be given incentives or can be recognized for their work. Writers like Achebe, Soyinka and Ngugi have won numerous international prizes and have been honoured in their own countries. But they are the exception; a majority of African writers could do with a bit more recognition, promotion in the workplace, a sponsored trip to some destination, a little prize money, or even just a certificate. The Noma Award for Publishing in Africa (➜ **98**), the Caine Prize already referred to above, and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize (www.commonwealthfoundation.com/culturediversity/writersprize/) are the only continental prizes to date. There should also be more national prizes such as the Jomo Kenyatta and Wahome Mutahi prizes in Kenya. Africa needs to reward its writers more, and in every possible way, with home made prizes, well before they attract international attention.

Writers' unions: African writers have not effectively networked among themselves; they are not properly organized, and are constantly squabbling. Here in Kenya, there are no less than ten writers' associations, all working at cross purposes. Attempts to unite them under one union have not been successful, as gains made have normally been short-term. I know of no regional writers' association, and the Pan-African Writers Association would appear to be very low key in their current activities. Attempts by the Norwegian reproduction rights organization Kopinor (➜ **89**) to organize African writers' groups have borne fruits in the area of copyright protection, and copyright licensing agencies, sometimes referred to as collective management organizations, now exist in several countries.

PUBLISHING
The African publishing industry has grown substantially since Ile-Ife, with books published increasing both in number and quality. Many new publishing houses have sprung up over the period, although quite a number have disappeared or gone moribund. The growth has been particularly noticeable in the textbook area, both at primary and secondary level. Children's books have increased significantly since the early 1990s, as World Bank textbook funded projects have included a component of them. Fiction and general books have been steady with output increasing during times of reduced economic hardship. Production quality has improved progressively although it has not yet achieved international standards. For example, most of the children's books could benefit from better editing, design, layout and illustrations if they are to appeal to international markets. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the output is far lower than what one might expect for each country, and for the continent as a whole. Little progress has been made in general, academic, scholarly and journal publishing, despite the mushrooming of university presses. The issues raised at Ile-Ife, and echoed at

subsequent conferences, have not been fully addressed as the following brief commentary on each will show.

Issues from Ife

Policies: Many African governments still lack policies to guide publishing development, although a few are currently involved in the process of formulating book policies, and a number now have textbook policies following pressure from the World Bank. The relationships between public and private sector publishing is not clearly defined, and several countries still engage in state publishing, or seek to control the private sector in one way or the other. Clear policies would address important issues such as textbook development, language of instruction, distribution, early childhood and adult education, and book use, as well as other areas where clear policies are required.

Multinational publishers: These were perceived as a threat to indigenous publishing development as they were more established, better capitalized, staffed, and supported by their parent companies. However, over the years, and in spite of globalization, the influence of multinationals in Africa is waning or taking on a different form, as in South Africa. The multinationals have enough struggles of their own at home, and they have tended to come and go according to the economic weather in Africa. They have pulled out of some countries and have been bought out in others. The time has come for these multinationals to enter into partnerships with local publishers for mutual benefit, as they are doing in South Africa.

Training: The issue of training permeates the entire African publishing industry. Much progress has been made, thanks to the initiative of some governments, APNET, and national publishers' associations. Currently, publishing training is available in a number of African universities in Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. In the first ten years of its existence, APNET was able to devise a curriculum and to offer intensive training in all aspects of the publishing process. The East African Book Development Association/EABDA has also been active in this area, offering training across the industry in the last ten years. The bigger national publishers' associations offer training to their members and, indeed, the larger houses provide in-house training for their new employees. In my view this issue has been adequately addressed. What is required now is a mechanism to sustain the training opportunities available.

Scholarly and journal publishing: This area of publishing has recorded the least improvement even as enrolments in African universities have increased dramatically, and almost every university has set up its own press in some form or another. However many university presses have been are started

without adequate planning, lack of proper equipment and skilled personnel, and they are ill-prepared to operate in a commercial environment, being controlled, in large measure, by the university administration. It is lamentable that even with new technologies that make journal publishing affordable, fewer and fewer journals are being published each year. It also says something about the academic malaise that has afflicted African universities. The World Bank has plans to install digital Print-on-Demand (POD) machines at strategic locations in Africa. If these plans come to fruition, we hope periodicals, monographs, and academic titles will increase their presence in the African book and journals marketplace. However, there is a need for African universities to give much more attention to publications, and consciously work to develop and maintain vibrant presses that take advantage of modern technology. At the same time, commercial publishers are encouraged to look at this area, as it provides an opportunity that could be utilized for product diversification and profitability.

Emerging issues
In the meantime, a number of new publishing issues have emerged since the 1970s, inviting a response from the African publisher. These include, among others, harnessing the new technologies, NGO publishing, the role of the World Bank, and the value of translations.

New technologies: The production of books by means of desk-top publishing, digital print-on-demand, or even through photocopying, has been made faster, cheaper and more efficient. Africa is only slowly beginning to benefit from these innovations, especially the pre-press end. These technologies make it possible to publish viably even in small runs. The continent stands to gain from these technologies as soon as they become available and affordable.

NGO involvement: NGO involvement in African publishing has developed at a scale higher than anticipated. Some NGO's have set up publishing units of their own, while others have sponsored their publications through local or overseas commercial houses. Some international agencies such as USAID (➔ 121), or UN agencies such as UNICEF and UNESCO (➔ 118), have developed or sponsored full publishing programmes, sometimes in unexplored areas such as children's books and scholarly publications. It can be assumed, therefore, that their efforts were responding to the many gaps in Africa's publishing development.

The World Bank: The World Bank (➔ 124) has become a major player in African publishing, especially during the last 20 years. It has encouraged private sector publishing, and established funding mechanisms that can help Africa achieve education for all. Because of this, the last few years have witnessed substantial growth in African publishing for schools, especially at

the primary and secondary level. So dominant has been the Bank's influence that fears are growing that some countries may not be in charge. A look at the situation in some countries of East and Central Africa shows that World Bank consultants have tended to prescribe the same medicine for every publishing ailment without full understanding of the realities on the ground.   For example, they have driven up book prices by insisting on unrealistic technical specifications, in the process forcing publishers to print in Asia and the Far East, at the expense of local printers.

The other World Bank policy of limiting the number of textbooks approved for each class, ostensibly intended to reduce costs, is ill-advised and can lead to knowledge stagnation. A dynamic curriculum environment where new textbooks are continuously being published must be encouraged, as is the case in the developed world.

On the positive side, 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 is lost. Additionally, the practice of placing textbook money in schools and directing them to procure through bookshops is good for the retail book trade, if carefully monitored.

As can be seen, the entry of the World Bank on the African publishing scene is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing because it provides funding for textbook purchases, and a curse when African governments and their publishing industries are pushed off the driving seat.

PRODUCTION
Printing capacity has existed in Africa since colonial times when governments, missionaries, and resistance groups acquired printing presses for their propaganda wars. Newspaper companies, whether controlled by the state or private enterprise, have also been used to print books. Strewn all over Africa are old Heidelberg machines of varying shapes and sizes, which continue to churn out books and other related materials. However, some printing firms have continued to use such machines while also investing in state-of-the-art technology that can undertake both pre-press activities such as filming and plate-making, as well as printing. I believe such outfits provide a prototype from which a thriving African printing industry can emerge. Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe can be said to be self sufficient in printing, as all three countries have paper manufacturing plants producing certain types of paper.

It has been claimed that printing prices in Africa are higher than anywhere else. This is not true. Given that the machinery and raw materials such as paper, film, inks, etc., are all imported and substantial duties levied, and

considering that printing prices are not much higher than India, a real opportunity to produce books at very low cost exists. If African governments can come forward with incentives such as those relating to tax, African printers can take advantage of the cheap labour and the existent nascent skills that need harnessing. However, I have already referred to the World Bank technical specifications on the manufacturing side, which are driving lucrative textbook printing contracts out of Africa.

African printing has been blamed for poor quality. This is true only when one imposes Western standards on African books. It must be appreciated that we cannot develop printing ahead of everything else; rather it has to be in tandem with the rest of African development. In the 1970s, books coming out of India were of very poor quality. The eventual improvement in the quality of Indian books was not as a result of externally imposed specifications, but rather in response to an internal competitive dynamic.

Printing is labour intensive, and there is no shortage of cheap labour in Africa. School enrolment is on the rise and the demand for books, at all levels, is growing. African governments should encourage local investment in paper manufacturing plants, assembly of printing machines, complete with the more recent technological innovations in this area. An invigorated printing industry will positively impact on publishing and hence the entire book chain.

DISTRIBUTION & MARKETING

In spite of the many distribution bottlenecks that have been widely documented about publishing in Africa, the situation is slowly improving. African publishers are gradually waking up to the need to market and distribute their books more effectively. Obstacles exist within each country of course, and it is still not possible for books to travel across the continent, from East to West and vice versa, but this may be for reasons beyond the industry itself. For a long time, lack of foreign exchange was blamed as the culprit, but it is now possible to buy the US dollar in any African country, using local currencies, although these have been severely devalued since the advent of structural adjustment programmes and globalization.

African publishers are gradually getting into the habit of preparing catalogues, price lists and other promotional materials, although there is as yet no evidence of provision of new title advance information with forward publication dates. Mailings to schools have become fairly routine among the big educational publishers, even as the numbers of these schools have continued to rise. Standard practices such as employing representatives to visit schools, use of inspection copies, and direct mail, are all being employed. Some countries still engage in centralized buying of books for free distribution to schools, or via district education boards, but this is being phased out,

thanks to World Bank intervention. General books are less well distributed, although book reviews in newspapers and radio, author visits, and launch parties are nowadays not uncommon.

While the number of bookshops and libraries (both community and public) has increased over the last 30 years, many more are needed in the rural areas. The major challenges have been reaching them, as road transport remains difficult and expensive, and postage and freight costs continue to be high, slow and unreliable. As the cost of distribution has continued to rise, booksellers have put pressure on publishers, who have had to increase trade discounts from an average of 20% in the 1970s to 40% at present.

Trade promotion is one of the anchor aims of APNET and PABA, the two continental book development associations set up in the 1990s. These associations have been active in promoting regional trade, and have been represented at the African "international" book fairs mentioned above. APNET has been invited to most world book fairs, and has exhibited a range of African-published books. The fact that African books now feature on international databases such as Nielsen BookData, and appear in the search results of major Web search engines such a Google, would seem to indicate that we are beginning to come out of the woods.

The African Books Collective/ABC (➔ **3**) has done commendable work in promoting and selling African books outside the continent. Based in Oxford in the UK, and with US distribution arrangements through Michigan State University Press, the Collective stocks a diverse range of academic, general and children's books, which it sells to bookshops, libraries and individual book buyers around the world. It has negotiated wholesale arrangements with Gardners in the UK who carry some of its stock. It has recently entered into an arrangement with Lightning Source Ltd. to digitize, print-on-demand, and provide online sales services, both retail and wholesale. These moves have enabled ABC to leap into the 21st century as far as electronic publishing is concerned, and to steer in a direction which will free it from donor dependency and achieve self sustainability.

It is clear from the foregoing that book distribution and marketing has made some progress in the last twenty years. However, a great deal more remains to be done in order to increase visibility, and revenues both from the home and export markets. National bibliographies, books in print, and other book trade reference resources need to be prepared, and regularly updated.

Emphasis needs to be placed on regional trade, as is currently the case in East Africa, before moving to other parts of the continent. Most African publishing

firms are small, with tiny marketing and publicity budgets that, if spread out thinly across the vast African continent, will make little impact.

READING

There was a lot of talk in Ile-Ife about fostering the reading habit in African peoples, almost as if this condition is innate. Since then, this topic has attracted many conference papers, and a host of theories has been propounded. In the meantime much has changed: cultural and missionary influences have receded into the background, the children of the 1970s are now adults, and the African publishing environment has improved. This writer's view is that all people are the same, and it no longer makes sense to talk about creating a reading culture in Africa. It is true that Africans read less than other people, and the reasons for this are as much cultural as they are economic, sociological, and even environmental.

It is true that colonial and missionary education did not present the book positively as a source of knowledge and pleasure. Indeed, people were forced to school and made to read books they could not relate to on promises of employment and a good life thereafter. It is also true that Africans derive more pleasure from the oral and performing arts: talking, singing, dancing and socializing. But some of the arguments about reading habits can no longer hold, for example with Ghana celebrating 50 years of independence, and a majority of the population having been born after independence.

There is paucity of reading material at all levels and those available are, in some cases, badly written, lack variety, or are unattractively produced. Some imported books are culturally inappropriate and normally unavailable, or unaffordable. The last 40 years have shown that the pace of reading has developed side by side with the continent's publishing output. Reading campaigns in the countries where they have been conducted, through book weeks, reading tents, library development and book donations (and as demonstrated by EABDA activities), have produced excellent results, especially in primary schools, and even among communities at large.

In addition to the issues discussed above, the African reader is particularly disadvantaged as far as leisure reading opportunities are concerned. At school, there are few books and no library, and the rigid timetable cannot allow quiet reading. If the child is permitted to take a book home, and this is not always the case, more obstacles get in the way of reading. Many children are used for household chores, running errands, mundane tasks such as fetching water or firewood, or looking after animals. The same problems apply to adult learners who may gain literacy through literacy programmes available in some countries, but fail to sustain it through lack of engagement

and follow-up reading materials. Few public and community libraries exist and much of what they stock is elitist and irrelevant to the new literates.

Socio-economic and environmental factors also need to be put into consideration. Statistics show that nearly half of Africa is illiterate. Such people have no use for books. Also, just over 40% of African peoples survive on the equivalent of US$1 per day. For such people, buying a book would be an unnecessary luxury as they struggle for the essential commodities of health, food and shelter. Environmental factors include crowded housing in the urban areas and lack of electricity in most rural areas.

UNESCO (➔ **118**), the International Reading Association (➔ **83**), and other external agencies have provided significant logistical support in the promotion of reading in Africa, while Book Aid International (➔ **38**) and CODE (➔ **48**) have assisted with book donations as well as library training and development. National reading associations are slowly taking root in Africa, and it is hoped they will sustain the reading campaigns currently underway, especially in East Africa. It has been suggested that the new media such as television, video, CDs, iPods, and so on, pose a threat to the future of reading. This threat exists only on a very small scale in the urban centres of Africa, but the reading campaigns in hand should be able to harness and exploit its power in the promotion of books and reading.

CHALLENGES

This paper would be incomplete if I did not point out some of the key issues plaguing the African book industry and which, to date, remain largely unresolved. A majority of these have been highlighted elsewhere in this paper, and can be attributed to Africa's general state of underdevelopment. They are issues that can only be addressed by governments themselves with assistance, perhaps, from the international community. The rest are industry based, and result from a lack of government policies or weaknesses within the industry, which have led to the present unsatisfactory state of affairs.

External Factors

Policies: To what extent should African states involve themselves in publishing? If African governments came up with comprehensive publishing and book policies, this question would be answered. Africa remains a net importer of books and there should be rules to guide this process. Currently legislation governing importation of books is varied and even contradictory. For example, book imports may be zero-rated for tax, while importation of paper and machinery attracts tax. A streamlined tax regime covering the entire publishing process, with built-in incentives, could make the industry more competitive.

Language: Language remains both a major challenge and a dilemma for African publishing. Currently the majority of books published are in foreign languages: English, French and Portuguese. The need to publish in African languages is widely acknowledged, yet it is not possible to do this in the more than 1,000 languages that exist on the continent, half of them currently without orthographies. Most African countries have adopted policies which provide that learning in the first three years of primary education be in mother tongue; a meaningless gesture that peters off with time. Countries like Eritrea, Uganda and South Africa have singled out certain languages for development and use in education, and it remains to be seen how this experiment will fare.

Illiteracy: Illiteracy is a major problem in Africa, and although serious attempts have been made at universal primary education and adult literacy programmes, half of Africa is still illiterate. There are many children of school going age who do not go to school, and adult literacy programmes are not sustained with life-long reading materials. While we appreciate the enormity of the problem, it must be said that African governments, assisted by their international partners, have not done enough to speed up the eradication of illiteracy. In some countries, progress has been painfully slow, and some learners have lapsed into illiteracy. Illiteracy and poverty go together, and one explains the other. It takes on a socio-economic dimension if we realize that tackling illiteracy is one way of fighting poverty.

Poverty: Poverty is to blame for the lack of the infrastructural facilities that militate against reading development, as set out above. Schools are poorly equipped with books: with a pupil ratio averaging 1:10, and have a record of poor book use. School libraries are still a rarity. Elsewhere in the community, libraries are few, and home libraries are unheard of. I believe that until Africa develops a middle class with access to disposable incomes, its publishing industries will continue to lag behind.

Internal Factors
Investment capital: The African publishing industry lacks access to investment capital that can enable it to grow and be strong. It lacks favour with national governments and banking institutions, and has been slow to attract international partners. It is heavily tilted towards curriculum publishing, perceived to be less risky, at the expense of general publishing. Consequently, key areas such as scholarly publishing, or early childhood and adult education, are mostly ignored. The sometimes poor quality of products is the result of a combination of lack of skills and insufficient investment funds.

Trade and book marketing: African publishers have yet to realize that books are commodities that need to be vigorously promoted in a competitive

marketplace. Consequently, they do not put aside sufficient funds for advertising, catalogues, leaflets, and other promotional material. Most do not have publicity departments, and do not mail out information about their new and forthcoming books. As a result their output is not known for the most part, even in their own countries, much less in neighbouring and export markets. The emerging African book fairs, referred to above, will not have much impact until the African publisher learns to approach them with a business mind frame. The same applies to international book fairs, and the increasing number of international bibliographic databases that offer free publicity.

Copyright and piracy: The growth in publishing activity in countries like Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda, has brought with it the spectre of piracy. Fast-selling locally published or imported books are indiscriminately and illegally printed, and offloaded to unsuspecting schools, in a swift and carefully orchestrated racket that is difficult to beat. A majority of African countries have enacted copyright laws and are signatories to international copyright conventions and the WTO. Their enforcement agencies are slowly beginning to appreciate this threat, and are working with publishers and international agencies such as World Intellectual Property Organization/WIPO (➜ **126**) to end this menace. Piracy is a major disincentive to business and, if allowed to continue, can destroy creativity.

THE WAY FORWARD
At this point one might ask, where does the future of African publishing lie? I am convinced the answer lies in partnerships, among the local publishers themselves, and with foreign publishers as well. Partnerships will unlock the resources, the skills, and the market penetration required to reach the vast African market with books in sufficient quantities. Foreign partnerships should come hand in hand with liberalization of the copyright regime to enable the licensing and reprinting, or adapting of key titles published in the North, for Africa. In other words, the buying and selling of rights should be easier in the new dispensation. This approach will increase the quantity and quality of products available in the market in a very short time, and economies of scale will bring prices down. One example is the kind of partnership James Currey Publishers in the UK has with a number of African publishers in the field of African studies.

Secondly, I believe the future of African publishing lies in translations. This genre has the greatest potential for African publishing, but currently remains largely unutilized. Traditional knowledge, contained in the more than 1,000 African languages needs to be transcribed, translated and the content shared among the African peoples themselves, as well as with outsiders. Likewise, existing materials in foreign languages (and not just English, French and

Portuguese) should be translated into African languages as this will enrich and broaden our knowledge base. In this we should borrow a leaf from the mission presses and their translation programmes in Africa.

CONCLUSION

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.

The African publishing industry still has a long way to realize its potential. Poor leadership has turned the continent into a pawn of the West (and now the East) and it continues to squander its resources on externally driven projects that carry little benefit to its people. Since the publishing technology and all its recent developments come from the North, Africa needs to engage with Northern governments and institutions to create partnerships and agreements that can facilitate the transfer of this technology to the South. Above all, it must take charge of its own destiny, get over its colonial warp, and put its house in order. But, at this point, it is not possible to say that African publishing has come of age.

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