

# PROBLEMS OF THE AVAILABILITY OF BOOKS IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

Books are a vehicle of national and international understanding because of their use for exchange of ideas and knowledge. Problems considered as inhibitory to the realization of the ideals of book industry in Nigeria examined were government emphasis and control, low production, lack of professional writers, and piracy. International programs to improve availability of books in the third world were discussed. Suggestions were then made for the evolution of local programs to improve the present state of availability of books in Nigeria.

## Basic Concepts and Definitions

"Book" is used interchangeably with the term reading material throughout this paper in the sense that "book" was used in the National Library Decree of 1970 to include all literary works such as monographs, pamphlets, sheets of music, maps, charts, plans, tables and compilations, dramatic works, collective works such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, yearbooks and similar works, newspapers, magazines and similar periodicals, and work written in distinct parts by different authors or in which a part or parts of work of different authors is or are incorporated, and every part or division of such a work, and all forms in which documentary or oral records are published.<sup>1</sup> The book industry responsible for the production, promotion and distribution of books in Nigeria according to the Nigerian Book Development Council (NBDC) is made up of writers, translators, publishers, editors, graphic artists, typographers, printers, binders, booksellers, and librarians.<sup>2</sup>

*The Oxford English Dictionary* defines availability as the quality of the state of being available, i.e. at one's disposal, within one's reach.<sup>3</sup> Availability is used in International Federation of Library Associations' (IFLA) Universal Availability of Publications (UAP) program to imply, "making sure that anyone who has need of any published document can obtain a copy to read."<sup>4</sup>

## **Reading Materials**

The Nigerian Book Development Council (NBDC) has noted that reading materials are indispensable tools for the development of the country because of their role in national education, development and sustenance of literacy, and transmission and preservation of the cultural heritage.<sup>5</sup> They are a vehicle of national and international understanding because of their use for exchange of ideas and knowledge.

But the dimension that the present scarcity of reading materials in Nigeria has reached leads one to ask whether any meaning was attached to the above assertion from a government agency established to: initiate, coordinate and stimulate the activities of government and private sector agencies in the development of the book industry of Nigeria to the end that more and better books of all kinds and responding to Nigeria's national goals and aspirations may be made available at the lowest possible costs to readers of all ages and in all parts of the federation.<sup>6</sup>

Mr. Chinke Ojiji, Marketing Director of Longman Nigeria Limited and President of Nigerian Publishers Association, stated in 1985 that the Nigerian educational system requires 218 million volumes of reading materials yearly for 13 million children in the primary schools, seven million in the secondary and about a million students in the lower and upper tertiary levels.<sup>7</sup> The supply of reading materials as shall be seen in this paper is very far below the minimum requirement.

The problems of the availability of books in Nigeria is the challenge of every member of the book industry and the government because of its control of the fortunes of the industry.

## **Government Emphasis and Control**

Government emphasis on local sourcing of raw materials for industrial manufacture applies also to the book industry and is responsible for high import duties on raw materials used to manufacture books. Printing paper, the main input into book manufacturing, is grossly inadequate locally but carries a 40 per cent import duty. Other printing materials such as wire, thread, ink, glue and spare parts for machinery are also scarce because of high import duties. This has made indigenous publishing unattractive since books published locally are very expensive, according to Akinleye costs can be as high as 300% more than books published abroad.<sup>8</sup>

The present economic crisis and recovery programs have considerably reduced the value of Nigerian currency in foreign exchange. Financial allocations of many Nigerian libraries, especially the university and special libraries, which depend on government subvention for their book vote have become inadequate. These libraries could no longer maintain their current

periodical collections and were unable entirely to purchase any new books. The result is a depressing effect of the chronic foreign exchange on imported finished books. This is the reason for the lack of current information required for academic work presently witnessed in Nigeria. Unavailability of required books is due to the low priority the government accords intellectual effort.

The fact that the operative copyright law, Decree no. 61 of 1970, regards piracy as a civil and not a criminal offence is another indication of the above mentioned low priority. The criminal sanction provided under section 491 of the criminal code treats piracy as a simple offence and provides a fine which is equivalent to four US dollars for every infringing copy to a maximum of one hundred US dollars.<sup>9</sup> This fine is the main overhead cost of a pirate who carts away unknown profits from churning out copyrighted work at will.

It appears that counterfeiting products for cheap availability is endorsed at the expense of creativity. The result is the present wave of "brain drain" or mass exodus of specialists and experts in all fields from Nigeria to other countries with brighter prospects. There is hope for improvement if the Copyright Law of 1988 has taken cognisance of the criticisms of the Copyright Law of 1970 and accommodated the tremendous changes that have taken place in documentation.

Another area of governmental inaction concerning all is the delay to evoke the compulsory licensing clause of the Universal Copyright Convention, a Charter of UNESCO, which permits developing countries to compulsorily acquire the rights to print and sell within their borders books that are required solely for the purpose of education. This measure, if taken along with reduction of import duty on raw materials for book production, would enable local production of required books and the emergence of a much desired universal Nigerian selling price.

### **Low Production**

Low production was identified by Barker and Escarpit as one of the factors which deprive the peoples of the developing countries of reading materials they need.<sup>10</sup> Others were inadequate distribution channels and the high cost of importing sufficient number of books. They noted that only one title out of every five produced today originates in a developing country. Of the more than 500,000 titles which are issued every year 80 per cent come from Europe, Japan, Russia, the United States, and the European countries.<sup>11</sup>

The level of book production in Nigeria is low when compared with those in developed countries. Twenty years cumulation of current national bibliography of Nigeria, *Nigerian Publications, 1950 - 1970*, lists a total of 9,767 titles (an average of 488 titles per annum). Of this figure, 3,511 were government or official publications in English (35.8 per cent) and 4,577 were private or non-official publications in English (47.1 per cent).<sup>12</sup> Publications

of works in 47 Nigerian languages accounted for 1,679 titles (17.1 per cent) with works in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, the three main Nigerian languages, accounting for 39 per cent of the non-English language publications.<sup>13</sup>

The annual cumulations of the current national bibliographies, *National Bibliography of Nigeria, 1973-1982* and its predecessor *Nigerian Publications, 1970-1972*, listed 7,797 titles. This is an average of 600 titles per annum. Of this figure 2,283 titles were government or official publications in English (29.28 per cent).<sup>14</sup> Private or non-governmental publications in English accounted for 4,618 titles (59.23 per cent) while publications in Nigerian languages accounted for only 896 titles (11.50 per cent).<sup>15</sup> Aje gave the total publication in Nigeria from 1972 to 1982 as 7,004, an average of about 700 titles per annum.<sup>16</sup> The figures he gave for the same period were over 30,000 in Britain and 80,000 each for the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>17</sup>

### **Lack of Professional Writers**

Many Nigerians are writing today and increasing numbers of them are receiving international recognition and awards for their works. For example, the Nigerian poet and novelist, Professor Wole Soyinka won the 1986 prestigious Nobel prize for literature.

At the present, however, Nigerians write part-time while employed full-time elsewhere. Full-time or professional writers, those who devote their entire time to writing and depend upon the financial returns from it for their livelihood, have not emerged. The lack of professional Nigerian writers is probably due to the fact that the Nigerian book industry is still in an embryonic stage. Most of the available indigenous publishing houses are not firmly established with either the appropriate manpower or adequate financial resources. Each of them functions as one man's enterprise with no clearly defined policy governing the industry itself. Anything suspected to yield quick financial return is published.

Thus the climate of the Nigerian book industry has not reached the point of attracting and supporting good writers with financial advances or fellowships to sustain them and their families while writing full-time as a well-established publishing house is able. The type of encouragement from publishers required for full-time writing is presently unavailable in Nigeria. The immediate need of indigenous writing and publishing was partially summed up by the *Daily Star*:

"...indigenous writing and publishing should be encouraged by making production costs low enough to keep the publisher in the business and at the same time giving him room to pay better royalties to authors.

Incentives like pioneer status of publishing houses for a couple of years, easy landing rates with reasonable repayment moratoria for new publishers, and task-assignment for the production of literature in specified fields would do a lot of good."<sup>18</sup>

Another reason for the lack of professional writers in Nigeria is the often mentioned poor reading habits of Nigerians. A limited reading public is further reduced by the multiplicity of local languages, many of which are not suitably developed for publishing purposes. Thus the available market is limited not only by the reading public but also by the languages of publication. The chances of making a living from the sale of books written for a Nigerian audience is still remote even for the most prolific authors. Uncertainty about making a living as a full-time writer in Nigeria also arises from the exploitation of the works that have been written. These exploitation methods are very complex but the word piracy embraces its various forms.

### **Piracy**

Unauthorized reproduction of copyrighted works on commercial scale, or piracy, is a major problem for book availability in Nigeria. Piracy is nurtured and sustained by the demand for books which far outstrips the supply, especially at the tertiary level where there is a heavy dependence on importation of finished books which are very expensive locally. The activities of pirates militate against any positive steps taken to ameliorate the deteriorating book availability situation.

The argument that counterfeiting of products generally makes them available inexpensively is extended to intellectual output. Publishers and authors do not have the expected government and public backing in their long, drawn out war with pirates. Piracy has therefore become a nightmare faced by publishers and authors which has made book production and distribution very costly and less rewarding.

The many aspects of piracy are very sophisticated. One of the most potent of these aspects, revealed by Ekwensi, is the type perpetrated by the staff-members of the publishing houses. The staff-members make use of their knowledge of titles, market demands, and booksellers who are willing to pay cash in order to exploit the author and dupe the publishing house. They also have inside knowledge of the school curriculum. For example, if a publisher orders 10,000 copies of a book, the unscrupulous staff-members then add an additional 50,000 copies. Upon receipt of the order, 10,000 copies would be sent to the publisher and the remaining 50,000 copies would then be disposed of. The staff-members also collaborate with underground printers or even run

their own printing presses where paper and other printing materials ordered by their employer are diverted to use illegally.

Aside from the publishing house employee/pirate there are also full-time pirates. Professional pirates take a book that is in high demand to other countries where it can be cheaply reproduced then shipped back for sale at a profit. Piracy has made indigenous publishing unattractive since it is impractical for publishers with inadequate financial resources to compete with illegal reproductions of finished books carrying none of the financial overheads of the legitimate publications.

The common belief that Nigerian printing technology is still very much in its infancy is opposed by the availability of printing presses in every nook and cranny of the country. Aside from federal and state government printing presses which print and distribute the majority of government documents many other printing presses exist and operate in secrecy. They openly pose as printers and distributors of ephemerals such as cards, posters, almanacs, accounting records, letter-heads; etc., but clandestinely indulge in the business of the illegal reproduction of books in high demand.

Piracy is antisocial and against public interest and some of the havocs of the violations of the copyright law enumerated by Ojiji prevail in Nigeria. These include a drop in the sales of authentic works, offering fake copies to the public, loss of revenue to the government, loss of royalties to authors, insecurity of employment in the book industry, escalation of the hardships of the book industry, and lowering of the morale of authors.<sup>19</sup>

### **International Programs to Improve Availability of Books in the Third World**

IFLA through its Universal Availability of Publications (UAP) program recognizes the non-availability of published documents as a "world-wide problem, to be solved on a world-wide scale".<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, the program lists the following requirements to improve availability:

1. Effective acquisition of documents, whether by purchase, exchange or gift to serve present and future needs, and
2. Effective interlending systems, to ensure that documents can be lent or photocopied to serve remote users.<sup>21</sup>

The program further emphasizes the need for each country to "ensure effective acquisition and interlending policies and systems".<sup>22</sup> The solution to the lack of availability must originate within individual countries in order to avoid "book dumping" yet ensure the availability of suitable reading materials.

Aspects from IFLA's direct services to Third World countries through its Core Program on the Advancement of Librarianship in the Third World

(ALP) have suggested that developed countries should aid the Third World by the granting of reprint and translation rights on more generous terms, lowering the prices for paper and printing equipment, and training of writers, editors, translators, printers, and publishers.<sup>23</sup> The library associations of the Nordic countries made a proposal to the Nordic Council of Ministers to fund a program for the advancement of librarianship in the Third World by establishing an ALP-office in Sweden and, thus, initiating and supporting a 3-year pilot project for ALP.<sup>24</sup> Although the proposal was rejected by the Council of Ministers, the concept alone is worth mentioning in view of the hopeless state of availability of books in Third World countries.

One of the conclusions of the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development's (UNCSTD) Advisory Committee on Science and Technology for Development at its Fifth Session, held 4 - 13 February 1985, stated that each developing country needs to have some fundamental minimum of information available in primary form to allow it to sustain scientific and technological activities related to its own development.<sup>25</sup>

The Advisory Committee further suggested that a series of projects should be initiated to furnish universities, science and technology institutions, and national libraries of less developed countries with important scientific journals through voluntary contributions thus providing them with a basic stock of journals and literature on science and technology.<sup>26</sup>

Zell supported the proposal of the International African Institute to make available to African libraries gift subscriptions of scholarly journals if donor organizational support could be secured. He also proposed that monographs could be made available to African libraries at cost or near cost prices, including a royalty element so that authors would not be penalized. This was possible, he further noted, if donor organizational funding could be secured to pay for books at cost price plus freight charges to African destinations.<sup>27</sup> Nigeria as a developing country would benefit if proposals at the international level to alleviate the problems of book availability in developing countries such as those mentioned above are fully implemented.

### **Suggestions for the Evolution of Local Programs to Improve Availability of Books in Nigeria**

Locally there is need for aggressive long- and short-term book development and distribution programs which would ensure that the right types of books are produced and distributed at affordable prices. Toward this end there is the need to introduce and enforce copyright laws that would enhance indigenous publishing, reissuance of texts published elsewhere but considered relevant to local need, and guarantee fair returns for all those in the book industry. National registers of printers and booksellers should be

compiled to guard against all forms of piracy. Indeed the campaign against piracy and counterfeiting generally should be mounted in an organized manner nationwide to educate the public on the dangers they pose. Public campaign against piracy and provisions of stiffer penalties for pirates under the copyright laws would ensure availability of authentic books.

The Nigerian Books Development Council (NBDC) should be revitalized and provided with essential resources which would enable it to monitor and coordinate the implementation of national programs concerning book development. One such program would be the training programs for Nigerians as authors, translators, editors, typographers, illustrators, printers, booksellers, managers, etc. A national publishing house should be established as a matter of urgency to enhance the attainment of the objectives of NBDC. NBDC should be responsible through the national publishing house for publication devoted solely to announcing, reviewing and compilation of statistics to inform the public about Nigeria's book output. In addition to the services of the national publishing house, NBDC should be vested with the power to authorize other indigenous publishing houses to reissue and market within Nigeria any required educational books. It should also be responsible for payment to any publisher or author of a fair license fee if NBDC compulsorily acquires the rights to print anybody's book.

Since the emphasis of the present government is on local sourcing of raw materials for industries, effort should be made to put into full production capacities available paper mills at Jebba, Iwoppin and Oku-Ibokun. There is also the need to establish industries to produce other printing materials, fabricate spare parts and assembly plants to assemble printing equipment locally.

## **Conclusion**

Information is able to be communicated in various forms but books have remained unique as a medium of information communication in human society. As purveyors of ideas, books enable knowledge and information to be preserved and passed on from one generation to another. Their full utilization is essential to scientific and technological development and to the mutual understanding of cultures. Therefore a society must meet the book needs in all levels of its strata to have full access to recorded knowledge.

The satisfaction of the present book hunger in Nigeria requires new titles as well as all books published during the last ten years. It is a herculean task necessitating government action and joint efforts of all Nigerians in the book industry. Full implementation of decisions reached at international meetings and conferences to alleviate the present book famine throughout developing countries as well as the evolution and implementation of local programs would greatly improve availability of books in Nigeria.



**NOTES**

- 1 *National Library Decree 1970: Supplement to Official Gazette*, 27 (57), 14 May 1970 - Part A. Lagos: Federal Government Printer, P. A133.
- 2 The Nigerian Book Development Council, *The Book Nigeria*. 1 (1), December 1980, pp. 53 - 54.
- 3 *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. 1, A - B, Oxford: Clarendon, 1970. p. 578.
- 4 *IFLA-UAP: Universal Availability of Publications*. IFLA Secretariat, The Hague, Netherlands. n.d.
- 5 The Nigerian Book Development Council. op cit. p.53.
- 6 *ibid.*
- 7 Ojji, Chinke. Cited in: Alibi, Idang. Problems of the Nigerian book industry. *Daily Times*, Friday 15 November 1985, p. 26.
- 8 "Akinleye wants decree on book piracy". *National Concord*, Tuesday, 13 August 1985. p. 13.
- 9 Ojji, Chinke. op cit. p.26.
- 10 Barker, Ronald and Robert Escarpit, eds. *The Book Hunger*. Paris: UNESCO, 1973. p.5.
- 11 *ibid.*
- 12 Ibadan University Library. *Nigerian Publications 1950-1970*. Ibadan: University Library, 1977.
- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 National Library of Nigeria. *National Bibliography of Nigeria*. Lagos: National Library, 1973-1982. National Library of Nigeria. *Nigerian Publications: Current National Bibliography*. Lagos: National Library, 1970-1972.
- 15 *ibid.*

- 16 Aje, S. A. "Nigeria's book industry since 1972: an assessment." In: *Report of the First National congress on Books*, 21-25 March 1983. Lagos: Federal government printer, 1984.
- 17 *ibid.*
- 18 *Daily Star*. Tuesday, 13 August 1985, p. 3.
- 19 Ojiji, Chinke. Cited in : Esajere, Akpo. That piracy may fail. *Daily Times*, Monday, 2 November 1987. p. 7.
- 20 IFLA. *UAP: Universal Availability of Publications*. *Op. cit.*
- 21 *ibid.*
- 22 *ibid.*
- 23 IFLA. *IFLA and the Third World: The IFLA Core Programme on the Advancement of Librarianship in the Third World (ALP)*. The Hague, Netherlands: IFLA, 1987. pp. 14-15.
- 24 Swedish Library Association. *Nordic efforts for the advancement of librarianship in the third world: a proposal for a pilot ALP-office in Sweden*. A translation from Swedish by Bjorn Tell, former Chief Librarian at the University library of Lund, Sweden. March 1988. p.1.
- 25 United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development's (UNCSTD) Advisory Committee on Science and Technology for Development at its Fifth Session, held 4-13 February, 1985. *IFLA and the Third World: The IFLA Core Programme on the Advancement of Librarianship in the Third World (ALP)*. The Hague, Netherlands: IFLA, 1987. p.17.
- 26 *ibid.*
- 27 Zell, Hans. Cited in: *The book famine in Africa*. Summary report of the proceedings of IAI symposium, held on 14 October 1985, in London. *The African Book Publishing Record*, xi(4) 1985, p. 195.