

FOREWORD

THE BOOK PUBLISHING INDUSTRY IN NIGERIA

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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There is no doubt that there is a crisis in the book trade in Nigeria today, caused by a shortage of books and reading materials and a continuous increase in book prices, as is evident from even a cursory examination of shelves in Nigerian bookshops. The anxiety felt by publishers, printers and booksellers as well as students, parents and educationalists, is well reflected in the frequent reports and articles that have appeared in the press in the past few years or so. Yet despite the general concern and debate no solution seems forthcoming.

The present acute shortage of books is of course directly related to the economic crisis which the country is experiencing. And as we have all become fully aware, the economic crisis itself has been caused by one main factor — namely the excessive role played in our economic life in the recent past by the importation of foreign goods (be they raw materials or finished products) and services. The consequences of the sharp fall in our foreign exchange earnings by which we sustained importation at an abnormally high level in the years before 1982 have been felt in areas and sectors of the national economy, especially that of the book trade.

Although reliable figures are not available, it has been estimated that some ninety per cent of the reading material circulating in Nigeria before 1982 was imported, mainly from Britain and the USA, but also from India and, to some extent, the USSR (in respect of English language titles). The drastic reduction in foreign exchange facilities made importation more difficult so that, according to the *Business Concord* of 20 May 1983, there was a drop in the availability of books of the order of forty per cent within a year of the introduction of emergency measures in 1982. The consequence was a steep rise in the price of books which has continued ever since.

The introduction in 1986 of the second tier foreign market (SFEM) as the principal element of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) has compounded the situation. As books belong almost exclusively to the import sector, the new measure has had the expected result of causing a further rise in the price of books. It has also meant a cutback in the volume of orders, necessitated by cash flow considerations as the value of the naira was adjusted downwards in relation to the major currencies required for purchases abroad. It must not be forgotten that the SFEM is also affecting the prices of materials required for local production, most of which still have to be imported, so that even in this regard one cannot expect a significant reduction in the price of books. We seem, therefore, to be locked into something of a vicious circle.

The consequences of this situation are far-reaching. In the first place, it is a sad irony that Nigerian authors who have had their works published abroad cannot be read by their own people due to the importation problems. I have in mind here the striking instance of Wole Soyinka, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, whose autobiographical masterpiece, *Aké*, published over six years ago, is not available in this country in the cheap paperback edition put out a few years ago by Hutchinson; and the same goes for most of his works. And the situation applies not only to works of creative literature, in which Nigerian writers are pre-eminent, but also to educational books written by Nigerians for the local context, whose relevance to the educational needs of

the country is obvious. Not only do students not have access to these books due to the problems of foreign exchange, but they cannot pay the prohibitive prices when they are available.

The present scarcity of books means that the needs of educational institutions and of the reading public in general cannot be met at anything like an adequate level. This is happening at a time of continuing expansion in education at all levels, and of a new orientation in policy and emphasis on disciplines directly related to the development of a self-sustaining economy. In a nutshell, at a time when more books are required, they have become less available.

It must not be forgotten that the present situation has direct economic implications for the book trade itself due to the fact that the scarcity of books has meant a serious reduction in the volume of business. In other words, apart from the adverse effects of the present shortage of books on educational policies and strategies, it can also be seen to be a factor in our general state of economic depression, since the book trade in its entirety constitutes a substantial sector of the national economy.

Because of the relatively poor development of the book publishing industry in Nigeria, it is at the moment in no position to take up the slack created by the present acute shortage of books. At the same time, it has long been obvious that the only lasting solution to the problem of the supply of books and publications in adequate quantities to meet our needs consists in the development of a viable, indigenous publishing industry. We need therefore to break this vicious circle I alluded to earlier. It is in this context of a determined effort to overcome the present crisis in the book trade that we need to examine the problems encountered by the book publishing industry which, as I will shortly demonstrate, is central to the life of the entire book trade itself. We need to bear in mind the immense potential for development in this area, in terms of its contribution to the educational system and the intellectual life of Nigeria and to the revival and sustenance of the Nigerian economy.

The book trade in Nigeria

To place the problems of the book publishing industry in Nigeria in their proper context, an overall picture of the book trade in general is needed. This will not only help to clarify the facts about the production and distribution of books — facts which are not always understood by the non-specialist public — but also to emphasise the central position of book publishing in relation to other allied activities in the book trade.

The book trade comprises three main types of activities; book publishing, printing and distribution (bulk distribution and retail). These will be examined in turn.

Publishing

As distinct from newspaper and magazine publishing, book publishing is generally carried out entirely separately from printing. Although some book publishers in Britain have their own printing presses — the outstanding examples being the university presses of Oxford and Cambridge, and this for historical reasons — the rule is that the actual production of the book is carried out by a separate establishment which is paid for the job. In Nigeria, only Onibonoje Press among the established publishers can be said to own its own printing factory. All the other major publishers, both foreign and indigenous, farm out their printing jobs. However, some publishers have acquired equipment for 'origination', that is, the initial typesetting of the text; in this case, the

final printing is still done by the printing presses. In actual fact, therefore, the business of the book publisher consists of procuring manuscripts, editing them to recognised standards, arranging their production and marketing them. These various stages of the book publishing process represent a complex interaction of skills which are perfected by training and experience, but which draw essentially on a high level of education and, indeed, intelligence.

Printing

The books are actually manufactured by the printer. There is, of course, a considerable technological input involved in book production, and there is a growing number of reputable printers in Nigeria capable of high-quality work. Generally, the printer supplies the paper to be used from his own stock, but the recent trend has been for the publisher to supply the paper, as this gives him greater control over the cost of production. (This point will be taken up later.) In summary, the role of the printer is to transform the edited manuscript into a finished product — the book.

Distribution

There are two kinds of book distributor:

- (a) The bulk ('wholesale') distributor who takes stock from the publisher into his own warehouse on a consignment basis and supplies in turn to retail outlets (known as 'jobbers' in the USA).
- (b) The bookseller (or retailer) who handles limited numbers of individual titles for sale in the bookshop. It should be noted that the retail sector includes, in addition to the standard bookshops, other outlets such as kiosks and the book sections of department stores.

The big publishing companies in Nigeria, especially the local branches of the multinationals, invariably have their own warehouses and supply direct to retail outlets. However, there now exist in Nigeria a number of bulk distribution companies set up initially to represent overseas publishing companies which do not have local branches. Some of these companies are in a position to serve local and indigenous publishers whose scale of operations is still too limited to permit them to establish their own warehouses or independent distribution system. It must be borne in mind that a distribution system in this sense also involves the maintenance of travelling salesmen ('educational representatives') who go out into the field to promote titles, secure adoptions of books for courses and place orders with retail outlets all over the country. In view of the size of Nigeria, poor communications and the cost of travel, this can be a very expensive operation.

Bulk distribution, as can be gathered from the above, is a specialised area of bookselling and is a necessary adjunct to the retail trade in books. The retail sector for its part is largely unstructured and poorly organised in comparison with what obtains in the developed countries. Apart from the university bookshops and a few well-managed private bookshops, it is composed of a large collection of small outlets which for the most part do not even specialise in bookselling. These small and scattered retailers give bookselling a highly seasonal character, as they function principally in relation to the school calendar. We need to add to our description of the book distribution process in Nigeria the various task forces set up by some state governments for bulk purchases. Although these task forces do not form an integral part of the book trade, they do have a direct impact on the whole process of production and supply in so far as they cause a

bypassing of the standard outlets, and publishers and distributors are obliged to take account of them.

What should emerge from the above is that publishing as a distinct and specialised activity is central to the effective operation of the book trade itself. Once past the writing stage, the book as a product depends on the publisher.

In order therefore for the book trade sector of the economy to thrive, it is essential that book publishing in Nigeria be stimulated as an indigenous and viable industry. For while the other areas of the book trade — printing and especially book distribution — are fairly well developed, book publishing is still, as it were, in its infancy in this country. Given its present state and the peculiar problems associated with its operation, Nigerian book publishing is unable to meet the challenge of shortage of books posed by our present economic crisis. And as pointed out earlier, this situation is also having an effect on the allied areas of printing and book distribution. It is now time to consider the structure of the book publishing industry itself as it operates in Nigeria, as this is essential in order to grasp the problems involved.

Publishing in Nigeria

The structure of the book publishing industry in Nigeria is easily identifiable under two heads; one relating to the local subsidiaries of the multinational companies, and the other relating to the 'indigenous' publishers.

The multinationals

There are some half a dozen publishing houses in Nigeria which are subsidiaries of British-based multinational companies. Although now registered as Nigerian companies, these publishing houses are still very closely integrated into the world-wide operations of their parent companies. This is not surprising, since they were originally set up as local warehouses to stock books produced in Britain. Over time, and with their conversion into Nigerian companies, these publishing houses have evolved into local branches, with indigenous management enjoying a relative autonomy in relation to the parent company.

However, the important point to consider here is that they are still controlled from abroad — the possible exception being University Press Limited, which evolved out of Oxford University Press. The local subsidiaries of the multinationals can thus be said to exist primarily to promote and sell in Nigeria books originating from their parent companies. Although they now undertake some local publishing, this is still very limited, and even here the parent company is still very much in control, as manuscripts are often sent to Britain for editing and production into books which are then imported into Nigeria. The case of Macmillan deserves special mention, since it has a long-standing working agreement with Northern Nigerian Publishing Corporation (NNPC), but has never given any printing jobs to the Gaskiya Corporation, the printing establishment associated with the NNPC.

Credit must be given to the multinational companies for having initially ensured an adequate supply of books to this country and contributing to educational development. Moreover, as they have grown, they have provided training to indigenous staff in all areas of the publishing trade and industry. However, their contribution to the economy at this time is still limited by their ties to their parent companies. The paramount consideration remains whether they can continue to operate in such a way as to channel substantial amounts of foreign exchange abroad at a time when this country needs to

conserve its resources as much as possible.

The indigenous publisher

For the sake of clarity, even at the risk of stating the obvious, this category needs to be strictly defined. The indigenous publishing company is one that is not only registered in Nigeria, but whose capital is generated internally and whose operations are carried out without reference to a foreign-based company. This definition is important, since it seeks to exclude certain companies operating in association with foreign-based companies, an association that has foreign exchange implications.

The point that requires to be stressed here is that the indigenous company is one that undertakes the publishing process as described earlier entirely within Nigeria, and under its full control. It is necessary to stress this point because this is presently the crucial issue with regard to the development of publishing in Nigeria.

The fact is that the indigenous companies labour under several disadvantages. Not only are they denied the prestige of long-established multinational companies but they cannot have access to the considerable resources in capital and services enjoyed by their local subsidiaries. The result is that the vast majority of these indigenous companies are weak and unable to compete in real terms with the multinationals who now dominate the Nigerian market. In other words, the peculiar problems of book publishing in Nigeria bear more directly and more heavily on the indigenous publishers. These problems will now be examined more closely.

Problems of publishing in Nigeria

Publishing in Nigeria at the moment faces a range of problems that affect every area of its operations. While some of these problems are internal in nature — those related to management skills, for example — others undoubtedly derive from factors external to the publishing establishments themselves and inherent in the public sphere of the national economy. It is these latter set of problems that will be examined here, as they affect the indigenous publishers.

Finance

The indigenous publishers are almost without exception under-capitalised, with practically no access to credit. As publishing is capital-intensive, the potential for initial output is severely limited, and further expansion is slow and uncertain. The result is that indigenous publishing in Nigeria is marked by erratic production, unsteady output and often poor quality, since it has to be carried out with limited resources. This naturally affects the reputation of indigenous publishers and places them at a great disadvantage in relation to the local subsidiaries of the multinational companies, who not only have a solid capital base but also enjoy the support of their parent companies in terms of services and facilities.

Technical problems

These relate essentially to the constant shortage of materials: especially paper, and film and plates for lithographic (offset) work. This is a problem that has serious implications for the small publisher, who has to depend almost entirely on the printer for materials. If he wishes to supply these direct to the printer to reduce costs, it is much more

convenient for him to purchase them locally, rather than to import them from abroad, given the difficulties involved. In view of the higher costs involved, especially in these days of the SFEM, the differential between buying his materials in order to supply direct to the printer, and having the printer supply from his own stock and charging to production is so insignificant that there seems ultimately no point in going to the additional trouble of making his own purchases. The total dependence of the small indigenous publisher on the printer for materials has implications for production schedules and the calculation of print runs; delays in obtaining finished copies are frequent, as the completion of jobs depends on the printer's supply. These other factors contribute to higher production costs.

This problem of the indigenous publisher must be viewed in relation to the advantage enjoyed by the large publishing houses. In the first place, they have the option of producing their books abroad, which until recently was cheaper than printing locally (perhaps this is still true?). Where they decide to print locally, they can often undertake origination in-house, giving the printer only the camera-ready copy for final printing. Most importantly, they have the financial resources to import the basic materials — paper, film, plate — and the staff to procure these from abroad; all along the line they have the advantage of scale. Since they can supply these materials to the printer direct, they are in more or less full control of the production process, and therefore of costs.

The problem of materials, therefore appears as a crucial one. It needs to be stressed that, for the large publishers, the situation is not even as simple as I have presented it. The truth is that, because of the constant shortage of materials due to our total dependence on imports, local production of books is not only hampered but made more expensive, as both publishers of all categories and printers are affected by this problem in varying degrees. I shall return to this question later.

Distribution

Perhaps the greatest problem that confronts the small indigenous publisher in Nigeria is that of distribution. It is well known that the market for books in Nigeria is considerable, and the potential for expansion of this market is likely to be a factor for the new educational policy — the so-called 6334 system — which provides a great opportunity for creative output of books in all areas, especially textbooks at various levels. The problem that seems to me to be attendant on such an expansion is directly related to that of effective marketing of the books that we all wish to see produced.

Again, the small indigenous publisher is at a disadvantage. While the larger publishing houses are well equipped to handle warehousing, extensive promotion and distribution to retail outlets, as well as to monitor the movement of stock and keep accurate accounts of sales (and especially to collect monies owed to them), the small publishing houses are in no position to carry the considerable overheads involved in this aspect of the business or to invest in the infrastructure, staff and facilities required for these operations. For this reason, they are obliged either to improvise makeshift arrangements for the promotion and distribution of their books (with attendant problems of debt collection and accounting) or to contract out to a bulk distributor at a heavy discount. In either case, marketing cannot really be effective enough to generate adequate returns on investment in stock.

The structure of the retail sector of the book trade as I have already described it contributes in no small way to the problem of distribution. As presently organised, bookselling in Nigeria is conservative; there are very few bookshops that are prepared to take titles that are not directly related to school lists, and even university bookshops

have been known to insist on course recommendations before placing orders. As we all know, the small publishers have no clout with ministry officials who decide on adoptions of books for courses, and the competition for this is often so fierce as to appear unseemly.

With the market practically cornered by the big publishers, especially the multinationals, for textbooks, and with the book distribution system as a whole quite insensitive to general books (except where sensational launchings and promotion techniques have been employed to back them up), the situation seems hopeless for the small publisher who is starting up modestly, even when he has books of undoubted interest to offer. There is no doubt in my mind that the unpromising nature of the book market in Nigeria for this category of books is suggested much more by the conservative nature of the book distribution business than by the attitude of the Nigerian to books. The combined effect of these various problems and of the other handicaps of industry and trade in Nigeria arising from an inadequate infrastructure is such that it will be readily appreciated that the indigenous publisher faces formidable obstacles. In any effort to develop a viable publishing industry in Nigeria, these problems need to be tackled with determination to eliminate them as far as possible.

The need arises therefore for a comprehensive policy at the level of government itself embodying measures aimed at promoting the development of a truly indigenous publishing industry. This policy should involve the two categories of publishers operating in Nigeria as described above, and in particular make the local subsidiaries of the multinationals take on a more indigenous character. The proposals that follow are intended to suggest the lines along which such a policy could be formulated.

Proposals

The immediate aim must be to remove bottlenecks and then to outline the kind of long-term measures that are likely to favour local production of books.

Finance

There are two ways of providing the indigenous publishers with the financial resources they require. These are (a) bank loans and other forms of credit to widen and strengthen their capital base and (b) subsidies for specific projects.

(a) *Loans and credits.* Given the importance of the book publishing industry to the educational and economic development of the country, it is now obvious that priority should be given to this sector. More liberal terms of credit could be given to *bona fide* indigenous publishers to enable them to expand, and also to attract investment into this sector. It is not in my view too much to suggest that publishing should be given the status of a 'pioneer' industry, and certain concessions could be made. Banks should be encouraged to give special consideration to this sector, as with agriculture. It seems that an awareness of the role which banks can play in helping the development of indigenous publishing has emerged in East Africa — which has smaller potential — (see *The Guardian* (of Nigeria), 3 May 1984); such an awareness is yet to be seen on the part of the majority of banks operating in Nigeria.

(b) *Subsidies.* In many countries, subsidies are granted to publishers to help them cover the production cost of projects with a recognised educational, cultural or intellectual value. In France, for example, a special subvention exists for translations of French publications into other languages and vice versa. The government should create a fund, to be administered through the Book Development Council (BDC), from which (under

specific terms) subventions could be granted to indigenous publishers to enable them to produce works of definite educational, cultural or intellectual interest, which they would otherwise be unable to undertake. The question of subsidy is of special interest to university publishing houses which are involved in academic publishing with little prospect of profit. This category of indigenous publishers should therefore be given special consideration. It is pertinent to mention here that the Book Development Council itself needs to be reorganised so as to make it a more effective agency for the development of publishing in Nigeria.

The point that needs to be stressed with regard to finance is that book publishing should now be a priority area for investment, with financial measures taken to ensure greater flow of capital into the sector.

Technical facilities

The considerable capacity for book production which now exists in this country is under-utilised, and investments in equipment made in recent years by many printing establishments to bring their production methods up to date are being rendered unproductive. As imported books do not by convention attract duty, and as locally produced books have to be printed with more expensive materials for the reasons I have already explained, the situation is created whereby it is more convenient and cheaper to print abroad and to import finished books than to produce them locally. It is obvious that such a situation is anomalous and works against the indigenous publisher. In order therefore to encourage local production of books, immediate short-term measures are needed to facilitate the importation of paper and other materials, until present plans for the production of paper in adequate quantities in this country come to fruition.

Two short-term measures could be envisaged: (a) The removal of duty on paper and other printing materials in order to bring down the cost of these items that have to be imported. In the context of the present controversy regarding current government measures on custom duty and tariffs, this proposal seems to fit into the general trend of opinion on the desirability of giving greater protection and encouragement to local industries by way of fiscal relief. It needs to be borne in mind that, where books are concerned, we are dealing with an industry that not only has a potential for growth in economic terms, but also a relevance to the investment in education, with a secondary effect on the whole life of the nation. (b) Alternatively, the re-introduction of the approved users' scheme which was abolished five years ago. The scheme was poorly administered, and its benefits to genuine educational publishers were never fully realised. Nonetheless, it had the merit of making it possible for certain categories of books to be produced locally at competitive cost in relation to imported books. The need for this scheme is more pressing now than ever, and if a total removal of duty on paper and printing materials is not effected, then at least a better thought-out and better administered version of the approved users' scheme should be considered, as a form of relief to indigenous publishers.

These two proposals can of course be considered only as short-term measures to meet what is obviously an emergency situation. The real solution consists in the production of paper and other materials locally. As a long-term measure, therefore, it is imperative that the various paper mill projects undertaken by government should be pursued with renewed vigour.¹ When one considers that Kenya and Zimbabwe are practically self-sufficient in paper, it will be readily understood why book publishing is making such rapid progress in these countries.

It is important to encourage research into the production of alternative raw materials

for the production of paper. The Jebba mill is reported to use hardwood for conversion into pulp, a process which is wasteful of this precious commodity. Yet it is now known that other products like chaff from wheat, rice, maize and sugar cane, and certain varieties of grass and papyrus can be converted into pulp for the manufacture of high-grade paper. These new processes should be investigated, and perhaps a government-funded research project could be set up at one of our universities for this purpose.² It should in any case be government policy to encourage private investment in projects designed to produce locally the various materials required for book production.

Administrative measures

On condition that the proposals I have outlined are adopted, and especially that the long-term measures suggested are pursued, it will be possible to adopt a number of administrative and fiscal measures designed to protect the indigenous publishing industry and to oblige the local subsidiaries of the multi-national companies to undertake all their book production work in Nigeria. The following proposals are intended to achieve this result.

(a) A relative ban could in time be placed on the importation of books from abroad, relative in the sense that limited importation of specialised publications (technical books, special collections such as encyclopedias and bibliographies, books in foreign languages) would still be allowed. In no case, however, should importation exceed a fixed number of copies (say 1,000) of any given title.

(b) As a corollary of the proposal in (a), greater use could now be made of the licensing system in the book publishing industry in Nigeria. Under this system, Nigerian publishers could reproduce locally titles published abroad after obtaining the permission of the foreign publisher and against payment of a royalty on a scale between ten and twenty per cent. Translation of foreign language works into English and the Nigerian languages could also be undertaken and published locally under this arrangement. The government could provide the necessary foreign exchange facilities to enable Nigerian publishers to meet payments on the initial advance and six-monthly or yearly royalties payable under this scheme, which would considerably reduce the volume of foreign exchange transactions involved in the book trade and at the same time boost local production of books. This means that the same recognition should now be given to the system of licences and royalties in the book trade as that which obtains in other areas of industry.

Allowance will also have to be made for fees on services that can only be obtained abroad. In the case of technical or specialised works, origination (i.e. editing, typesetting and preparation of the text up to film stage) can only be carried out by specialised personnel, with facilities that do not yet exist in Nigeria. Once the text has been put on film however, final printing of the book can be completed locally. In no case therefore should importation of finished books be permitted beyond the number suggested above.

This arrangement should be made to apply especially to the local subsidiaries of the multinational companies who should be encouraged to acquire licences on titles published by their parent companies for reproduction locally.

It has to be recognised that the question of licences raised a number of important issues relating to copyright conventions which need to be carefully examined before a general policy can be adopted. It is impossible for me to go into these issues here, as they are complicated and in some respects technical in nature. I need only mention that the Indian government has taken significant administrative measures to facilitate the use

of the licensing system by Indian publishers, and in Zimbabwe, which has the infrastructure for local production of books, the trend is also to have increased recourse to this system. It has become necessary for us in Nigeria to envisage a similar approach.

I would therefore suggest in this connection that a study group should be set up comprising representatives of the professional groups concerned (publishers, printers and booksellers) and officials of the Ministry of Education and of the Book Development Council, to examine the issues involved and to work out a framework for a coherent government policy on this subject. The advantage of this approach is that it will make it possible not only to coordinate the scattered individual initiatives in this matter, but also to win the confidence of overseas publishers, especially those in Britain, who have showed a marked reluctance to grant licences to Nigerian publishers for the reproduction of their titles locally. Their reluctance can well be understood, considering the rumour of fraud in some cases, and the general uncertainty about the official government position as regards remittances abroad on fees and royalties.

A word needs to be said here about the role of the Nigerian Book Development Council. It seems fair to observe that this body has had no impact on book publishing in this country, and the hopes placed in it at its inception have proved extravagant.³ I have already suggested two possible functions for this body: as an official agent to consider applications for subsidies for publishers, and as a technical unit for copyright questions. These functions require specialised staff who are conversant with the issues involved in these matters. Another important function that the BDC would assume is that of the promotion of Nigerian books for export. A market does exist in North America and Europe and other places for academic and scholarly books by African authors on African subjects in all fields, and considering the vitality of Nigerian authors, book publishing stands to earn this country some foreign exchange through export of books. This is one area in which the BDC should, in my view, be seen to be actively engaged.

Conclusion

The proposals outlined above are intended to foster the growth of a viable publishing industry in Nigeria through local production of books on a scale that will match present and future needs. They touch on measures that can be adopted in order to create a favourable environment for such a development, taking account of the problems faced by the industry.

There are other problems that have not been considered. These include book piracy, which is a major preoccupation of Nigerian-based publishers, and about which the attitude of the government has been strangely lukewarm, despite the obvious threat it poses to the healthy and steady development of publishing in Nigeria. The misconceptions in the mind of the public on this issue have been well demonstrated by Onwuchekwa Jemie's article in *The Guardian* (of Nigeria) 25 January 1987), entitled 'Book pirates of Nigeria, awake!' It seems inexplicable that an enlightened writer like Jemie cannot understand that if his reasoning is followed up and his call taken up, the road will be wide open to anarchy and eventual collapse of the publishing industry in Nigeria.

Another issue that has not been examined but only touched on in passing, is that of the export potential of a viable publishing industry in Nigeria. The problem that arises here is related to the timid approach to deregulation that we are witnessing, despite the SFEM, under the Structural Adjustment Programme. The liberal thrust of the SAP is being curtailed by bureaucracy, and the way things are going, we can expect a return of

the worst features of over-administration of the economy and the frustrations associated with it. It seems that in Nigeria, the civil servants are unwilling to let go of the strings they have woven around our economic life.

This general comment points to the context in which book publishing has to be carried out in this country, the inadequacies of infrastructure that face any branch of industry and business, the administrative and other hurdles that have to be overcome. It points especially to the situation of economic crisis with which we are all confronted and to which we seek solutions.

The country as a whole is involved in a programme of national recovery, and there does not seem yet to be a bright light at the end of the tunnel. Yet, as far as the particular sector we are discussing is concerned, there is a real sense in which the present crisis represents a challenge as well as an opportunity for the development of a strong viable publishing industry as a basis for an effective book trade in this country, and as a vital resource for our educational strategies towards national development. The current situation has underlined the necessity for us to re-order our priorities, as much in the area of the book trade as in other sectors of the national economy. This means quite simply that here as elsewhere, our former reliance on importation now has to be abandoned and a new orientation adopted.

The proposals I have put forward take account of the prevailing conditions in Nigeria which can be said to admit possibilities not yet fully considered, let alone exploited.

Notes

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1 It is indeed regrettable that the Iwopin mill, which is designed to produce bond paper for book work, should have been handled with such disregard for the needs and interests of this country in this area. It seems reasonable to suggest that the government should re-invest in the Iwopin mill so as to revive the project and ensure that it becomes operative as soon as possible. In any case, from the undoubted impact it will have on book production in this country — comparable to that which the Oku Iboku paper mill is already having on newspaper production — it makes more sense to continue with the Iwopin project than to abandon it at this time if only to redeem the considerable sums already invested.

2 The recent revival of the petrochemical project will afford an opportunity for the local production of film from the raw materials produced by the planned plant.

3 It is not even clear what the status and functions of the Book Development Council are supposed to be. These need to be defined more clearly, and a reorganisation of the Council should be carried out in such a way as to give it greater scope so as to make it operate more effectively. It could be desirable in this respect to detach the Book Development Council from the Ministry of Education so as to give it more autonomy, and to work out for it a mode of operation that will put it in direct and daily touch with the problems of the book publishing industry in the country in particular, and the book trade in general.

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