



The Library and the Third World Publisher: An Inquiry into a Lopsided Development

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ECONOMISTS CHARACTERIZE THE Third World as having a low gross national product, very slow increase in per capita income but rapid rise in population, and slow economic growth rate. The Third World includes most of the African, Asian and Latin American countries. These countries also share characteristics in addition to those established by economists, i.e. the experience of having been colonized by another power and only recently assuming independence. What is significant is not their colonial experience, but the relative freshness of that experience. Their economies and cultures, once geared to the objectives of the colonizing power, are still trying to assume a new, perhaps independent, direction. There is a lack of self-reliance and therefore of confidence. This renders them prone to accept aid from the developed countries, although complaints are soon heard of aid inappropriately applied and hard-won independence sorely threatened. These countries display evidence of overreacting to the colonial situation. This overreaction is manifested in a headlong haste to catch up with advanced countries without doing the necessary groundwork, and in an almost wholesale dismantling of institutions established in the colonial days, which, if retained, would have proved beneficial and effective. They also experience great difficulty in breaking into the technological era because of foreign aid.

When the colonizing powers introduced the modern book to the colonial peoples, they had three main objectives in mind: (1) to help develop the colonized people, intellectually and in every other way; (2) to educate the citizens in such a way as to provide the resources for achieving the political and economic objectives of the colonialist; and (3) to propagate within the colony the ideals of the mother country. This was achieved

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by importing books published abroad and by distributing publications produced by the colonial power. With independence, however, the inevitable change in educational objectives occurred and the consequent explosion in student numbers soon followed. The demand for books rose steeply and it was then realized that something had to be done about providing the books needed for achieving the new objectives — first, textbooks to sustain formal education, and later (much later) other books to underpin the formal education. In some countries, for example, India, Ceylon and Japan, there had been a long tradition of the book and of libraries flourishing in religious institutions. This tradition, however, did not grow into a modern library service administered by central governments or local councils for the benefit of the citizens, because the objectives of libraries in religious institutions were severely limited. Thus, in organizing a modern library system, these countries did not work along familiar paths and tended to adopt the system prevalent in the country of their colonial experience.

Modern publishing and librarianship in the Third World have both developed along generally parallel lines with no direct link between them. The establishment of the public library system in Eastern Nigeria is a good example. Before the establishment of this system, library services consisted of reading rooms and the British Council library. The new objective was to provide a library service throughout the region with its base at Enugu. A library board was appointed in 1955 through which the government made funds available. A Unesco expert actively cooperated with the local people to produce a system and a building which were universally acknowledged as a great achievement and as a successful completion of a Unesco “pilot” project. The Eastern Nigeria Library Board fulfills the objectives of library service in Africa as enunciated at the Ibadan seminar:

- (a) to support and reinforce programmes of adult and fundamental education; (b) to provide effective services for children and young people, including requisite services for schools; (c) to provide needed information and reference services; (d) to promote and stimulate reading for pleasure and recreation; (e) to provide, wherever needed, adequate services for special groups.¹

Both in the enunciation of the objectives and in the actual practice of establishing a public library system, there is the assumption that, as in developed countries, publishers will churn out the books required by these efficient libraries; and it was accepted almost without question that the

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foreign books which were flowing into the country were, in fact, suitable books. Thus, in establishing a library, no thought was given to the production of the books that are one of the reasons for the existence of the library.

There is another example which illustrates a forward development from this first stage, where no account is taken of the production of the books that will feed the library system — the East African library system. A preliminary survey was conducted to determine whether the community was ripe for library service. The indicators for this are: (1) a rising number of literates, especially those who have had more than primary education; (2) a clear desire for social and economic improvement by the people; (3) an existing body of literature in suitable language and form; and (4) sufficient economic stability in the country to maintain a service if one is started. These indicators are manifested in educationalists pressing for a continuing access to books, which are the source of knowledge and information for students, and in the local people both wanting to improve their educational standard and persuading authorities of the need for library services.

The result of this survey showed that most of the requisite conditions had been fulfilled. So, in 1945 the East African governments recognized this need and invited an expert to make definite proposals. The resulting report was accepted. A planner was appointed to work out details based on his survey of the educational system, languages in literary use, demand for books and the financial resources available. The system was established, but with two new elements. First, the system not only operated libraries in towns, but also operated a book-box service and a postal service to rural areas, considered to be "one of the most effective ways of promoting reading and making books widely available."² Second, the operation was tied in with the publishing activities of the East African Literature Bureau, which is perhaps one of the most successful experiments carried out in stimulating the production and dissemination of books in a developing area. The founders clearly identified three essential objectives of publishing: to stimulate development, to project the culture of the people, and to nurture the local languages.

The more usual situation in the Third World is that the public library is still seen as a center where books are preserved as stores of knowledge so that people in search of knowledge can come and consult them. A certain inability to grasp the close relationship between the goals of libraries and the goals of publishing still exists. There remains a perhaps unwarranted emphasis on publishing as a purely commercial undertaking

and on a book transaction as a commercial transaction. Even university libraries are organized on the premise that the books, in any case, will be forthcoming from foreign countries with established educational traditions. The establishment of the Ibadan University Press is therefore, very interesting. This press began at the Ibadan University Library with a small hand platen press, initially used to meet the printing needs of the library. Later it began publishing scholarly works in all fields. It is interesting that a bookshop was born in the basement of the same library. Even if he did not articulate it, the founding father of that library, John Harris, had demonstrated that the library was the centerpiece of a 3-part program, the others being publishing and bookselling, and that ideally they should coexist.

The main purpose of publishing is to communicate knowledge and information, and therefore the culture of the people, not necessarily to preserve it in the first instance. If preservation were the only function, an author would need only to deposit his manuscript in a library, and the librarian's job would be simply that of "keeping" the manuscript. It is important to understand that the purpose of a library is to disseminate recorded knowledge and information. Thus, the library idea is an extension of the publishing idea, not separate from it. The library service is the follow-through of the publishing process; publishing is successful or unsuccessful to the extent that people read what has been published, not necessarily to the extent of massive profit that the publisher makes. Therefore, the dissemination of books cannot be considered merely a matter of setting up shops in urban areas and selling books over a counter; it cannot be merely a matter of providing a building, staff and stock at a library divisional headquarters. Book dissemination is a neighborhood affair, a socializing process, especially in a situation where there are new literates with a very short tradition of the modern book experience.

From the foregoing, it is logical that the first priority is to develop publishing before the library system, or at the very least to develop them simultaneously. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that in a majority of developing countries, the reverse has been the case. It is difficult to account for this, but it is easy to attribute it to colonialism. For example, in the Eastern Nigeria case cited earlier, it can be argued that all the attention was devoted to the establishment of a library system in order to ensure a continuing market for foreign books, especially British books. (At that time the British Council director in the region was the chairman of the library board.) Such an argument is unfair, because the library board was appointed by a Nigerian-dominated legislature. At the time

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the Eastern Nigeria Library Board project began, there was no purely indigenous book publisher in Nigeria. All publishing was directed by expatriates. As a result, no strong voice was raised to impress on government or the business community the importance of book publishing. There was no strong personality in the publishing field to initiate action. From the start, there was a local expert in the library field, however; Kalu Okorie, the director of library services, succeeded in putting his views across to the government and was able to interest Unesco in the project. Government usually considers what is brought before it; the publishing field has a serious drawback in not having experts. There are few recognized training courses for publishers. In developing countries, it is of some consequence to be able to cite a recognized training course. The result has been that the publishing field has been unable to argue a strong case effectively, and a society with little publishing and with people who do not understand what it is about needs a strong, articulate spokesman to convince a government to take any action. Another reason for the comparative underdevelopment of publishing may be that the library system can be seen as an organized establishment capable of providing employment in a way understood by the local people, almost like civil service. Consequently, governments can understand it. Publishing is hardly ever understood — although the end product, the book, is. It is the domain of private enterprise. For the business community, there is no clear evidence before them that it is a profitable business. The few people who have tried it, usually as author/publisher, probably did so with the limited objective of making their voices heard on a matter connected with personal opinion. Twenty years after the establishment of the Eastern Nigeria Library Board, there is still no forward movement in the region to stimulate publishing, although the library system grows stronger in spite of changes of government. In twenty years no good case has been made to the government or business community to undertake, sponsor or support publishing; no strong publishing personalities have emerged; the public has not improved its concept or understanding of publishing. The example is all the more interesting coming from a region where literacy is relatively high and the majority of school-age children went to school even before the introduction of universal free primary education. In conclusion, the library has established itself as a potent force in the life of the people. Publishing has not done so, and it is publishing that keeps libraries alive.

By not incorporating publishing into its program as it became established, the library may have fixed in the public mind that books are al-

ways foreign imports and thus that there is no need to produce books domestically. In other words, has the library become a barrier to indigenous publishing? Much investigatory work must be done to answer this question satisfactorily. If a library's policy covers acquisition of whatever is published locally and then makes an effort to draw readers' attention to this material (and, where possible, to popularize it), then the library cannot be accused of not encouraging local publishing. This can only be done where there is some local publishing activity. Where there is none, and the library simply places foreign books in the hands of its readers, it will be regarded as doing a satisfactory job, but may be accused of a lack of imagination. If librarians know that they ought to have indigenous books in their libraries but these books are not being produced, should they be expected to take steps to get those books produced? Is the issue a matter of patriotism or is there a basic structural fault in the establishment of libraries? Perhaps the library ought to go out of its way to encourage and, if possible, to initiate publishing in order to fulfill its functions (cf. the example cited above of the Ibadan University Press). It is, however, doubtful that the function of the library as a disseminating extension of the publishing system, in the context of the people's culture, is clearly understood.

The Third World library, therefore, has lacked the strong impact on publishing which its counterpart in the developed countries enjoys. In the United Kingdom, for example, the public libraries in England and Wales spent over £16 million on books in 1972-73.³ This enviable position was attained after decades of careful and laborious development of the public library system. Once the principle of the public library was accepted, individuals, local authorities and governments initiated reforms to ensure that adequate provisions were made for the development of libraries. Indeed, in Denmark and Norway it is compulsory for communities to provide sufficient funds to operate public and school libraries. Yet, it is not just reforms and financial resources that have sustained the growth of libraries in developed countries. Three vital elements are also present: the ability, need and time to read. Most of their citizens are sufficiently educated to read and write and to want to read; their social structure, more or less stabilized over the years, is such that they have more time for leisure activities. Thus, these Scandinavian countries have been able to eliminate three major constraints operating in the Third World: (1) absence of publishers in sufficient numbers to be able to exploit subjects of interest to small communities, as well as subjects of universal appeal; (2) lack of interest in (and thus few adherents to) publishing because it is not a

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lucrative business; and (3) the high level of illiteracy, and therefore small potential market for publishing and small clientele for libraries.

In order to have a flourishing library system that will have a strong impact on publishing, or a strong publishing system that nourishes the library system along the lines of the developed countries, developing countries can take no shortcut. Patient planning and careful experimentation are needed. Some drastic decisions have to be made. Indeed, there are already examples of the kind of action which can speed up the production and dissemination of books in the Third World. In Malaysia the government decided that instruction in primary schools should be in a local language. This decision had the effect of encouraging production of books by indigenous publishers, who were eminently qualified to do so, for a large captive market. This reduces the overbearing influence of the foreign publishers. The government also took action beneficial to the book trade. Malaysia's Ministry of Education was instructed to order the books directly from the publishers, who supplied them at a discount of 10 percent. The books were distributed to the schools through local booksellers, who received a 12.5 percent commission for service from the publishers. "By providing this service fee to booksellers for merely conveying the textbooks to the schools, the Malaysian Book Publishers Association has shown its goodwill and interest in the development of a healthy and viable bookselling trade, which constitutes an integral part of any national book development programme."⁴ In this case, strong government action backed by the Publishers Association's understanding of the local situation has created an encouraging book trade. This is just another step to link up the library system with the existing publisher-education-bookseller complex by establishing school libraries and village libraries (e.g., the Republic of Korea had 10,000 of these in 1967). Like Malaysia, Korea stimulated local publishing by insisting on the use of a local language in the primary schools. It is possible to achieve similar results, for example, by insisting that all literature used in schools and adult education classes must be locally generated from authorship to printing. Undoubtedly there will be some poor-quality work to start with, but in a short time high standards will be attained. It is important to point out that in this example the state did not take over publishing itself. Indeed, in countries such as Ghana and Uganda, where state publishing has been tried, it has not been entirely satisfactory. Thus, one of the steps toward a community provision of book services is for the government, the largest cohesive unit within which the community operates, to make decisions that will stimulate all aspects of the book services.

A second step is to implement fully one of the recommendations of the Unesco-sponsored meeting on book development in Africa held in Accra, Ghana, in February 1968. It was recommended that a Book Development Council be set up within each participating country. Another meeting held in Bogotá, Colombia, in September 1969 recommended the establishment of a Regional Book Development Centre for Latin America. It is not quite clear whether the failure to establish book development councils in many of the countries participating in these meetings was due to the composition of the delegations — government functionaries who saw the meetings as just another conference to attend — or the decision-making machinery in these countries, where a decision at such a conference might be regarded as a low-priority recommendation. Whatever the cause, it is now time that these councils were established on a sound footing.

It has already been noted that libraries have been established without due regard to the production of the books that will feed the library. One of the first functions of a book development council is to ensure that books are produced locally, or with local control; it can then set up a framework within which the book-production and book-dissemination arms can operate in a cooperative fashion. The council should remove those obstacles that have hampered the growth of publishing — lack of technical know-how, expensive paper and distribution bottlenecks, among others. The council should lead the way in experimenting with language, types of publishing, and even types of printing, book design, and distribution techniques. A well-run book development council can only be an asset to a developing country.

A third step is to experiment with development of book trade and libraries on a small scale in smaller community units, rather than on a country-by-country basis. Although the government can help at the national level, as with the establishment of the book councils, it is at the village level that any book effort will have its best return. Moreover, government may be too preoccupied with investment in the fields of conspicuous production to give proper political and economic support to book production, even when it has accepted the principle of the book's importance in national development. As stated earlier, book production and dissemination is a neighborhood affair, in the same way that festivals and all aspects of life that make up the people's culture are neighborhood matters. It therefore makes sense to develop books and libraries, printing firms and bookshops on a small tangible scale, so that the local person

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knows what is happening in that neighborhood and can discuss it with others.

In practical terms, perhaps the following process may be adopted in developing books and libraries on a small scale in a locality. First, the government must make the basic decision to establish libraries in local areas. As already shown, libraries are more easily understood as an institution by both government and the public than publishing is. Moreover, the locality is more likely to have experts in the library field than in publishing. The library should then be organized as a local resource center to handle all kinds of media, books, music and tapes. It should have an extension which collects local material — songs, any written material, and oral literature for analysis and arrangement in presentable form. The next step would be to put down on paper what is collected as attractively as possible, and if possible to let local people watch the process of transferring the material to paper. Once this is done, the library popularizes the material not only by showing it to people who come to the library, but by actually taking it to the people in the specific areas where the material was initially collected. It is only a short step from the library putting the material it collected on paper to encouraging other interested persons to do precisely the same thing with the cooperation of the library. This process could be tied up with the local education system — both at school and adult education levels. For example, if the local education authority decided that the primary school textbooks and the readers for the adult education classes should be in the local languages and produced locally, the library might be called in to organize the production of the required books. After producing the books, it could use its outreach channels to distribute them.

This article has attempted to show that Third World countries, by the fact of their history and recent experience, have basic handicaps which retard the growth of book production and dissemination. Reasons why the library has not had a strong impact on publishing, which should be providing the books it requires, have also been discussed. There are some steps which may be taken to stimulate book production, but it is quite clear that the most important factor is the Third World citizen. The Third World citizen is most willing to raise his income and standard of living, but is reluctant to match his eagerness with a change in work habits, values and attitudes. However good plans may be, no useful purpose will be achieved unless these plans can be vigorously and consistently followed.

There are, perhaps, already enough suggestions about how to develop the book field. Over the years, through conferences, reports and expert advice, Unesco has built up a large body of knowledge which can transform the book situation in the Third World within a decade. The problem which has not yet been solved (and for which a solution must be found) is how to get the Third World to match its desires with the hard work that guarantees the achievement of the desires.

In the final analysis, however, whatever aid is pumped into a country and whatever cooperation may be obtained from outside bodies, the best results will be achieved by means of experimentation, trying and failing, and trying again. It is therefore imperative that an organization in each country oversee the book scene in order to provide direction and encouragement. A national book council, made up of librarians, publishers and booksellers, together with a few government functionaries, will meet this need.

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