

THE BOOK INDUSTRY IN GHANA

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The book industry is discussed in this paper, with reference to the situation in Ghana. An analysis is made of all aspects of the industry, printing, publishing and bookselling. Problems confronting the industry, as well as suggestions for the future are also discussed.

1. The Nature of the Industry

The Book Industry is considered one of the most risky businesses alongside the film industry. It is a high risk area because it involves, from the outset, a huge capital outlay. On the other hand, the returns are so slow, so very low, and above all are spread over a long period. Indeed very few publishing houses make any profit on the first printing of any book. Instant bestsellers are few and far between. On the contrary steady plodders are generally the rule (one title published by the Oxford University Press is reported to have sold 21 copies in 21 years). Yet almost all authors believe that their manuscripts are potential bestsellers and would, on publication, sell millions.

The industry itself is an interesting mix; it is an art, a craft and a business, and the structure of the

Ghana Publishing Corporation (G.P.C.), for example reflects the three essential aspects of the industry. There are, first, the purely publishing functions which involve the soliciting and commissioning of manuscripts, developing and fashioning them into a publishable form. In other words the publisher secures the raw manuscripts; develops it editorially, designs it and arranges for its manufacture by a printer. The printing stage is the craft stage of the industry. The manuscript so designed by the publisher goes through several processes at the printing house, each stage requiring constant interaction between the publisher and author until the book rolls out of the press as an end-product. When the book comes out, the stage is then set for the third phase of the industry—the business aspect, which is normally referred to as bookselling or the book trade. This is perhaps the most important part for the publisher. He has to sell the book and make people want to buy it by promoting it if he is to get any returns on his investment. Indeed the promotion may start long before the book is released. Unless the

book is sold the publisher's capital gets locked up in a warehouse. It is therefore a very long and tiring road from the raw manuscript to the book in the hands of a reader. And many a manuscript does not make the journey.

In the 16th Century, printers were usually publishers of the books they produced; but while all publishers were not printers many were booksellers as well. Publishing as a business quite separate from bookselling began in the 19th Century. In the advanced countries therefore, the three aspects of the industry are quite distinct. A publishing house does not, for example, need to have a printing press of its own. Printing houses capable of doing all types of book work abound and printing itself has become a highly developed industry. A publisher can therefore buy print any time he so desires. Indeed major publishing houses in Britain and America buy print from Singapore and Malaysia because of low production costs. The publisher in these countries is also relieved of the direct sale and distribution of his books by a chain of bookshops, bookstands, kiosks or booths, and a developed system of public, special, research and academic libraries.

2. The Ghanaian Situation Publishing

In our context, apart from the risk-prone nature of the industry,

problems that are associated with one has to take into account all the generic term "developing country" and one begins to appreciate what the book industry entails.

The picture of publishing houses is a little different from what has been outlined above. There are quite a number of nondescript author-publisher-printer-book-seller and publisher-printer combinations. However the conventional pattern seems to be emerging. Of the 31 registered publishing houses only the Ghana Publishing Corporation (G.P.C.), Educational and Manufacturers Ltd. (Edupress), Waterville Publishing House (Presbyterian Press) and to some extent Sedco Publishing Co. (E.P. Press, Ho) have presses of their own. The other publishing houses invariably buy print from G.P.C. or any other local printer.

The growth in the publishing industry in Ghana is a recent phenomenon and it is in itself an interesting case study. Students of the book industry are of the view that education, libraries and publishing constitute a sort of trivium in the intellectual and cultural history of any country. Indeed there are those who believe that these areas are so closely related that "it is difficult to conceive how any one of them could flourish in the absence of one or two of them". Yet the present growth in the publishing sector in this country has not

come about as a result of expansion in our educational programmes or library services. On the contrary these and other social services have been run down since 1972. It is even more pertinent to note that the great boom in educational programmes particularly at the first and second cycles during the decade 1950-1960, saw no corresponding flourishing of indigenous publishing ventures whether state-sponsored or privately owned. Indeed not a single publishing house was established during the period and United Kingdom publishing houses like Oxford University Press, Longmans, Macmillan, Evans, "found themselves in the centre of an active market" as they were called upon to supply the bulk of textbooks and related materials for all the schools. The State thus had to intervene by setting up the Ghana Publishing Corporation apparently because private ventures in this sector were not forthcoming. The recent growth in the publishing industry may be partly explained by the promulgation of the Investment Policy Decree (1976) which banned overseas publishing houses from operating in the country.

Young as many of these publishing houses are they have demonstrated to the world what they are capable of doing. Indeed by the work of some of the publishing houses, Ghana has established itself as a source of good children's books

in Africa. G.P.C. set the pace with world acclaimed children's books **Tawia Goes To Sea** (1970) by Meshack Asare which has been translated into Japanese, French, German, Danish with Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish and Greenland editions in preparation. De Graft Hansen's **Papa And The Magic Marble** (G.P.C., 1973); and **The Fetish Hideout** (G.P.C., 1976); and T. E. Enin's **Seidu Drives His Father's Cow** (G.P.C., 1975) have been translated into Russian.

One of the first five titles released by Edupress in 1981, **The Brassman's Secret** by Meshack Asare won the Noma Award for Publishing In Africa in 1982. Reviewing this book, Hans Zell of the **African Book Publishing Record** said among other things: "to produce a book of this sort under the current conditions it amounts to something of a service achievement." Against a background of everpresent shortages (then) of all printing materials including paper, defective equipment and lack of spare parts, excessive import duty, high inflation and unstable currency and foreign exchange problems, Hans Zell's statement was no hyperbole. But of this later! Ghanaian publishing houses, largely through on-the-job training, have nevertheless acquired sufficient expertise to be able to challenge their counter-parts elsewhere.

Printing Facilities

Ghanaian entrepreneurs went into the printing industry by the turn of the Century much earlier than their counter-parts in publishing. This was perhaps due to the early introduction of Presses into the country by various missionary groups. The Methodist Book Depot (Wesleyan) was established in 1882 followed by the Catholics in 1903. The Basel Mission did not establish its own Press until 1904. Before then all their publications were printed and published in Basel, Switzerland. Yet the study of the local languages and the production of literature in the local languages has been more decisively cultivated in the areas they operated than anywhere else in the country. Between 1907 and 1928, and then between 1932 and 1940 there was a virtual boom in the printing industry. At present it is estimated that there are about 170 printing presses in the country. Amu Djoleto in his book, **Books and Reading in Ghana**, (UNESCO, 1985) gives an interesting picture of the printing houses in Ghana. Of the 170 or so houses 100 are located in Accra alone; 20 in Kumasi, 10 in Sekondi/Takoradi, 6 in Tema, 5 in Koforidua, 4 in Ho, 4 in Akim Oda/Asamankese, 3 in Cape Coast, 3 in Agona Swedru, 3 in Tarkwa, 2 in Bibiani and 2 in Tamale which serve the Northern, Upper West and Upper East Regions. Amu Djoleto further observes

that only 25 of these presses can handle bookwork; I would put the number at 15 and most of these are located in Accra. We are thus presented with an unbalanced picture of book production facilities in Ghana, not to mention that of distribution. A Bawku-based author with a potentially good manuscript has to travel down to the South to see possible publishers of his manuscript. The chances are that he may not make the journey at all and leave the manuscript to gather dust.

Most of the presses in Ghana are equipped with old letterpress machines which have been phased out in Europe and America. As a result they face acute spare parts problems. There are, however a few houses that have the most up-to-date printing machines and equipment in the country. Yet the interest of these houses in book work is problematic. Bookwork is complicated, time-consuming and expensive and many of these houses would prefer to print various forms for the Ministry of Health, to printing, for example a title for the JSS programme. Many of them have not been involved in large print-runs before and the contracts awarded to some of them under the JSS programme may be their first baptism of fire.

3. Problems

We have attempted to sketch in the foregoing paragraphs the

nature of the book industry generally and some of the infrastructures for the industry in Ghana. It may be pertinent at this stage to focus attention on some of the problem areas. These are legion, and the following may be listed for discussion:

- a. Weak Manufacturing base
- b. Unstable currency and high cost of raw materials
- c. Limited reading public
- d. Poor distribution facilities.

a. Weak Manufacturing Base

The book industry in Ghana is one in which every single item needed for production processes has to be imported—machines and related equipment, and spare parts on the one hand, and raw materials, paper, paper boards, plates, films, chemicals, matrices, inks, stitching wire and even printer's glue, on the other. Paper, for example, is the life-blood of any book industry but Ghana does not produce its own culture paper—newsprint, printing and writing paper. This places the industry on a very weak manufacturing base. All the items listed above are needed in the production of any single book. The industry is so integrated that the non-availability of any one item invariably delays production processes. A manuscript, for example may go through all the stages at the Press only to get to the Bindery and start

gathering dust, simply because there is no printer's glue. Obviously, this state of affairs does not conduce to the growth of a healthy and viable book industry.

b. Unstable Currency and High Cost of Materials

The perennial weakness of the Cedi has more than anything else compounded the problems in the industry. Indeed no industry suffers more in a depressed economy in a developing country than the book industry. This may explain the near total collapse of the industry between 1975 and 1983 when publications schedules of various publishing houses were thrown out of gear because of the non-availability of raw materials. The unstable nature of our currency invariably adds to production costs. The Ghana book publishing industry thus has been operating against a background of ever-present shortages of all printing materials, defective equipment and lack of spare parts, excessive import duty, high inflation and foreign exchange problems.

About 2 years ago the cost of 1 reel of White Offset Printing Paper was C11,000; it rose to C16,000 and subsequently to C30,000 within a matter of a year. And at the time of writing, 1 reel of White Offset Printing Paper costs between C85,000 and C150,000 depending upon the size. Apart from fluctua-

tion in the Cedi, the publisher has to contend with a near pernicious tariffs system. The following table is pointedly instructive:

Item	Cost	Duty and Charges	Total
1. Ink ...	936,237.18	970,066.00	1,906,303.18
2. Paper ...	12,998,285.23	13,467,962.00	26,466,247.23
	<u>¢13,934,522.41</u>	<u>¢14,438,028.00</u>	<u>¢28,372,550.41</u>

The cost per ton of paper is therefore ¢189,045.00 and the cost of 1 reel of paper is ¢148,574.00. The table clearly shows that even the duty and charges on paper are more than the cost of the paper itself. This does not seem to make sense. The publisher does not have to contend with soaring cost of paper alone but all printing materials. In addition to these, printing houses like the Tema Press pay 10% Excise Duty and 10% Sales Tax. With the ever-increasing rate of the Cedi vis-a-vis the Dollar there is no way in which the cost of book production may be scaled down.

To these must be added the inflationary rise in salaries and other goods and services and one begins to appreciate the problems facing the book industry as a whole. It now costs about ¢1.5 million to print 5,000 copies of a book of about 150 pages. This may only be the printing cost. To arrive at a selling price of the book a publisher may have

to multiply the unit cost of production by 5 to enable him to pay 10% royalty to the author, 25-30% discount to booksellers, his own over-

heads, bank charges, promotion and complimentary copies and a profit margin of about 5%.

c. Limited Reading Public

Publishing in a developing country like ours is essentially educational publishing, that is to say, publishing for schools and colleges. It is in this area that a publisher can hope to have large print-runs to make the venture profitable. Indeed most publishing houses in this country do not break even on the first printing of any book. When however the print-runs are sufficiently large the unit cost of production reduces and it is possible here to make some profit. Educational publishing is regarded as the bread and butter area of the book industry. This perhaps explains why the book trade collapsed in 1963 with the introduction of the Free Text-books Scheme by the Government. When the Ministry of Education decided to write and produce its

own books for the schools it thus deprived the publishing industry of the one important factor that could make the whole industry viable. It is therefore gratifying and a welcome development to note that the Ministry of Education/Ghana Education Service have decided to involve local publishers in the development and production of textbooks for Ghanaian schools. This is a unique development and no effort should be spared to make the Co-Publishing project between the Ministry of Education/Ghana Education Service on the one hand, and the 5 publishing houses including the Ghana Publishing Corporation succeed.

The reading public in this country and for that matter most African countries is not a large one and most of us do purposive or utilitarian reading. Our educational system seems to encourage a cult of the certificate or the diploma. Reading for pleasure is statistically negligible and this makes educational publishing very crucial to the whole book industry. If publishers should survive then they must have some of their titles adopted for use in schools. Most Ghanaian children, and for that matter, most African children, see and handle books for the first time in the classroom. There is hardly anything for the pre-school child. The book and for that matter reading has thus become so inseparably associated with

the school/classroom, that a disturbing impression has been created that outside the classroom the book does not matter. And certain social factors have tended to reinforce this impression. In the first place most parents in Africa are illiterate, and even where they are literate they do not read much. As a result the home which forms an important part of the reading environment for the child does not function as such. At home therefore the child thus lacks both the example and the precept because the adults around him cannot or do not read; for a child in such an environment the book and reading properly belongs to the school.

Neither the future of the book industry nor its cultural role can be guaranteed until the juvenile readers of today who are the book buyers of tomorrow come to regard books as an essential domestic commodity. The reading of imaginative or factual informational literature is as much an asset to the development of the child as the reading of textbooks. Indeed it provides the child with, in Yeats' phrase, "not what he would, but the right twigs for an eagle's nest." Any efforts to reform our educational system and any attempts towards the creation of a reading society in Ghana should first recognize the innovative and fundamental role of children's literature.

The Ghana Publishing Corporation and other Ghanaian publishing houses have a good list of children's books written by Ghanaians with African cultural background. But the patronage of these books is rather poor. Hardly any of them have been adopted as even supplementary readers in the schools.

d. Poor Distribution Facilities

The business aspect of the book industry depends for effective operation on the availability of bookshops, book-stands and a well-developed system of libraries. The once flourishing book trade collapsed after the introduction of the Free Textbooks Scheme in 1963 and the survivors have only resorted to selling stationery items and greeting cards. The uneven distribution of publishing and printing facilities in the country is even more disturbingly reflected in the book distribution facilities in the country. Of the twenty-four (24) bookshops listed in the country, 18 are located in Accra alone. One does not need to conduct a survey to arrive at the conclusion that a large number of potential readers in this country are denied access to books. Out of the 24 bookshops only 4 have branches in major areas of the country. It is perhaps only the Ghana Publishing Corporation which can be described as having a sufficiently nation-wide distribution centres in the country.

Reading and book-buying are cognate habits. Because the reading habit is not sufficiently developed book-buying is limited to the barest minimum prescribed textbooks. And the cost of the books are rather high because of factors outlined above. In a depressed economy like ours where survival becomes crucial, book buying becomes a luxury in which only a few can indulge. While the Ghana Library Board could have been a decisive factor in this regard by establishing a chain of regional, district and more importantly a network of school-libraries that organization is so starved of funds that it is only barely surviving. The need for libraries and in particular school and children's libraries does not seem to be a felt need—and felt at the level where determining decisions are made.

4. Prospects for the Future

We may have painted a grim picture of the Ghana book industry in these pages. Our aim was not however to paint such a picture; on the contrary we sought to tell the story as it is with a view to assisting the Commission in its work. Truth like a surgical operation hurts, but it also cures. This notwithstanding the present reviewer is of the view that the long term prospects for the book industry are good; indeed better than at any other time in the history of the country. This is due

to the following measures introduced by the Government which augur well for the development of the book industry:

- (a) Economic Liberalization Policy
- (b) Establishment of Paper and Pulp Industry
- (c) Training Facilities for the book industry personnel.

Because of the Economic Liberalization Policy initiated by the PNDC Government it is now possible for the first time in many years to procure printing materials from the open market without the publisher necessarily applying for an import licence and all that. Though the cost of these materials are prohibitive it is at least possible to plan publication programmes and above all be able to meet publication schedules. There are people who have money abroad who are ready to bring in these items at the request of any publishing house. The days of shortages of raw materials for the printing industry seem to be over.

Perhaps the most important measure initiated by the Government which holds a lot of promise for the development of the book industry is the establishment of a Pulp Industry at Daboase in the Western Region. Four thousand (4,000) hectares of pulp, we are informed, are under cultivation in

preparation for the establishment of a Paper Mill. A very bold and significant step has therefore been taken to produce Ghana's own culture paper. This is undoubtedly a positive step which should be vigorously pursued. Some of the most important factors for a pulp and paper industry are water and electricity which Ghana has in abundance. It is estimated that Ghana imports annually between 100,000 and 120,000 metric tons of paper and paper boards. With the cost of paper around \$900 per ton plus \$150 for freight the country stands to make substantial savings by the establishment of this pulp industry.

The establishment of a training programme for the book industry at the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, is also a step in the right direction. Until recently most Ghanaian printers and publishers had been largely trained on the job. But it is now possible to start from the Ghana Publishing Corporation's own Training Schools which prepares candidates up to the Final City & Guilds in Printing, through the proposed advanced programme in the same field by the Ministry of Education at the Tema Technical Institute up to Degree programme at the University of Science & Technology, Kumasi, in all aspects of the book industry. This is a feature not

matched by any African country south of the Sahara or even south of the Limpopo.

The current educational reforms in this country will also induce the concomittant expansion in the book industry. It is strongly suggested here that the Government should de-emphasize its total involvement in the development and production of textbooks and leave the field to local entrepreneurs. The Ministry may concern itself with determining the content of manuscripts and approving these for use in the schools. With the establishment of the Ghana Book Development Council a national book development policy has been evolved and this institution, and the Curriculum Research and Development Division of the Ministry of Education can guide publishing houses on the book needs of the schools.

5. Suggestions For Action

It is strongly suggested that the Government invite entrepreneurs to go into the establishment of plants for the production of raw materials such as Glue, Stitching Wire, Films, Plates, and Chemicals for the book industry. Messrs. Devag Ltd., have started with Printer's Glue but the cost appears to be prohibitive. A few years ago 1 drum of Printer's Glue cost around C8,000; it is at present C48,000.

Further, the Government should seriously review duty and taxes on paper and related raw materials for book work. Under the Florence Convention to which Ghana is signatory, books per se do not attract duty yet in Ghana, paper for book work, i.e. culture paper attracts a ridiculously high duty of almost 100%. This places undue hardship on the book industry. A reduction in the duty and taxes on all raw material for the book industry will go a long way in bringing down the cost of books in this country.

Finally, it is noted with concern that almost one half of the population of Ghana and the rest of Africa is under the age of 15. About 60 per cent and 30 per cent of this group is enrolled in primary and secondary schools, respectively. On the other hand 50 per cent of the adult male and 74 per cent of the adult female population is illiterate. In at least ten African countries the illiteracy levels for men and women are over 80 per cent and 90 per cent respectively. These figures clearly seem to suggest that the reading public in Ghana and Africa consists, in the main, of young people. In such a situation the emphasis in any publishing programme on the continent should be on children's literature. Indeed in no part of the world, is there such an urgent need to produce and

distribute children's books as in Africa today. The Education Commission is seriously urged to look into this factor in its deliberations and place due emphasis on the development of publishing pro-

grammes for children's literature —which will prepare our children for the challenges of the 21st century which, the Japanese have suggested, will be the era of the information society.