

# Problems of the Book Publishing Industry in Nigeria: The Onibonje Publishers Experience after 50 Years

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## **Introduction**

Book publishing has been defined and discussed by various authors. Granis (1967), defined it "making public-to send forth among the people-the words and pictures the creative minds have produced, that editors have worked over, that printers have reproduced. He further explained it as "a formidable succession of activities no one of which can by itself, be called publishing. It is only when a manuscript has been transformed into a book and then distributed to its intended market place, that the process of publishing is complete. Lee (1979) defined publishing using its characteristics. According to him, there are three crucial components of book publishing. They are: book editing, book design, and book production.

## **Methodology**

This research consists of secondary (internal files and reports, lists, and catalogues of publications) and primary data (interviews asking open-ended questions).

## **Early History of Book Publishing in Nigeria**

The very first printing press in Nigeria was established in Calabar in 1846 by Rev. Hope Waddell of the Presbyterian church of Scotland Mission. The press was used to print Bible lessons and later arithmetical books for schools. (Ajibade 2003)

In 1854 another missionary based in Abeokuta, Rev Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), established a press. Five years later, (1859) he used it to print the very first newspaper in Nigeria "Iwe Irohin". From that effort grew what we know today as the CMS Press, which has published thousands of books in Nigeria.

## **Background to the Study**

Onibonje Publishers is located at Felele layout, Molete area Ibadan. Onibonje was established in 1958 by Mr. Gabriel Omotayo Onibonje. The company celebrated her 50th anniversary in 2009. It was started as a family venture, one man business otherwise known as sole proprietorship (Company owned, financed and managed by an individual. The person decides on everything. This company is likely to have limited funds and personnel); with eight (8) persons and later grew to one hundred and fifty workers (150).

Due to the politics of neo-colonial publishing, Onibonje Publishers philosophy is to promote indigenous authors and talents. To provide reading materials relevant to the

Nigerian context; reading materials that enhances our curriculum, cultural values and indigenous language. The country's 1989 constitution, deals with the educational objectives of state policy. The sub-section 19(4), says simply that "Government shall encourage the learning of indigenous languages." The policy mandated the teaching at the Primary and Junior Secondary school levels of the child's mother tongue or, in the alternative, some indigenous language of wider communication in his place of domicile

The company publishes educational books to cover: Pre – primary, Primary and Post primary levels of education. Books to assist in both teaching and learning process; covering the entire curriculum .The company usually strives to identify Nigerians who are highly skilled and talented writers. Onibonoje has devoted both time and resources in publishing mostly school books.

The company has only one office in Nigeria. It has a chief executive officer CEO, who is in charge of all operations; technical and administrative. All other persons report to him. Apart from the managing director (MD), who acts in the absence of the CEO. Other units include technical services, personnel, editorial and accounts.

The company has since inception to date published about eight hundred (800) titles in subjects like Accounts and Book keeping, Business studies, Commerce, Economics, Home economics, Civics, Citizenship education, Geography, Government, History, Social studies, Agricultural Science, Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Statistics, Physics, Creative Writing, Literatures, Yoruba, Creative arts, Christian Religion Knowledge (CRK), Education, Social Studies, Health Education, Family living, English, and junior African Literature. Attached are comprehensive copies of the company's publications

The company has produced textbooks which has and still supports the educational curriculum of the country. Considering when it was established, at the time when the Nigerian child had to make do with foreign or totally Christian literature. Onibonoje came up with literature with African aesthetics. In this regard, Onibonoje can be said to have promoted and still promotes literacy since it can boast of 60% output of publishing, in indigenous languages.

## **Challenges**

A SWOT analysis will enable us to identify (at a glance) basic problems and possible opportunities. The SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis is a technique used by organizations to appraise in details, its internal working in order to come up with ways to improve its operations by building on its strengths, eliminating its weaknesses, exploiting the opportunities and avoiding the threats. In doing so, it would identify critical factors that can affect its operations and will be able to plan for the future.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualified and highly experienced staff</li> <li>• office equipment and space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Severe infrastructural problems</li> <li>• Undercapitalised</li> <li>• Inadequate knowledge about the local syllabus</li> <li>• No clear objectives of the type of publications</li> <li>• No marketing programme</li> <li>• No clear cut budgeting</li> <li>• Insufficient staff</li> <li>• Too few titles published</li> <li>• The company is old but not widely known</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law to teach vernacular in schools in all primary and secondary schools</li> <li>• Proliferation of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in the country.</li> <li>• Advocacy of reading culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The problem of bribery before getting books recommended by ministry of Education</li> <li>• Bookshops are not willing to stock non-recommended books</li> <li>• Piracy</li> <li>• Preference for imported textbooks</li> </ul>

## Problems of Book Publishing in Nigeria

### Severe infrastructural problems:

At the time of this research, there was no stable electricity; the interviews disclosed that they could not even remember the last time there was power supply from the Power Holdings Company of Nigeria (PHCN). From observations, the only surviving generator they have may soon pack up due to age and over use. Power cuts are rampant in all urban centres, and several non-metropolitan areas lack electricity supply entirely.

While examining the problems of Nigerian publishing with special focus on NEPA, NITEL, and NIPOST. Adesanoye (1995) has named the three as partners in inefficiency. Nigerian government promise to generate 6,000 megawatts of electricity by December 2009, is still an illusion for now and Nigerians still don't enjoy electricity supply. In 2009 several industries had to move out of the country to other neighboring countries for reasons bothering on this issue. Publishers are therefore are faced squarely with the high cost of running generators for its day to day activities.

### Lack of a marketing programme:

There is the problem of information on books published in the continent. Adebisi (2009) stated with disappointment that the main challenge facing the publishing industry in almost all African countries was the dearth of information on what's being produced. Lack of reliable data on a number of titles published annually in different categories was also identified as one of the factors not helping the industry to advance for a larger share of the market in educational books. He charged APNET to take this up as an urgent responsibility to build the expected capacity. If book sellers and buyers are not aware of the existence of a particular book, how can such a book be stocked and bought.

The internet which is now been used widely in developed countries to advertise and sell books is still a luxury item which is out of reach of the majority in African countries.

### **Self-Publishing:**

The self-publishing option is one in which the author manages the overall publishing, distribution and marketing processes him/herself. This option gives the author much more personal control of the whole process and allows him/her to earn more money per copy than through a commercial publisher. It also involves a lot of work by the self-publisher who is responsible for performing all of the functions and services that a commercial publisher would normally look after.

This model is normally less time-consuming in terms of elapsed time, since there is no manuscript submission and approval process involved. On average, the self-publishing process can save 6 to 12 months over the commercial publisher model. Self-publishing leads to too many mediocre books being published and Minimal marketing support for the vast majority of books being published

### **Undercapitalization:**

Onibonoje book publishing company opens only between Monday-Wednesday (three days), as a measure to cut cost. As at the time the time of this research, the company has only twelve 12 staff, compared to its initial start off of 350 members of staff. There was staff downsizing; also a measure to cut cost. Owing largely to the drastic devaluation of the naira.. The purchasing power of the majority of consumers has fallen drastically. Nwankwo (1993), states that "crisis and business do not go together, more so when the economic environment is already traumatized. Crisis is the situation in which Nigeria has been. Business, particularly that of publishing had anything but fun since then". Odozi (2009) observed that when faced with the large problem of financing a major book project, the publisher cannot but apply to banks for loan; in a depressed economy like Nigeria's, the chargeable interest is fixed at 17% . Due to undercapitalization, Okilagwe (1996) foresees that the book publishing industry will continue to record stunted growth.

### **Substandard production:**

It is no longer news that publishers in Nigeria have resorted to the use of low-grade materials (e.g., newsprint instead of high grammage wood-free paper) in book production while editorial and design proficiency have declined drastically due to inadequate training facilities. There are now many instances of books published in the country, even those produced by some of the major publishing houses, where pages are not straight and are smudged with large blobs of ink. Uneven print density and print images, barely legible half-tones, poor finishing/binding and various other production flaws are now common in Nigeria . The majority of books produced in the country do not meet internationally acceptable standards in physical and visual quality, or in the quality of content.( Ifaturoti, 1997)

### **Inadequate productivity of Nigeria's paper mills:**

There are three pulp and paper mills in Nigeria with a total installed pulp capacity of 102,000 mt per annum and a paper capacity of 207,000 mt per annum. Since 1990, the production of newsprint had been declining from 31,000 mt out of an installed capacity of

100,000 mt per annum, to only 3,000 mt, in 1993. The Nigerian Newsprint Manufacturing Company (NNMC) had remained shut since 1994, due to problems of spare parts and other logistic problems. The Nigerian Paper Mill (NPM) at Jebba produces industrial grade paper, specifically kraft and kraft linerboard. The old paper machine had a capacity of 12,000 mt but since 1994, a new machine with capacity of 65,000 mt has gone on stream. Production of paperboard in 1990 was 12,498 mt and declined progressively to 2313 mt in 1992 from where a gradual up turn began. Paperboard production by 1996 was 19,744 mt and production had remained at this level. The third mill is the Nigerian National Paper Manufacturing Company Ltd (NNPMC) Iwopin with a proposed installed capacity of 100,000 mt/yr of printing and writing paper. After a protracted history of delays only 30,000 mt/yr of printing and writing paper was installed by 1995. Test production with imported pulp resulted in 2,500 mt of printing and writing paper in 1995 and 966 mt in 1996. Production has not increased appreciably from this mill ever since. The production in the pulp and paper industry has been constrained by inadequate working capital, spare parts and long fiber availability.

### **Book reading culture:**

Atinmo (1998) traces the cultural and linguistics factors responsible for lack of reading for leisure among the neo-literates. She attributed the poor reading habits of such people to the entrenched oral forms of social communication, and noted that even such people wanted to read, it would be difficult for publishers to meet the reading materials needs of small populations whose local languages might not exist in written forms.

Adegoke (2001), observed "that the majority of people who are literate hardly read for pleasure. Students for example, tend to read just to pass their examinations, many hardly read books outside their disciplines. Nigerian graduates of all levels are often not really information literate and /or sophisticated

Okwilagwe (2001), disagrees with all the afore mentioned. He says, "Nigeria has a good reading culture and Nigerians buy books." he further buttressed that Nigerians are mostly utilitarian users of book.

Piracy and copyright in the electronic age:

Echebiri A. (2005) says there is an alarming growth of book pirates in Nigeria. He went ahead to say that "Nigerian book pirates are even now known to employ sales representatives of their own and often time succeed in selling books to, and oftentimes unsuspecting or willfully colluding school officials." Okwilagwe (2001) opines that books are not adequately available for purchase in Nigeria and that this is the genesis of book piracy and photocopy activities in the country.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

In view of all identified challenges and considering the prospects of book publishing in Nigeria, the following is recommended:

Paper mill: Government should establish other paper mill other than the three mills in Nigeria (Jebba for industrial paper, Oku-Iboku for newsprint and Iwopin for wood free paper) are facilitated to produce to their full capacity. Possibly, these three paper mills should be privatized.

- **INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT:** The infrastructure in Nigeria should be developed to the level required to sustain the publishing houses. In the meantime, governments and policymakers in these countries should be putting in place an environment to enable their local book publishing industries recover from the recession.
- **ADOPT NEW TECHNOLOGIES:** Many of the established publishing houses in African publishers should turn to the new technologies on the internet for their publications. It is unwise to wait for nine to twelve months for a book to be published. This undue delay can lead many to self publishing since it is easy to publish on the web without delay.
- **BOOK EXPOSITIONS AND READING CAMPAIGNS:** There is high need to regularly organize book expositions and reading campaigns.
- Governments in Nigeria should create favourable book publishing atmosphere which will impact meaningfully on book development. financial support should also be given to publishers.

In conclusion, this paper has highlighted the pivotal challenges faced by book publishers in Nigeria. To contend with these problems, publishers need to make serious commitment to invest and develop the indigenous book market; the government needs to attach more strides to support small and struggling publishers with financial subsidies, it also needs to apply more efforts at promoting literacy and the reading culture. Until then, book publishing will continue to face hardships.

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Abstract: The paper treats vernacular publishing: The Nigerian Experience. It gives a succinct definition of vernacular, and publishing thereby arriving at vernacular publishing as the ability of making known to the public. Announcing to the public the available literature in the indigenous languages and the dialect of a region or a particular country “ Nigeria.” Oxford university press.<http://www.grammar.about.com/od/tz/vernacularterm.htm>. retrieved 02/05.2013 [4]. Iwu, J. J. (2010) Problems of books publishing industry in Nigeria: The Onibonje Publishers Experience after 50 Years. Publication of the Pacific Northwest Library Association. [5]. Adejoke L. A. (2001).