

# Editorial Note

This issue of *Development Dialogue* is mainly devoted to indigenous publishing in Africa and most of the material published here was first presented at the second seminar on this broad theme held in Arusha, Tanzania, in March 1996, the so-called Arusha II seminar. The first Arusha seminar was organised in April 1984 and the material arising from it was published in *Development Dialogue* the same year (1984:1–2). An ‘Arusha III’ seminar, focusing on writer–publisher relations, was held at the end of February 1998.

This issue also contains the long and interesting correspondence between Dag Hammarskjöld and the American writer John Steinbeck. Their contact was established soon after Hammarskjöld had taken up his post as Secretary-General of the United Nations and continued up to his death in September 1961. In all, more than 30 letters were exchanged over an eight-year period.

At the end of this issue we publish two speeches given in memory of Göran Ohlin and Erskine Childers, who both worked very closely with the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation for many years. They both died in 1996.

Finally, we are reintroducing our section ‘Publications Received’. It has not been published for some time but will now appear regularly in *Development Dialogue*.

The active involvement of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, since the early 1980s, in indigenous publishing in Africa has been based on a firm conviction: namely, that a thriving autonomous publishing industry is essential to the intellectual and cultural health of a society and therefore to its development generally. As the paranoid behaviour of authoritarian regimes in suppressing ‘dissident’ literature demonstrates so clearly, the book is a powerhouse. It stands to reason that if books are predominantly written and supplied from the outside, particularly by the transnational corporations, their power to affect the development of the countries of the South will be similarly influenced by external interests, both political and economic. At their worst, these publications promote seriously distorted and dangerous messages about the history, culture and value of Third World societies. Nowhere has this tendency been more evident than on the continent of Africa.

Autonomous African publishing provides a vital corrective to cultural bias. More important still, it ensures—or should ensure—that books relevant to the needs and interests of African people are produced. Local publishers

have the opportunity to consult directly with different groups and sectors within their societies, and to encourage new writing. Publishing initiatives can grow out of community activities in health, education, agriculture and other areas, and thus represent a real contribution to endogenous, participatory development.

Indigenous African publishing has a seminal role to play in education. African countries still suffer from low literacy levels which can only be raised if, along with the provision of adequately trained and remunerated teachers, appropriate books are produced and made widely available. Publishers are among the chief players—others are ministries of education, teachers, and communities themselves—who need to be involved in the processes of discussing curricula and identifying the type and character of books required in schools and other educational institutions. Equally important, though, is the publishing of children's books, fiction and general books that will widen the knowledge base of a society, increase its problem-solving capacity and invigorate its culture.

The material presented in this issue of *Development Dialogue* is based on the seminar 'The Future of Indigenous Publishing in Africa', organised by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and held in Arusha, Tanzania, 25–28 March, 1996. The use of the word 'future' by the seminar directors was intentional. The notion of a future presupposes a present and a past, realities which by 1996 it was possible to claim for indigenous publishing in Africa. In the twelve years since the Foundation had organised its first seminar on developing autonomous publishing capacity in Africa (also in Arusha, in April 1984), African publishing had become a visible presence, with the appearance and survival of a significant number of small publishing houses, the indigenisation of some local branches of transnational companies and the establishment of national publishers associations in some countries. In strengthening and supporting the industry a number of initiatives undertaken over the years had played an important role: prominent among these are the African Publishers' Network (APNET), the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's loan guarantee scheme for Kenyan publishers, the Bellagio Publishing Network and various annual book fairs on the continent.

Indigenous African publishing still faces formidable problems, however. In most countries it operates within a national context of severe economic problems, debt, fragile or unstable political situations, weak educational infrastructure, declining literacy and increasing polarisation between rich and poor. It is not generally accorded the status it deserves by governments, who still tend to confuse book provision with book production and are con-

tent, especially when book famines are commonplace, for schools to be supplied with books from outside. World Bank interventions to increase the provision of textbooks have likewise favoured transnational publishers in the procurement of contracts.

Although there is, overall, far greater professionalism, skill and experience to be found among African publishing houses than a decade or so ago, marketing and distribution remain very weak. In Kenya, which along with Nigeria and South Africa has one of the best-developed publishing industries on the continent, a survey of all sectors of the book industry was recently undertaken by Ruth Makotsi and Lily Nyariki. Their report, published by East African Educational Publishers under the title *Publishing and Book Trade in Kenya*, shows that many of the most elementary promotional activities are neglected by African publishers. It also identifies weaknesses at the level of distribution, agencies, bookshops and libraries—indeed throughout the book chain.

Lack of working and venture capital is perhaps the most severe handicap that African publishers face. As the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's loan guarantee scheme has shown, small publishers who are able to gain access to commercial credit and who manage their finances carefully can see their businesses develop exponentially, although servicing loans when interest rates are as high as 30–40 per cent can be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Concessional credit from the World Bank and other international and regional finance institutions, from which agriculture and certain other industries have benefited, has not been made available to African publishing.

Other serious constraints on the development of indigenous publishing include the absence of national book policies and even of clear education policies in some countries, the lack of support for publishing in African languages—resulting in the denial of reading material to perhaps 50 per cent of the continent's population—and the demise of most of the once-flourishing literary magazines published in Africa which provided an essential outlet for new writers.

It was with the objective of adopting a strategic approach towards these problems that the seminar on 'The Future of Indigenous Publishing in Africa' was held. Directed by Walter Bgoya (Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, Tanzania), Henry Chakava (East African Educational Publishers, Kenya) and Per Gedin (Gedins Förlag, Sweden), the seminar brought together 30 participants, mainly publishers, but also librarians, bankers and policy-makers.

We publish here the three framework papers given by the seminar directors: a general overview by Walter Bgoya; a paper by Henry Chakava on marketing and distribution in which he throws down the gauntlet to African publishers to take these aspects of their job far more seriously; and a discussion by Per Gedin of the technological revolution, especially in printing techniques, that is changing the face of publishing worldwide. These are preceded by the text of a speech by His Excellency Benjamin William Mkapa, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, expressing strong support for indigenous publishing that is genuinely responsive to the cultural context in Africa.

We also reproduce the full seminar report, issued separately shortly after the seminar, which presents the key issues raised and discussed by participants: the need for publishing and related industries to be accorded the status of strategic industries by African governments; the material and social challenges involved in the creation of a reading culture, the need for clear education and book policies to underpin all practical efforts, and a range of practical initiatives, existing and potential, to improve marketing and distribution and to secure finance (including buy-back schemes and joint ventures). A set of Summary Conclusions adopted by seminar participants is the final item in this main section of the journal.

Clearly there is scope for individual publishers to improve their own professional operations. However, for indigenous African publishing to play a vital and central, rather than a marginal, role in the overall development of the continent will require more concerted, collective efforts to change the attitudes of the powers-that-be. In this respect, national publishers associations are the best placed to lobby their own governments for special support, including a higher priority for the publishing industry in governments' representations to international and regional finance institutions; likewise, APNET needs to redouble its independent efforts vis-à-vis these institutions on behalf of the African publishing industry, as well as steadily developing its training and networking functions.

Finally, the all-important area of writer-publisher relations, especially for the revitalisation of African literature, was felt by seminar participants to deserve further attention and, to this end, they recommended that a seminar of African writers and publishers be organised as soon as practicable. As we go to press with this issue of *Development Dialogue*, the report on an African Writers-Publishers Seminar ('Arusha III'), organised jointly by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the African Books Collective, is ready for distribution.

The correspondence between Dag Hammarskjöld and John Steinbeck, which is presented in this issue with an introduction by Carl F. Hovde, ranges from short polite notes and pertinent comments on politics and literature to a grandiose and extraordinary vision by Steinbeck of a United Nations nobility, a group of wise men and women who would advise the leadership of the organisation on politically and morally problematic issues. The correspondence gives ample evidence—as did the letters exchanged between Dag Hammarskjöld and the American writer Djuna Barnes published in *Development Dialogue* 1987:2—of how important it was for Hammarskjöld to stay in close contact with writers—and also artists and musicians—in the midst of his extremely demanding and time-consuming job as Secretary-General. These contacts stimulated him enormously and at the same time greatly inspired those he corresponded with.

A personality who is often mentioned in the letters is the Swedish painter Bo Beskow, who had known Steinbeck since 1937 and who brought him together with Hammarskjöld soon after he had accepted the Directorship-General. Steinbeck also mentions several times his visits to Sweden and the celebration of the Swedish Midsummer. We are fortunate in being able to print in this issue portraits of Hammarskjöld and Steinbeck painted by Bo Beskow and a few unique photographs of the three men relaxing during the Swedish summer, very far from world politics and demanding publishers.

Göran Ohlin first made contact with the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation in the early 1970s when, after many years abroad serving at American Universities and at the OECD Development Centre, he took up a Chair in Economics at the University of Uppsala. He belonged from the very beginning to the editorial advisory committee of this journal and many are the articles that he has read, advised the editors about and given constructive comments on. In the last few years of his life he became a member of the Board of Trustees and, finally, Chairman of the Board. It is sad that he never had a real chance to realise his many creative ideas about the future work of the Foundation.

Erskine Childers was a man of a very special kind. As well as having a clear and uncompromising vision of what fair development and social justice are about, he was also a man who paid attention to minute particulars. His broad knowledge, ranging from most UN issues discussed over three decades in a variety of fora to the pertinent details of book design, proofreading and printing made him a colleague whom it was always a great pleasure to work

with. When he first told the story about how as a teenager he built his own car and got it approved by the authorities, we felt that here was a visionary mind and a creative builder, a person who exemplified the rare combination of great theoretical knowledge and earthbound practical work so much needed in today's world.

# The Cultural Context of Publishing in Africa

By H.E. Benjamin William Mkapa, President of the United Republic of Tanzania

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*The Dag Hammarskjöld Seminar on the Future of Indigenous Publishing in Africa was given the valuable endorsement of the President of the United Republic of Tanzania when he addressed the seminar in person on the penultimate day (the text of his speech is reproduced below). Pledging his own and his Government's full support for indigenous publishing, he nevertheless called on publishers to remember that 'the culturing of minds need not be based on books and other publications alone'. 'We cannot rightly talk of promoting indigenous publishing', he contended, 'without publishing indigenous literature in its proper cultural context. Education is not a tool to sever us from our traditional societies but a tool to better adapt our traditional societal values to new knowledge and the requirements of modern times. ... Until African authors, editors and publishers can begin to see the book industry in these terms all efforts at promoting a truly indigenous publishing capacity will not succeed.'*

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I should like to begin by thanking the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the Directors of the Seminar for granting me the honour to address such an august assembly of people and institutions involved and concerned with the development of an indigenous publishing capacity in Africa. But before I proceed, it is my pleasant duty to add my own words of welcome to all our guests. I know that for most of you, this is not your first visit to Tanzania in general and Arusha in particular. But I want you to know that we are glad to have you with us once again, and I hope you have been feeling, and will continue to feel, quite at home.

My love for books is well known, and that is one of the reasons why it did not need much persuasion to bring me here to share your concerns and express my wholehearted support for your endeavours to develop an indigenous publishing capacity in Africa. For, as John Milton, the famous English poet, in defending the freedom of the press in his *Areopagitica*, said: 'A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.'

With such a passion for the written word, I can be forgiven for grieving about the shortage of books in our schools at all levels, and the problems facing the publishing industry in Tanzania which remains acutely inadequate even in relation to the status of publishing elsewhere in Africa.

I have, over the years, been invited to Book Week events organised by the Publishers Association of Tanzania at which I came into contact with Tanzanian publishers and learned of their plight. I can truly say that it must be a labour of love that keeps them going.

Likewise, in my previous capacity as Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education, I was constantly aware of the acute shortage of books in our universities and other institutions of higher learning, and its implications for our students and inevitably for our society. In primary and secondary schools it is not uncommon to find a whole class sharing only one or two textbooks!

So, my coming here will, I hope, signify to you and to the People of Tanzania my profound interest in this subject and my Government's recognition of the importance of the publishing industry in Tanzania, and by extension in the entire African continent.

In my campaign for the Presidency, I made a pledge that in the five years of office, my Government would reinvigorate the literacy campaign of the 1970s and early 1980s which gave to our country a rate of literacy that was equalled by no other country in Africa, but which we now know has gone down considerably—in large part because of there being no books for the newly literate. This was part of our election manifesto and I intend to fulfil it to the best of Government's ability. I know also that such a campaign would translate into more demand for books and more money for publishers, for book distributors, and so on all along the publishing chain. We would hope that the international community will support our efforts in this great enterprise.

I can see that the problem facing government and publishers will initially be the search for effective mechanisms that will realise our common ultimate aims. I know banks do not lend to publishers and I also know that government is not a good or even capable lender itself. I know from experience that not all publishers are good managers of finances and so on both sides there is work to be done to ensure that we cannot be held responsible for failure. My Government will be happy to be educated about publishing and about a positive role that it can play to make it easier and worthwhile for the industry and its captains. So, publishers in Tanzania need not hesitate to raise matters with relevant authorities in government. Indeed, I am sure it is not only in Tanzania that such pressure from publishers must be constantly applied in order to achieve the desired results. I really do believe that serious lobbying is the only way to get things working. It is only in this way that government

can keep abreast of the realities of the publishing situation, and ensure policies are matched as nearly as practicable with the interests of publishing and society.

Twelve years ago you convened your first seminar on 'Developing of Autonomous Publishing Capacity in Africa' here in Arusha. I have been informed that it was a very successful seminar which addressed all aspects of the publishing industry in Africa, analysing the current situation and its shortcomings, and coming out with a statement consisting of recommendations on what needed to be done to enhance autonomous publishing capacity in Africa. I am sure the present seminar will review progress achieved in the implementation of those recommendations, and come out with new ideas on the best way forward.

## **Education as culture**

It is indisputable that educational publishing will for many years to come continue to form the backbone of the publishing industry in Africa. Without the publication of textbooks, reference books, and supplementary reading material, no indigenous or transnational publishing company can survive in Africa in the near future. For, in this continent there are people, even among the minority who are formally educated, who still consider serious reading as something to be endured in school or college, and to be discarded as soon as possible after graduation.

The situation is made worse by the advent and spread of non-print media and sources of entertainment. Across the African continent our people, including the learned ones, are increasingly relying on television and video recorders for news and leisure. To a large extent it is the learned people who can afford these electronic media. In other words, it is precisely the people who should constitute the market for non-academic and leisure reading who are sacrificing the profoundness and permanence of the written word for the shallowness and transience of the images on television. The television and video culture contributes significantly to the discouragement of literacy and the reading habit among our people. And those who remain keen on books may not always be the ones with the money to spare for new books.

Fortunately, investment in education is receiving renewed commitment by many African governments, the Bretton Woods Institutions and some donor countries. This is a positive development which leads to the concurrence of interests between governments and publishers in Africa. Increased investment in education, to which my Government has pledged itself, implies increased demand for books. In the African context this has to be books rel-

evant to all levels of education including adult education, primary education, secondary and tertiary education. With present rates of illiteracy, and a still high population growth in Africa, the share of educational publishing for lower levels of education will remain high. Likewise, the demand for quality books—in terms of authorship and printing at higher levels—will increase.

But what is education? Education is basically, and broadly speaking, a cultural plan by which societies ensure the continuity of societal values, the acquisition of knowledge about the environment and other societies, and the systematic instruction given to members of the society in their different age groups to better prepare them for their survival and adaptation to their environment, and the performance of their work and roles in society. This is one of the reasons why publishing should, first and foremost, be indigenous. That is also why I would like African publishers to adopt this broader definition of education which emphasises the link between education and culture. After all, even in common language the term ‘cultured person’ is taken to mean one whose life is improved by education and training, and as Hobbes pointed out many centuries ago, the education of children is the culturing of their minds.

But the culturing of minds need not be based on books and other publications alone. Indeed, books are a very recent addition to the means by which African societies cultured the minds of their young ones. Traditionally, an African child learnt the values and norms of its society on grandpa’s or grandma’s knee, and at initiation ceremonies. Everything else was learnt by experience and apprenticeship depending on the means by which a parent provided for the family. The daughter learnt from the mother how to be a good mother and wife. The son learnt hunting, gathering, farming, smithery, war skills, and so on from the father—largely as an apprentice. Taking education as only that acquired through books is a great mistake for African authorship and publishing, and in my view engenders the negative stereotype in literature on indigenous African writing, reinforced by its evaluation on the basis of criteria external to Africa.

Second Viscount Melbourne, William Lamb, the English Whig Statesman who was premier at the accession of Queen Victoria is believed to have written to the Queen as follows: ‘I don’t know, Ma’am, why they make all this fuss about education; none of the Pages can read or write, and they get on well enough.’

It is this narrow definition of education being predicated upon knowing how to read and write that is at the heart of the crisis in indigenous authorship in

Africa. The traditional methods of education—which depended on oral traditions and apprenticeship—were superseded by the written word brought to Africa by missionaries and other foreigners. These people were not always sensitive to local knowledge and ways of life. Often they authored and published their works in almost total disregard for the African viewpoint, and even as a criticism of African traditions, values, and ways of life. In other words, the written word was superimposed on African societies along with the preconceived ideas and models of life that Europeans imposed on Africa, rather than the traditional African education system transforming itself from being oral to being literary.

The later proposition would have had the advantage of not disrupting the African perspective, yet enabling the traditional African education system to be more efficient as books will preserve more accurately the societal culture and way of life, and make it transcend the narrow confines of tribal life to be available to a wider cross-section of society. Perhaps this explains why books originally written in the vernacular, and later translated into English or French, give a more authentic perspective of Africa—such as Okot p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino*.

We cannot rightly talk of promoting indigenous publishing without publishing indigenous literature in its proper cultural context. Education is not a tool to sever us from our traditional societies but a tool to better adapt our traditional societal values to new knowledge and the requirements of modern times. Modernisation is not a wholesale ostracisation of our past, but an adjustment to changed times and technological and scientific development. Until African authors, editors and publishers can begin to see the book industry in these terms all efforts at promoting a truly indigenous publishing capacity will not succeed.

### **Books as manifestations of culture**

As I have stated before, publishing represents the transformation in the means by which education is imparted, and minds are cultured, in African society. Books will, in Africa, continue to take over the role of the parents, grandparents or village elders as repositories of knowledge, value systems, and skills needed to perpetuate life and the way of life.

This puts a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of African authors, editors and publishers. The present crisis in African value systems may indeed be caused by a transitional gap in the way education is imparted in African societies—whereby traditional learning has been ignored or abandoned in fa-

vour of literary learning which is not yet properly tuned to fill the gap between the two value systems.

## Language

One of the issues that keeps cropping up in discussions on indigenous authorship and publishing in Africa is that of language. I do share the view that language is a hallmark of cultural authenticity. But depending on the purpose of a publication, there are certain aspects that need careful attention.

Publishing is a productive activity that needs to break even and be sustained by its own momentum, determined by the existence of a large market that guarantees profits for those involved. A market for books, with the exception of educational books, presupposes the existence of a highly literate society with sufficient surplus income to constitute an effective and sustainable demand for books. It also presupposes the existence of a tradition or culture of reading books.

Taking into account the low levels of literacy in Africa, the size of some of the tribes, and the lack of income for meeting anything beyond the very basic human needs, it would seem difficult to find many tribes of a size sufficient to sustain publication of books in tribal languages.

One then is faced with a choice between profits and sustainability of publishing against cultural authenticity by publishing in one's own mother tongue. The other concern is whether such publications will contribute to further widening the divide between tribes. Africa has inherited arbitrary—at times even ridiculous—borders from the colonialists. The greatest challenge to newly independent African countries was therefore to evolve a national consciousness among the many tribes that found themselves in one geographical area demarcated in Berlin over a century ago. Encouraging the publishing in mother tongues has its cultural values, yes, but this also has to be weighted against the glorification of one tribe at the expense of another, and underlining tribal differences in a country that wants to acquire a truly national character. In other words, one has to weigh and balance the needs for cultural authenticity against the virtue of nation-building.

Tanzania is lucky to have a lingua franca which all of us can identify. It is for this reason that I would wish to see Swahili literature and other publications in Kiswahili growing. Unfortunately, the paucity of serious authorship in Kiswahili remains entrenched. I call upon our people to devote more energies to this type of activity.

## **Conclusion**

There is a great need to develop an indigenous publishing capacity in Africa but it must be a capacity that is sensitive to the cultural context of this activity. African authors and publishers must aspire to break free from the cultural sphere of influence of northern countries if their publications are to be authentic and effective tools for the better culturing of the minds of the Africans of tomorrow. Our value systems and ways of life are endangered, and what is offered in their stead is hardly worth copying and is irrelevant if not inappropriate. It is incumbent upon African publishers to protect African value systems and ways of life.

Educational publishing will remain an important anchor of the publishing industry in Africa in view of the low levels of formal education and the renewed commitment to education. Publishing is an important adjunct in this renewed commitment.

But this renewed commitment must be seen in the context of economic reforms that put private enterprise at the centre of development efforts in production and services. I do not, therefore, foresee direct government funding in publishing at a time of great economic and social demands on scarce resources, and unsatisfactory economic growth. In the context of the allocation of scarce resources among competing needs, it becomes unreasonable to expect a government to spend money directly on publishing, rather than on medicine, water or education. But greater investment in education will precipitate greater markets for publishers.

Tanzania's renewed commitment to education will, I hope, create a bigger market for our publishers. I invite Tanzanian publishers to be prepared to play a greater role in educational publishing, commensurate with the expected greater resource outlay to the education sector. With such commitment on the part of governments, and with greater concern shown by the African publishers for our cultural context, I foresee brighter prospects for a truly indigenous publishing capacity in Africa.

Let me end by thanking you all once again for inviting me to share ideas with you on this vital area of national life, and for making Arusha the centre for brainstorming, reflection, and design of initiatives to support African publishing. Let me also record our appreciation of support that the Tanzanian Government has received from the international community, in particular the Nordic countries and UNESCO, for our educational needs, and for publishing. I congratulate the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and its Executive Directors, Sven Hamrell, and now Olle Nordberg, who have had the

imagination and will to create an intellectual dynamism which has resulted in original and practical ideas in support of publishing in Africa. I do hope that you are having an interesting stay in our country and that we can look forward to an Arusha III before too long.

# The Development and Future of Publishing in Africa

## 12 Years after Arusha I

By Walter Bgoya

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*In this overview of indigenous publishing in Africa today and the industry's requirements for the future, Walter Bgoya writes: 'Three scenarios for the future of publishing in Africa are easily discernible: one, African publishing playing an insignificant role, the source of books and reading material remaining external, and indigenous publishers playing a mediating role between the "European" publisher/producer and the African book market; second, African publishing becoming modestly successful through a long period of trial and error; and third, African publishing playing its full role following a realisation of its strategic importance in the overall development of a country and its being accorded special support.'*

*Publishing deserves the status of a strategic industry, Bgoya argues, primarily because of the significance of books in education, and for this vision to be realised 'the first step ... is to work with all component constituencies of the book chain and with government to evolve and establish a national book policy'. Only if there are clear policies in the areas of education, books and language, backed up by practical implementation, will the conditions be created in which indigenous publishing can grow and flourish. Meanwhile, among the practical self-help options that publishers should consider are joint ventures with overseas publishers; a framework for establishing equitable and mutually beneficial joint ventures is appended to the article.*

*Walter Bgoya has been a publisher for over 25 years. He joined Tanzania Publishing House (TPH) in 1972 as Managing Director and stayed in that position until 1989 when he formed his own company, Mkuki na Nyota Publishers. He was the Co-director of both Arusha I and Arusha II and has worked closely with the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation on indigenous publishing as well as on several other issues central to development in Africa. He is a founder member of the African Books Collective (ABC) and a member of its council of management, and he chairs the managing committee (jury) of the Noma Award for publishing in Africa. He has also been active during the formative years of the African Publishers' Network (APNET) and in the Publishers Association of Tanzania (PATA), inter alia, as its vice-president.*

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This paper sets out to review what transpired in the twelve years since the first Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation Seminar on the Development of Autonomous Publishing Capacity in Africa, which was held in Arusha, Tanzania, in April 1984, and to answer a number of questions leading to the determination of whether autonomous publishing capacity in Africa has been enhanced or not; what can and should be done to improve the situation so as to make African publishing not only viable commercially but also responsive to the needs of a liberating education and culture as the 20th century comes to a close. To start with, it may be useful to summarise the broad consensus of participants in the 1984 seminar on the African publishing situation as it existed then and the recommendations that emerged therefrom.

### **Publishing in Africa 1984**

According to the participants' statement in 1984, 'The majority of publishing houses serving Africa [were] not autonomous. The publishing field [was] dominated by the branches of transnational publishing corporations, all but a few controlled from outside the continent, and by some state publishing houses, which [were] directly or indirectly controlled by governments.'<sup>1</sup> The most active transnationals in publishing in anglophone Africa were Macmillan, Heinemann, Oxford University Press, Nelson Publishers, Evans Brothers and Longman; while the best known state publishing houses were Tanzania Publishing House, Ghana Publishing Corporation, Northern Nigeria Publishing Corporation (all ex-joint ventures with Macmillan), Uganda Publishing House of the Milton Obote Foundation, and the National Education Company of Zambia (NECZAM) of the Kenneth Kaunda Foundation. In Kenya there were two active state publishing companies—the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation and the Kenya Literature Bureau, successor to the East African Literature Bureau which broke up following the demise of the East African Community in 1977.

In the francophone countries the most prominent publishing companies were Editions CLE, established in 1963 in Yaoundé, Cameroon, and Nouvelles Editions Africaines (NEA), based in Dakar, which was constituted by the states of Senegal, Ivory Coast and Togo (60 per cent) and five French partners (40 per cent).

The effect of this bias towards transnational publishing was a recurrent theme at the 1984 seminar: 'Because of the infertile soil in which indigenous publishing has had to be nurtured in Africa, transnational publishers have attracted many African writers. In this attraction lies the risk that writers turn to a Western public rather than to readers of their own countries. Their thinking is often forced by expatriate editors to accommodate foreign

and neo-colonialist biases and susceptibilities, thereby depriving it of its deep and unique significance.<sup>2</sup>

It was not only literary production that was affected. The major interest for the transnational as well as state publishing houses was school textbooks from which, thanks to huge increases in the student populations in the newly independent countries, they made enormous profits. Issues such as the dumping of inappropriate books on schools by the transnational publishers and books hastily written and edited to fit 'national' demands were discussed, as was corruption of government officials who approved and ordered hundreds of thousands of the books published by the foreign transnational companies.

The language issue in African education is not unrelated to the policies of the ex-colonial metropolitan countries to retain their languages as a way of ensuring book purchases from their publishers, amounting to millions of pounds or dollars in business every year. The call by the 1984 seminar on governments to 'encourage ministries responsible to review the content of their textbooks in order to improve or foster the development of sound and accurate textbooks and other educational materials'<sup>3</sup> was a result of awareness of the inadequacy, from the standpoint of pedagogy, of the books published for Africa by the transnational houses, which, however, could impress book buyers because of their colourful covers and superior production quality. 'The contents should be in keeping with the realities and aspirations of a cross-section of society, and should not encourage the perpetration of social injustice and inequality', the seminar participants urged.<sup>4</sup>

*Obstacles to indigenous and autonomous publishing*

The definition of an indigenous and autonomous publishing institution adopted at the seminar, that it should be one 'which is responsible to itself and which exercises the freedom to control its policies, its finances and its management'<sup>5</sup> contained within it an awareness of the obstacles to realisation of such publishing. The major problem for African publishing houses is the lack of investment and working capital finance. Without finance there can be no ownership and no freedom to control policies and to manage complex issues of an editorial, production or administrative nature.

Other obstacles were noted: policy issues, including harsh tax regimes, duties on imported paper and the denial of foreign exchange allocations for machinery and other consumables; censorship; the absence of training institutions; and the generally unfavourable climate in which the industry and its practitioners found themselves. These conspired to reduce further the chances of growth of an African publishing industry.

*Recommendations  
from the 1984  
seminar*

A number of recommendations and calls for follow-up action were made at the 1984 seminar. While they covered a wide range of issues they can be summarised as follows.

- African governments were called upon to create conditions in which indigenous publishing could thrive. To that end they were urged to dismantle state publishing monopolies which were not only incapable of efficient management of book publishing but which made it impossible for private publishing companies to take root, since they were unable, in the presence of these and of transnational companies, to compete effectively in the textbook market.
- The political and social climate in addition to financial institutions (primarily banks) had to be made conducive to supporting private publishing initiatives, and governments had important responsibilities in bringing this about.
- Other recommendations were addressed to donor organisations and NGOs involved in supporting culture in Africa. Specifically, the seminar called for donor funding of publishing in the form of loan guarantees, provision of equipment, training and research.

**Twelve years after  
Arusha I**

Developments since the 1984 seminar have been many and varied. Prior to 1984, there had been commendable efforts by a number of African publishers and non-Africans who were interested in the independent development of African publishing. The Ile-Ife conference in 1973 was, in this respect, key in generating interest in African publishing. After 1984 that interest greatly increased and many African entrepreneurs went into publishing. Well over 40 publishing companies came into existence from 1984 to 1993 and an unknown number have been started since then.

How did the dramatic entry of African entrepreneurs into this field come about? First, there was the departure from Africa of many transnational publishing companies as a result of the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, usually leaving behind their senior African editors. Second, many individual African would-be-authors, editors, critics and others took up the challenge to undermine the foreign domination of African publishing and started their own companies. Third, with the collapse of most state publishing corporations due to undercapitalisation, politically appointed and ineffective management and unfavourable macro-economic policies, some of their former employees with experience from publishing started their own companies.

The indigenisation of two transnational companies in Kenya (Heinemann and Longman), initially through local interests buying into the company and later buying out all foreign-owned shares, was a major development in African publishing. The fact that in the case of Heinemann, which changed its name to East African Educational Publishers (EAEP), the volume of publishing and the turnover and profitability increased markedly after the buy-out strengthened two arguments: one, that one way to the successful indigenisation of African publishing would be through similar buy-outs of the shares of the transnationals in their former branches; and two, that contrary to conventional wisdom, it is not always true that expatriate management of transnational companies is better than that by local managers. Longhorn—formerly Longman—has continued to do well after the buy-out, confirming the success of the evolution of transnationals into indigenous and autonomous publishing houses in Kenya.

It had been expected that African managers of other branches of the transnational publishing companies would follow the Kenyan example, particularly in Nigeria, but that has not been the case. The reason most often given for this is that due to the difficulties experienced by publishers in Nigeria as a result of the rather chaotic political and economic situation there—shortages of paper and the devaluation of the Naira being two very serious constraints to competition with the transnationals—the local branches of the transnationals have had to depend a great deal on revenue from the sale of book imports from the mother companies and can ill afford to part company at present.

Other forms of ‘indigenisation’ of the transnationals will be discussed further on, but the Kenyan scenario does not appear to have scope for now and the near future for two reasons: one, the success of the EAEP and Longhorn may make Heinemann, Longman and other transnationals less interested in selling than they were before their Kenyanisation, and two, in the new era of ‘liberalisation’ and ‘joint ventures’, indigenisation does not have as much ‘sex appeal’ as it had in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

*The situation of  
state publishing  
companies*

State publishing houses in Tanzania, Kenya and Ghana have continued to exist and to perform the same functions as they did before. In some cases, such as the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation and the Kenya Literature Bureau in Kenya, the state has continued to give them the lion’s share of textbook business by approving only their publications and no others for use in schools. In Tanzania, the parastatal publishing company has improved its situation because of a fortuitous insistence on the part of the World Bank and the IMF that ministries repay outstanding debts, and also by winning through the

Pilot Publishing Project (PPP) a tender for publishing some titles for the Ministry of Education with large print runs. Tanzania Publishing House (TPH) is one of the companies to be privatised and it is understood that a management employment buy-out may be in the offing if the workers can put together a down payment of about USD 75,000.

In Zambia, in spite of planned 'liberalisation' and 'privatisation', there are still three public companies involved in publishing: Zambia Educational Publishing House, Printpak (Zambia) Ltd, and Zambia Printing Company and it is not clear when or if in fact it will truly 'liberalise' and 'privatise' by selling the three companies.

*Some important  
developments in  
African publishing*

*The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation loan guarantee programme*

One of the recommendations of the 1984 seminar was for the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation to carry out feasibility studies on establishing a mechanism that would give loan guarantees, and to define the legal, managerial and organisational structures necessary for establishing such a programme. Two such studies were made for Kenya and Tanzania. However, in 1988, a loan guarantee programme was established for Kenya only, with funding from Ford Foundation (USD 300,000) to cover capital, possible losses, bank expenses and an advisory committee's expenses.

The programme was conceived in order to assist Kenyan publishers to develop relations with banks on a regular basis with the hope that, as the publishers gained the confidence of the banks through regular servicing of the loans, eventually the banks would take on publishing and publishers as bankable businesses and partners.

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation has always been cautious in its appraisal of the success and/or failure of the programme. There is no doubt, however, that it has had a considerable impact on Kenyan publishing. A number of publishers who received the guarantees would not have done as well as they did without these. They published more books, improved their management skills and two or three of them have been able to develop independent bilateral relations with the bank without further guarantees from the loan programme. One major and seemingly insurmountable obstacle to the loan guarantee programme is the high interest rates that African banks have been forced to institute as part of countries' structural adjustment programmes. Commercial bank interest rates in Kenya are close to 30 per cent whereas in neighbouring Tanzania, they average 40 per cent. In the circumstances it would be suicidal for a publisher to operate an overdraft facility and the loan guarantee programme would not be feasible.

The model, on the other hand, has shown itself to be basically sound, and in countries where interest rates are manageable it could work quite well. It is understood that with special Central Bank dispensation, businesses in Kenya can borrow money from foreign banks and operate on the basis of interest rates prevailing in the countries of the lending banks. But unless amounts repayable are fixed at the local equivalent of the borrowed currency at the time of borrowing, this alternative could not work either. Many companies in Tanzania went bust after institution of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) because having borrowed in foreign currencies when the exchange rates were reasonable, they found themselves—after devaluation of the shilling—indebted ten or twenty times the amount they had originally borrowed; with the interest accruing on the new principal, they had no way out.

*The African Books Collective (ABC)*

One of the problems for African publishing was always the lack of a market for books from Africa in Europe, North America and elsewhere outside Africa. Past efforts by well-meaning but unprofessional agents (NGOs and individual book sellers) did very little to promote African books and the terms of trade were not at all favourable to African publishers.

Exporting their books to these markets was the only way in which African publishers could earn hard currency, but African publishers were cut off almost completely from this source. It was in recognition of the potential for exporting their books to these markets and for easing the access of librarians in those countries to African books that a number of African publishers got together in 1985 to set up an organisation that would sell and promote their books overseas. In 1990 the African Books Collective began trading. Thanks to support from a number of donor organisations, which have provided funds for administration and for some promotional activities, ABC has been a great success and has earned and transferred to a number of African publishers significant revenues in foreign currency. This, in turn, has enabled the publishers to purchase equipment that they needed—computers, fax machines, etc.—as well as to pay royalties in foreign currency whenever this has been necessary. With a total turnover of USD 200,000 in 1995 and better books (production and design) from its members, ABC is poised to do even better for its members in the coming years.

*The Bellagio Conference on Publishing and Development in the Third World*

The success of major initiatives such as the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation loan guarantee programme, the African Books Collective and the involvement of a number of donors in their funding was a contributing factor to the strong African component of the first conference on Publishing and Devel-

opment in the Third World, held at Bellagio, Italy in February 1991. After Arusha I, this was the next benchmark conference on publishing. Although it covered Asia and Africa, it was the latter that generated the greatest interest and from which new initiatives grew. The conference covered all aspects of publishing but most notable were questions relating to the role of transnational publishers in Africa, government policies that tend to hinder rather than promote publishing, and other obstacles to indigenous publishing including fiscal policies (taxes, duties), state publishing monopolies, the lack of capital and trained personnel and the conduct of multilateral agencies such as the World Bank.

The conference prepared a report that covered two categories of concerns, those at the micro and those at the macro level, and recommended concrete steps not only for improving the situation but also for developing an analytical framework for a better understanding of the issues. The most important outcome of the conference was the realisation that piecemeal solutions were not likely to succeed; that a continental organisation focusing on cooperation, on the one hand, between African 'doers' and international 'donors', and, on the other, among donors or doers (as and when required), stood the best chance of mobilising resources within and outside Africa in support of publishing.

#### *The African Publishers' Network*

The African Publishers' Network (APNET) was born out of the Bellagio Conference. The immediate tasks that APNET set itself were to mobilise African publishers through their national publishers associations, to build a representative organisational structure that would get everyone involved and to carry out projects that would benefit as many publishers as possible in every member country. Where there were no national publishers associations, APNET has encouraged their formation and given all necessary support to the publishers seeking to form an association.

Training was singled out as the most crucial input and courses in the various publishing functions were organised on a regional basis. Substantial resources were allocated for training of trainers, and an African Publishing Institute (API) to be responsible for all the training programmes is in place. Other activities which APNET has organised to the advantage of African publishers are: publication in English, French and Portuguese of the *African Publishing Review*, which is a vehicle for the exchange of ideas, and features articles, reviews and announcements; managing of buyers' and sellers' meetings; participation in international book fairs and organisation of exhibitions of books by African publishers in these events; and making informa-

tion from such bodies as the World Bank known to member associations. The establishment of an African Publishing Resource Centre that will house the Hans Zell collection of materials on publishing in Africa for over 30 years in Harare will provide invaluable assistance to African and other researchers on publishing in Africa.

There can be no question that the appearance of APNET on the publishing scene has been one of the most significant events for publishing in Africa from a continental and regional perspective. APNET has not only mobilised African publishers to come together in order to work for practical solutions to common and concrete problems—providing training, establishing publishers' associations, supporting book fairs, etc. It has done more. In a very tangible way it has begun to address the continental context in which publishing is or is not happening. Through various actions at the level of individual governments and through alliances it has created with international donor organisations and multilateral institutions that carry considerable influence with African states and statesmen, African publishers and publishing have moved to centre stage and their many years of isolation in the past appear to be over.

#### *Other NGO support*

Partly as a result of the Bellagio Conference and alongside the work of APNET, some significant NGO projects that have had a positive impact on books and reading have been started in a number of African countries. A good example is the Tanzanian Children's Book Project, which was initiated with the Canadian Organisation for Development through Education (CODE) funding and as a result of which close to 80 titles were published in the last five years. Not only did the project buy 3,000 copies out of a print-run of 5,000, thereby guaranteeing the publisher break-even, and the author a royalty paid on time; it also organised training for authors, editors, publishers and artists, and helped set up children's book writer associations at national and regional levels. The project supplied paper at cost, making it possible not only to control costs and prices but also to ensure, in a situation of erratic paper supplies, that the project's books would be out on time. The Children's Book Project has been a resounding success not only in terms of titles printed but also in the steady improvement of the quality of design, layout, illustration and printing.

*World Bank  
interventions in  
publishing in Africa*

#### *Book Sector Studies*

The World Bank's involvement in book issues in African countries is centred around 'provision' rather than 'production'. It is not within the scope of this article to make a detailed study of the World Bank in all countries in Africa

in which it has been involved in one way or another in providing books in schools. However, the Bank's current position, which, simply stated, is that it is only interested in putting books on the children's desks and has no interest in assisting local publishers (apart from a 15 per cent price advantage over foreign bidders), makes it quite clear that it does not have a 'developmental' attitude towards African publishing.

Yet, the World Bank has been very much in search of a role in improving education in sub-Saharan African countries and specifically identified textbooks as the single most important educational tool for this task. The World Bank and other donor organisations have commissioned a large number of Book Sector Studies—in all 48 (as of April 1996) have been done since 1988 when the first one was carried out by Anthony Read of International Book Development (IBD) in England.

The World Bank's interventions in education have been in three distinct phases. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s textbook provision was a minor component of the World Bank's educational support. The conclusion drawn from its research from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s was that 'provision of textbooks is one of the most cost-effective ways of raising learning achievements in resource-scarce schooling environments'. From 16 per cent between 1974 and 1978, support for textbooks within overall support to education rose to 32 per cent between 1979 and 1983, to 59 per cent between 1984 and 1991 and to 72 per cent by 1995. These three four-year periods were characterised by: support for acquisition of production equipment such as printing machines and materials; support, through government institutes of curriculum development, for the writing, publishing and distribution of books; and, in the latest phase, provision of loans to governments for them to source books from private publishers internationally through competitive bidding. The 15 per cent advantage over the lowest foreign bidder is of little help in situations where there is little or no publishing in the first place.

There can be no doubt that Book Sector Studies contributed to the World Bank's policies and practices in the last two generations of World Bank interventions and many African publishers and other observers are of the view that these studies did not promote indigenous African publishing. The position held by the Bank, that it is not its primary objective to support the development of local publishing firms, was seen by African publishers as aiming at promoting the business of publishers from the US, Britain and France, and keeping African publishers out of the big money. Book Sector Studies provided the rationale for this policy, arguing as they did on static

grounds that there were no local African publishers who could undertake to publish the books that were needed in their countries. The fact that the studies were done by one person and that the input of African publishers was nil or only marginal reinforced the view of the one-sidedness of the studies.

A great deal has been written in support of and against this World Bank policy. In 1992 an APNET delegation visited Washington to meet World Bank officials and to discuss the implications of their policy for African publishing. It raised questions about the availability and sustainability of books based on foreign procurement and argued for a reappraisal of the policy in favour of active support for African publishers as the only guarantee for the future of textbooks and general books in Africa. The World Bank does not appear to be about to change its policy, although some aspects of the dialogue with African publishers are receiving attention. In Tanzania, in the Eighth IDA negotiations, SIDA, which was contributing a big share of the book sector support, prevailed over the World Bank by insisting on local publishers being the only ones to participate in local competitive bidding (LCB) for the supply of primary school textbooks.

#### *Publishing and structural adjustment*

The overriding feature of the economies of African countries in the period between 1984 and today, was how they adjusted their economies in line with IMF/World Bank conditions for credits to meet the ever-widening gaps between government revenue and expenditures. However salutary the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) may eventually turn out to be for African economies, in respect of book publishing they have only aggravated an already difficult situation. Devaluation of currencies resulted in unaffordable price increases in all the requirements of the printing industry—paper, spare parts and other consumables—for publishers and printers. Production plummeted and high book prices resulted in drastic cuts in purchases by libraries and other institutions. Parents could not afford to buy books for their children and books for leisure reading were unaffordable or unavailable. One of the conditions of the SAPs was a reduction in expenditure on social services, including education. For Tanzania the education budget as a percentage of the total national budget dropped from 13.8 per cent (which was already inadequate) in 1977/78 to 6.45 per cent in 1988/89. The decline in the health sector financing was even more dismal, from 7.3 per cent of the national budget in 1977/78 to 4.4 per cent in 1985/86 and 4.6 in 1989/90.

Another feature of structural adjustment programmes was high interest rates (currently at 40 per cent in Tanzania), which does not make borrowing for the publishing industry and for a great many others a practical option. The

cumulative effect on the local publishing industries was devastating. In Nigeria, indigenous publishers who had benefited from the military regime's decree in 1973 that all foreign publishing companies had to be 60 per cent Nigerian-owned found themselves unable to sustain their publishing for lack of resources. The competition they had given to transnational publishers was wiped out because unlike the latter they had no foreign currency to buy paper and to guarantee prices between award of tender and delivery as the Naira was forever going down. The transnational publishers on the other hand did not experience that problem as they dealt in stable currencies. They had the best of both worlds; they obtained, on exchange, more and more Naira for their local costs and imported all their requirements at stable prices from international suppliers.

Many of the state publishing houses collapsed or nearly did so, as much if not more as a result of this turn in the economies of their countries as because of bad management and/or corruption. Corruption itself was greatly exacerbated by the collapse in the real value of wages, especially for middle-level government officials and in parastatal institutions.

In these circumstances, to make international competitive bidding a condition for awarding publishing contracts was in effect to eliminate African publishers altogether. For African publishing to have the chance to develop, it was not sufficient merely to level the playing field, without matching the strength of the players. The fact that African publishing had not developed in the era of unchecked foreign domination in the first 20 years of independence should have been sufficient argument against continued dependency on book imports. Sustainability of book provision—watchword for any serious planning—cannot be expected without deliberate efforts to strengthen indigenous publishers (where they exist) and to assist in their creation (where they do not exist).

Many of the features of structural adjustment programmes have gone far in undermining initiatives such as the loan guarantee programme that were conceived in order to give a boost to African publishers. Major interventions that were set up to 'correct' the situation sought to do so by externally derived inputs. The beneficiaries were first and foremost suppliers from Western countries. The money that was injected into Africa for books in fact went right back to publishers in those countries. British publishing companies followed IBD consultants carrying out book sector studies and set up agents in those countries, not to carry out local publishing but to play the role of compradores on their behalf. In a few situations genuine joint ventures between transnational and indigenous publishers have been established but

**Table 1** Book exports from the UK to sub-Saharan Africa 1989–1994 (in GBP)

Year	Book exports	Year	Book exports
1989	£ 38,955,832	1992	£ 52,255,000
1990	£ 45,086,385	1993	£ 58,843,000
1991	£ 48,229,735	1994	£ 57,416,000

*Source:* From Export Sales, Extract from 1993 Book Trade Year Book and The Publishers Association, Book Trade Year for export sales 1992–94.

they are few and far between and are not likely to become the main feature of African publishing in the short run.

After looking at what transpired between 1984 and 1996, is it possible to conclude that there has been ‘development’ of African publishing? The easiest way to determine this would be to use the quantitative yardstick and to answer the question; were more books published in Africa by indigenous publishers? Regrettably, due to the paucity of data one cannot state categorically that this is or is not so.

#### *Book provision versus book development*

It must be emphatically stated that book provision is not book development. By advancing credits to government to purchase books the World Bank made it possible in the late 1980s to improve the book situation in schools in sub-Saharan Africa where ratios of children to books had deteriorated to as low as 10:1 or even 20:1. International donor organisations made similar, or, in some countries, even larger contributions in the form of grants. Statistical data on country situations is patchy, but one indicator of increased book availability in African countries is rising book imports from traditional sources (ex-colonial powers—the UK and France) and from the United States and Canada.

In Tanzania the support of international donors, in particular Sweden, continued to be important in providing inputs for printing and binding textbooks. More recently, in the Eighth IDA project, SIDA took the most important step in promoting the development of Tanzanian publishing by providing funds for textbook publishing under local competitive bidding (LCB) in which only Tanzania or joint venture publishers could take part. A Pilot Publishing Project (PPP) was initiated and a Finnish company—Opifer—was recruited (through international bidding) by SIDA to work

**Table 2** Annual financial allocations for textbook publishing 1994/95–1998/99 (in 1,000 Swedish Kronor)

	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99
<i>Book Production</i>					
Primary	2,445	2,000	2,000	2,000	1,500
Teacher	55	50	50	50	30
Secondary	550	500	500	400	300
<i>Pilot Project for Publishing</i>					
Primary/Teacher	2,195	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,500
Secondary	950	1,900	1,900	2,000	2,100
<i>Total</i>	6,140	9,450	9,450	9,450	9,450

*Source:* MOEC/SIDA: 7 SEK = USD 1.00

with Tanzanian publishers so as to enable them to meet the conditions of LCB. The project, which has entered its third phase, has been greatly appreciated.

For publishers, money under PPP constitutes real support. However, it is understood by all that the PPP is only a transition from state publishing to an open, competitive, commercial system. Whereas, at present, publishers bid for manuscripts written by the Tanzania Institute of Education, it is government policy that as soon as possible the system should be fully liberalised and that the whole publishing process should be in the hands of publishers. In his 1997 budget speech, the Minister of Education stated that it was now government policy to allow as many books as are available on the market to compete as long as they have been approved. A textbook Approval Committee within the Ministry of Education and criteria for approval are to be set up shortly.

Needless to say this process is complex because it involves decisions about who ultimately holds the purse strings. A fully liberalised system would put funds at the primary school level or at the community level. Neither option is without difficulties given the legacy of concentration of decision-making and financial power at the centre, on the one hand, and the lack of experience at the local level on the other.

Book provision and book development are, of course, not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they can be mutually supportive. Clearly, however, book provision from external sources ought to be a short-term, emergency operation. The shortage of books in schools and libraries is such that in some countries (Tanzania included) without book donations there would be no new books. Many public libraries are so starved of cash that they go for many years without any budget for acquisitions.

Organisations such as the UK's Book Aid International (BAI), Canada's CODE and American ones that make regular book donations play a useful role as long as the programmes are demand-driven. BAI, which between 1990 and 1995 donated books to Africa worth £7,638,739, supported two other worthwhile projects: the Inter-African Book Support Scheme (IBIS) in which selected books from African publishers are purchased and sent to libraries in African countries; and the Publishers' Resource Pack through which African publishers associations and individual publishing houses have been given collections of excellent reference books on all aspects of publishing, including design, editing, marketing, financial management, and copyright.

### *International copyright*

In the last few years there has been a great push by the international book publishers, with the support of their governments, to get all countries not yet members of the International Copyright Conventions to sign up. Many countries, especially in Asia, where violations of copyright were rampant, were threatened with retaliatory measures unless they curbed the activities of those of their citizens who pirated foreign works. In Africa, debate about copyright has always been centred around two aspects: the internal aspect, which is about the protection of writers' and publishers' exclusive rights to income from the sale of their works; and the external aspect, which is about African countries gaining legal access to international educational materials without having to pay fees (or paying only low fees).

Much has been written about this subject and within the community of African publishers and their international supporters there is a growing volume of research into the question, although by and large the overwhelming opinion tends to support blanket application of the copyright law. While there is agreement about the need for scrupulous respect of copyright within each country, the history of the publishing industry would tend to show that at certain levels of development each country has taken from the international intellectual community whatever it has needed to set its own course of development. Reference has often been made to the fact that in the 19th century, the United States—then a fledgling nation—was the biggest book pi-

rate in the world, freely printing European works, without requesting permission or making any payments. The US publishing industry was successfully established on the back of piracy. Whether or not the requirements of international copyright law are observed has depended in practice on whether a developing country considers it worthwhile to flout the law while it builds its own publishing capacity. Usually when such a country attains that capacity, their vested interest lies in observation of the law.

The middle ground would be for the protocols of the law on compulsory licensing to be applied effectively so that African countries are able to access educational materials easily and quickly on applying for such a dispensation.

### **The future of publishing in Africa**

Three scenarios for the future of publishing in Africa are easily discernible: one, African publishing playing an insignificant role, the source of books and reading material remaining external, and indigenous publishers playing a mediating role between the 'European' publisher/producer and the African book market; second, African publishing becoming modestly successful through a long period of trial and error; and third, African publishing playing its full role following a realisation of its strategic importance in the overall development of a country and its being accorded special support of the kind that is detailed in the next section.

But first, why should publishing be accorded the status of a strategic industry? Primarily because of the significance of books in education. Recent development literature (World Bank and other) is replete with assertions about human capital as the key to development and the critical contribution of textbooks to education, especially in countries where teachers are few and are handicapped by lack of opportunities for self-improvement; where classrooms are too big and the home does not contribute to the child's educational development as a result of the family's own lack of education.

### *The East Asian 'miracle'—lessons for us*

In all attempts to explain the East Asian 'miracle' one factor remains constant: high investment in human capital.<sup>6</sup> East Asian countries are credited with long having had education that focused on primary and secondary schooling, in turn generating a rapid increase in labour force skills. Advocates of an unfettered free market are surprised (probably even upset) that in addition to effective education policies, governments in the East Asian countries 'also intervened to foster development, often systematically and through multiple channels including "targeted and subsidised credit to selected industries ... protection of domestic substitutes, subsidies to declining industries"' and so on.<sup>7</sup> In great contrast, the SAP policy is to lump all in-

dustries into one category and advocate their being sold off at give-away prices or simply allowed to collapse if they are not profitable within a short time frame, without any consideration of what steps could be taken to make them profitable.

This is not a defence of loss-making public enterprises that are a drain on the state and inevitably on the taxpayer. It is only to caution against the almost religious fanaticism for the free market even when confronted with successful models of state intervention such as those made by governments of East Asian countries.

*Can publishing in Africa become a strategic industry?*

Whether this question can be answered in the affirmative will depend on, first, whether African states and their tenders are prepared to make education the pillar of their economic and social policies—which may be begging the question, why didn't they do so in the past; and second, whether individuals and people's organisations (civil society) can accelerate the pace of education through private schools and universities and in the process build up the kind of pressure that would then push governments similarly to accord education that priority.

The first step towards according publishing the status of a strategic industry is to work with all component constituencies of the book chain and with government to evolve and to establish a national book policy. In the past, efforts to establish National Book Development Councils succeeded in only a few countries and even then only to a limited extent. One reason for this may have been the absence of national book policies that would provide backing, or where a Book Development Council (BDC) was a legal entity, would provide financial and human resources so as to enable it to perform the functions for which it was established. The tendency of BDCs to become large bureaucracies and to perform restrictive roles vis-à-vis publishers—seeking to act as censorship boards—did not make them attractive to the publishing industry. Furthermore, in the absence of professional organisations throughout the book trade—associations of publishers, booksellers, printers and librarians—it was not possible to carry out a meaningful dialogue with government, and even less to impress upon it the seriousness of the issue.

*Towards a national book policy*

It is not necessary to 'reinvent the wheel' as far as models for a national book policy are concerned. The basic objectives of such a policy are:

- to mobilise and give support to all elements comprising the book chain so as to ensure their best contribution to the production, dissemination and use of books;

- to give guidelines on the question of language in publishing so as to ensure that the greatest number of people are served;
- to develop and give support to all actors so as to develop, ensure the highest quality of books, in their content as in their form;
- to ensure that all activities connected with publishing and dissemination of books are seen as part of the education of the nation, and are incorporated in the development;
- to establish the book industry as a strategic industry and gain public recognition of it as such.

While existing models of successful national book policies can provide inspiration and guidance, the business of developing a national book policy should be taken up by professional associations of the industry in each country and brought up for public debate. The importance of such a debate cannot be sufficiently underscored. Only through such a debate can civil society as well as ordinary people be brought in to give their ideas and support, thereby broadening the base of concerned citizens. The larger the constituency, the more likely that government will listen. It is imperative to work with parliamentarians and win their support for the idea of national book policies and to evolve strategies leading to passage of necessary legislation to that end. But legislation is one thing; realisation of the ends for which a national book policy is established will need commitment and hard work, and that will fall first and foremost on the agents in the book chain. In many countries, the national publishers association is best placed to play the leading role.

*Financing  
publishing: the  
immediate future*

In addition to projects that have been identified in the past—loan guarantee schemes, buy-back for guaranteed purchases, overseas marketing and distribution, and joint venture development—there is still a need for concerted exploration by all partners in the current African publishing process, to find effective new ways of putting publishing on a sound financial footing. New ways may mean in fact extending the scope of some of the older projects. For instance, in the Children's Book Project, three-fifths of a comparatively short print run (5,000 copies) were bought. So far there is no similar project for fiction although it is very much in demand. If the print runs were much greater than 5,000 and a higher profit margin was built in for the publisher, it would be one way of building up the publishers' financial base.

Likewise, it is certain that the potential of the loan guarantee scheme has not been fully investigated. There is no reason why the huge amounts of money that institutions such as the World Bank have put into doubtful projects so readily could not have been invested in strengthening publishing. The ques-

tion is really one of the Bank working systematically and on a long-term basis with publishers and other actors in the book chain, in the realisation that most African publishers are not fully equipped to meet the demands of the industry; by so doing, the World Bank will itself help to ensure that expectations of African publishing, currently unrealised, are steadily fulfilled.

#### *Publishing cooperatives*

One possible way of raising financial resources for publishing that has not been studied sufficiently is for several small publishers to club together to publish books, series or courses with the potential for adoption on educational curricula. It is clear that whatever resources individual publishers are able to raise would be multiplied by forming publishing cooperatives. Although there are considerable management constraints on such projects, these are not insurmountable. Experience of international competitive bidding for textbooks in Tanzania in line with the World Bank requirements would suggest that cooperation between two or three publishers would reduce the burden on individual publishers, at the same time as enhancing their collective competitiveness. Although no successful model can be quoted to date, this is an area that merits further study.

#### *Joint ventures*

Joint ventures between investors from developed economies and entrepreneurs in the less-developed countries seem to be the most favoured approach for attracting investors. The fact that both partners gain from such ventures guarantees transfer of technology and skills. There are nevertheless possible pitfalls if the partners collaborating are not quite clear about or convinced of the benefits of those partnerships: this is particularly so for the Southern partner. An Appendix to this article suggests for discussion a model framework that could be the basis of a joint venture in publishing.

#### *Publishing, culture and development*

Debates and discussions on publishing in the last few years have been dominated by 'market' considerations. They have been about making publishing viable; about financing, distribution and training. Not surprisingly they have also been largely about textbook publishing. All other publishing has been marginalised; indeed the way it is treated is that it can only develop if publishers first have the bread-and-butter educational books. It is the icing on the cake, others are inclined to say. Although these points of view are understandable, the pervading economism does call for challenge.

Textbook publishing should not obscure the need for all other publishing and especially of fiction, poetry, plays and other genres of literature. In the Bellagio book, *The Muse of Modernity* (1996), cultural activists in the field

of cinema, music, video, radio and museums write about development from their perspectives. A contribution by the author of this article, on 'Publishing and Culture', discusses publishing away from the textbook not as a commodity like every other commodity but within the context of the cultural imperatives of development. One of the key factors identified as responsible for the decline of literary book publishing is the demise of so many literary journals during the 1980s. This has resulted in a dearth of publishing outlets for writers in general, and young and as yet unknown or inexperienced writers in particular, and has probably also led to a stifling of creative writing. Much of the early work of the now 'big' names in African literature was first published in a number of then-flourishing literary magazines, but today there are fewer and few publishing facilities of this sort. This is of course a lamentable state of affairs. Many of the well-known magazines of the 1960s and the 1970s, such as *Black Orpheus*, *Transition*, *Zuka*, *Busara*, *Marang*, and *New Culture*, have dried up. *Transition* is now published in New York but does not resemble at all the old *Transition*.

There are encouraging signs that another period of intellectual renaissance is at hand, thanks in part to the liberation of South Africa—the last part of the continent to be free—and quite honestly because things sank so low they can only go up now. New technologies, especially desk-top publishing, are making it possible to cut down costs and to do a great deal in house that was not possible not so long ago. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that journals of the calibre of the ones pointed out above will be able to survive in the economic situation that prevails unless they are underwritten by a committed donor or group of donors.

A number of factors are coming to make the non-print media very much more accessible than in the past: the so-called 'democratisation' of media and culture through electronic channels in turn tends to impact on the print media in a way that enhances production and creativity. Certainly, censorship may soon become obsolete as a practical possibility.

### **The language issue**

Publishing in African languages is a crucial issue in the cultural context, but also has important implications for African publishing as such. The basic issue is that in any one African country, by most observers' reckoning, less than 20 per cent of the population can speak English, French or Portuguese, and even fewer would be literate enough to read a book in those languages. The implication therefore, at least in respect of non-education publishing, is that publishers are not developing what is potentially, in publishing terms—quite apart from cultural considerations—their largest market. The present

weak performance of books in national languages is traceable to official policies in favour of foreign languages—both institutional and in terms of status. It is fair to say that the slowness in the development of the reading habit is partly attributable to a lack of genuine literacy and proficiency in the relevant foreign languages; and at the same time, over-dependence on foreign languages is undermining both national language development and publishing. In my view, fundamental human and societal values are being undermined, and the mass of African people are being disempowered. Indigenous publishing will have to take account of this issue, which should also be central to discussions of national book policies.

Some years back, Wole Soyinka proposed that Swahili should be developed as the African lingua franca. That was before he won the Nobel Prize. It would be welcome if he would now make the same call and join Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his support of publishing in African languages.

**The writer and the publisher: the need for a 'New Deal'**

A strong case can be made for the holding of a conference at which writers and publishers would meet to discuss, in the light of their experience and of developments over the last 20 or so years, what needs to be done so as to arrive at a New Deal that would strengthen professional relationships and provide common approaches which are currently lacking. Authors and publishers know more now about their professions than they did 20 years ago. In the past, each side viewed the other with suspicion, and although this attitude has not been altogether eliminated, there is now sufficient knowledge of the demands of both professions for more enlightened and constructive debates to take place. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation could appropriately provide such a forum, as one part of the follow-up to these discussions.

In conclusion, we think it is time to bring back the debate to where it belongs: to the book as a weapon of liberation, to literature as the soul of the people, and people as the objective of development. It should, therefore, matter what is published and it should matter that resources are brought back to the dreamers, so that they too are heard. Those who build castles in the air should also be listened to, for as a Spanish saying goes, 'if you cannot even build a castle in the air you certainly cannot build it on the ground'.

## Notes

1. 'Towards Autonomous Publishing Capacity in Africa', *Development Dialogue* 1984:1-2, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala, Sweden, pp. 137-140.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. World Bank, *The East Asian Miracle, Economic Growth and Public Policy*, Washington DC, 1993.
7. *Ibid.*

## Appendix

### Framework for establishing equitable and mutually beneficial joint ventures in publishing in Africa

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1. Whereas it is normal business practice for contracting parties who agree to form joint ventures to advance their business interest according to their shares in investment, experience in the publishing business in Africa has shown that in the past transnational publishing companies, even while investing minority shares, were the main beneficiaries of these ventures to the disadvantage of the local partners.
2. Not unusually, the African partner was saddled with the losses while the foreign partner took more than his share of the profit through management fees and over-generous salaries and benefits to the foreign Managing Directors and other expatriate staff.
3. As the joint ventures were established with state or parastatal companies the consequences of the break-up of those ventures may not have been as devastating as they would have been if the local partner was a small publisher with all his or her savings tied up in the venture.
4. In the present and future situation in which joint ventures are more likely to be between foreign companies (big and small) and local ones of small to medium size, and where financial resources are unequal, it will be necessary for both parties to be absolutely clear as to the advantages and disadvantages of entering into joint ventures. In particular, as the foreign partner is likely to be the stronger financially, it will not be advisable to rush into any agreement before the contributions according to each partner's strengths and weaknesses are assessed and taken note of.

5. The strengths of the African publisher would tend to be: knowledge of the local publishing situation, contacts with responsible officials in curriculum development institutes, the Ministry of Education and other government bodies; knowledge of indigenous languages (important where local language publishing is developing); and knowledge of sources of authors, editors, illustrators, etc.

6. Where the African publishing partner is well established with a staff (trained and competent) and a basic infrastructure—an office, some capital assets and above all a backlist—a proper valuation of assets and goodwill should be undertaken and included in the final shareholding.

7. Where it is deemed necessary to establish a new company (and this may be preferable) rather than restructure the African publishing company, it may be necessary to build the new company on the basis of a publishing programme comprising series of books or courses (in the case of educational publishing).

In this regard:

- (i) both parties must agree on the manuscripts to be published in order to protect each other from loss and recrimination should the end product not sell;
- (ii) the African partner should be the leader in identifying areas of book needs, finding writers and editorial teams;
- (iii) the foreign partner (with expertise) should work side by side with the African partner in instituting management and organisational systems (where identified as weak) to ensure adherence to schedules and deadlines and to constitute part of the training component, one advantage to the African partner in a joint venture; and
- (iv) as far as possible all pre-press work—typesetting (except where special characters are not available locally), layout and design—should be done in Africa unless there are clear advantages for doing it in the country of the foreign partner such as urgency and price. This would be one way to develop skills in Africa.

8. The division of financial responsibilities needs careful consideration. While the share of small/medium partner will depend on publishers' financial strength, in the prevailing situation it is likely that the African partner will not be in a position to match the financial resources of the foreign partner. However, in order to retain equal say in the management of the joint venture, one proposed format could be the following:

The foreign partner pays for/covers:

- (i) a retainer fee for the commissioning or administering of manuscripts;
- (ii) printing and marketing costs;
- (iii) 50 per cent of the overheads of the company.

The local partner provides/pays for:

- (i) an office, basic secretarial staff, basic office furniture and machines (typewriters/word processors);
- (ii) DTP (text processing) if available;
- (iii) a warehouse (or other space to store books). As the joint venture develops and stock increases it would be necessary to have a warehouse facility.

#### 9. Profit-sharing

- (i) Based on annual accounts, profits would be shared equally after the deduction of costs (printing, overheads, royalties) and less say 80 per cent which should go into building a reserve fund.
- (ii) The foreign partner may choose either to repatriate the profit or to plough it back into the company; however, in view of the subsequent costs of printing, the reinvestment option would be the more attractive for the company and for exchange control department.
- (iii) In Year Five of operations the accumulated reserves may be sufficient to carry the budget for new titles without the foreign partner having to pay. At that time, a truly joint venture company would have evolved in a manner that enhances the development of indigenous publishing capacity.

10. There are certain basic conditions for the success of joint publishing ventures in Africa:

- Even though the partners in joint ventures in Africa, in the past, were transnational companies and state corporations, there have been other models of cooperation between African publishers—big and small—and European/American companies. These have taken the form of co-publications. They have usually benefited both parties because of the lower unit costs of larger print runs, and in some cases the African partner's copies have been priced on a run-on cost basis.
- Co-publication arrangements have worked best when the negotiating individuals knew one another, and there was trust between them and professional competence on both sides.
- Where such trust and professionalism were absent, there were inevitably problems, which usually put an end to other possible projects. For this reason it is recommended that those wishing to go into joint ventures should know their prospective partners well and have trust in them.
- It is for this reason too that a cautious project-by-project approach would have better chances of success than rushing headlong into fully-fledged joint companies.

# Book Marketing and Distribution

## The Achilles Heel of African Publishing

By Henry Chakava

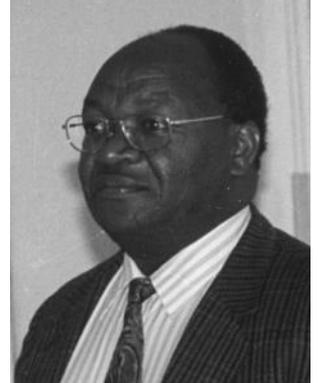
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*The point of departure for this wide-ranging discussion of marketing and distribution strategies is Henry Chakava's view 'that the African publisher has not ... approached his job with the energy, determination and innovativeness that would guarantee success'. Although acknowledging that shoestring budgets, inefficient transportation and an underdeveloped infrastructure of bookshops and libraries cannot be blamed on the African publisher, he challenges publishers to improve their operations by giving proper attention to market research, the production of clear and comprehensive catalogues, advance publicity, direct mail and other promotional approaches, and the equipping and training of personnel attending book fairs. Current practice, Chakava says, is to 'light a lamp and hide it under a bushel'.*

*Henry Chakava goes on to consider the issue of discounts and related credit terms, arguing that in the African context it is impracticable to extend further discounts to distributors; he suggests instead that more efforts should be made by all actors to enlarge existing markets. He also discusses the role of book development councils and national publishers associations, and concludes with a summary of the wider policy issues that need to be tackled at the national level.*

*Henry Chakava's experience in publishing goes back to 1972 when he joined the East African branch of Heinemann Educational Books in Nairobi. Eventually he became the Managing Director of the branch and later joined up with friends, colleagues and staff to buy the company and thus transform it from a transnational into an indigenous publishing house, carrying the name of East African Educational Publishers (EAEP). Henry Chakava played an important role both in the first and second Arusha seminars on indigenous African publishing and has advised the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation on publishing since this was first included on the Foundation's agenda. Between 1982 and 1992, he served as Chairman of the Kenya Publishers' Association. He has also been heavily involved in the work of the African Books Collective (ABC), the African Publishers' Network (APNET) and its training arm, the African Publishing Institute (API), and the Bellagio Publishing Network. Among several other important roles he serves on the Executive Committee of the International Publishers Association (IPA) and its International and 'Freedom to Publish' Committees.*

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## **Introduction**

When I was a young publisher under British tutelage, I used to be told two things. The first was that a good book sells itself. The second was that publishing is a gentleman's profession and publishers should not debase themselves by engaging in advertising books, least of all on TV and in mass circulation tabloids. Twenty five years on, I find myself pulled in two directions. Yes, books are different, but who cares?

The popular belief that 'books are different' is under siege in this new era of liberalisation, privatisation and commercialisation which has brought cut-throat competition. New realities are propelling me in a direction I do not and did not like, having built up my career as an academic-turned-businessman, much to the consternation of my colleagues in the Senior Common Room of the University of Nairobi in the early 1970s. As I have mellowed with age, I have come to the conclusion that books are consumer products like any other commodity, although they contain an intrinsic value which makes it necessary for the book salesman to be fully familiar with what is contained 'in between the two covers' before he can confidently promote and sell them. At a seminar in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in late 1995, an old friend of mine from India and a seasoned publisher protested that books are not 'products'. Then, what are they, I ask? Should they not be promoted alongside spaghetti, soaps, medicines, or should they be discreetly advertised in colourful language to attract the unsuspecting and sometimes ignorant buyer, like condoms?

Recently, I have been toying with the idea of advertising my books on television, just like candies, biscuits, beer, cigarettes, junk and health foods. The question I want to address here is, if I had the budget, would it be prudent for me to indulge in such high-profile gesturing? Would I sell more books as a result? Would I still retain the label of a 'respectable publisher', not always driven by the vagaries of commerce? These are questions which have nagged my conscience for a long, long time and which I shall tackle as candidly as I can in this article, which will make a detailed survey of all aspects of book marketing and distribution in Africa, what has been tried or not tried, what has worked or not worked, and what still remains to be done.

When I went into publishing in early 1972 as a trainee editor, I was, as mentioned above, informed by my trainers that under no circumstances should I advertise books in mass newspapers and popular magazines. The best way to expose my books was to have them reviewed on radio and in newspapers. I had some difficulty identifying a regular columnist to review my books in the local newspapers. So I embarked on reviewing them myself, especially the African Writers Series (AWS) fiction published in London, under a pen-

name. My reviews were syndicated to a sister newspaper in Dar es Salaam where they were also published. Imagine my embarrassment when I visited Dar es Salaam in 1973 and found one of my reviews in the *East African Standard* newspaper under my own by-line! At that point, I decided to stop this practice. In any case, I was always being unnecessarily hard on some of my books, like Alex la Guma's *In the Fog of the Season's End*, which I gave a less than glowing review for fear of being regarded as partial. At that time, I was actively helping James Currey to assess and recommend manuscripts for publication in Heinemann's African Writers Series.

Since then I have experimented with almost every other marketing, advertising and promotion gimmick in the book. In some cases, I have failed miserably. In others, I have been a trail-blazer ahead of my time, and some of my ideas, such as the launching of the popular fiction imprint Spear Books, which Macmillan followed up with their Pacesetters series, have proved very successful in the hands of others who jumped on the bandwagon.

I have come to the conclusion that marketing and promotion receive very low priority in African publishing programmes. Most publishers consider their work complete when, after months of sweating, their book finally comes off the press.

The majority of booksellers in Africa are generally inept and do not adopt a creative approach to their business. They sit behind their counters waiting for orders to flow in. They do not engage in any promotional activity at all, and few, if any, employ salesmen. Few believe in window displays to capture the passing trade, concentrating mainly on servicing school orders. With African governments moving away from book publishing and distribution, African booksellers will find it difficult to survive, let alone thrive, as they should, in a market economy.

Below, I shall comment on all book promotion and marketing issues and strategies available to the African book publishing industry, making brief observations regarding the extent to which these marketing possibilities are being exploited by the African publisher today.

## **Market research and publishing initiatives**

Most of the books published in Africa are not backed up with thorough market research to establish the needs and interests of the would-be consumer. The majority of writers write because 'this is my area of specialisation', and few bother to check whether any relevant literature already exists in the marketplace. Others do so because they want to compete with a rival author or

publisher whom they are convinced is ‘minting’ money in that subject area. For example, in 1972, I decided to launch a series of students’ guides, complete with potted examination questions and answers, to compete with the Minerva guides from India which were very badly written. Their attempts to produce guides on African works of fiction were particularly disastrous. So I launched the ‘Heinemann Student’s Guides’ in which series I have since published more than 40 titles on the various prescribed set books, the majority being by African writers. Today, in Kenya, there is not a single publishing house that is not publishing students’ guides under one or other series title.

Then, in 1974, I launched the Spear Books series in response to worries from some of our readers and writers that the AWS was far too didactic, and seemed to have been crafted specifically to capture the school book market as prescribed texts either for the ‘O’ or ‘A’ level examinations. This series, which I might add, did not, at first, get the support of my principals in London, was aimed at the low-brow reader in search of something to read during leisure time, as opposed to going to a movie or football match, watching TV, or chatting away with a neighbour. The language was controlled and the extent was fixed at between 80 and 96 pages under the mistaken view that the African reader was young and had a short concentration span. The first five titles were published in 1975 to much critical acclaim. A deal was struck with *Joe Magazine*, at that time the most popular magazine, edited by Hilary Ngweni and provocatively illustrated by Terry Hirst. We even jointly started what appears to have been a prototype of a book club. Readers would state their preferred title(s) by completing a tear-off form and returning it to *Joe Magazine* who would then forward the order to us for fulfilment. In spite of rave reviews, only 2,000 copies were sold in the first year as opposed to the full print-run of 8,000 copies which I had hoped would be ‘lapped up’ within the first few weeks of publication. The series continues to this day with print-runs scaled down to 4,000, which normally sell out within the first two years. Today, the Spear Books series continues to grow, with more than 40 titles in print, the most popular one being *My Life in Crime* by John Kiriamiti, which has sold in excess of 100,000 copies.

In 1988, I invited Professor Chinua Achebe of Nigeria to assist me in launching a series of children’s books of which there were no suitable ones in Kenya. Achebe himself, in an address to the opening ceremony of the 1987 Zimbabwe International Book Fair, had described foreign imported children’s books in Africa as ‘poisons wrapped in between beautiful covers’. I launched the EAEP Junior Readers Series with ten books at once, four of them being Achebe’s own—*How the Leopard Got His Claws*, *The Drum*, *The Flute* and *Chike and the River*. Today, the series contains over 50 readers

and is the fastest growth area in the publishing house. Achebe's launching visit was successfully followed by that of Cyprian Ekwensi whose books *The Drummer Boy*, *The Motherless Baby*, *The Boa Suitor*, *The Passport of Mallam Ilia*, *An African Night's Entertainment*, *Juju Rock Adventure*, *The Rainmaker and Other Stories* and *The Great Elephant Bird* have proved to be most successful with Kenyan readers, and several of them have been reprinted a few times. A couple of years ago, I invited the electrifying South African singer, storyteller and writer, Gcina Mphlope, whose contributions to the series, *The Snake with Seven Heads*, *The Queen of the Tortoises* and *The Singing Dog* have already won her a large following of Kenyan fans. Seeing our success in this publishing area, local firms have followed with new series of their own, the Pyramid Readers, the Anchor Readers, and others.

When the Government of Kenya decided to monopolise the publishing of primary and secondary school textbooks, have them written at the Kenya Institute of Education and published by the state publishers, Kenya Literature Bureau and Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, I decided to diversify my portfolio and minimise my risks by entering the 'revision books' market. I launched two series, the EAEP Revision Series for primary schools, and a similar one for secondary schools. These books were very successful at first, but during the period 1994–96, nearly all Kenyan publishers, including even the state publishers, have launched their own revision series, *Gateway* by Longman, *Top Mark* by Kenya Literature Bureau, and *Gold Medal* by Macmillan, to name a few.

A couple of years ago, we decided to launch a school library scheme through which we could sell our fast-expanding series of primary readers to schools in book boxes. The idea was immediately picked up by our competitors and there are now several schemes in operation to fulfil the library needs of rural populations. My secondary school English teacher always used to say 'Good examples will always find imitators', quoting from one of our regular readers at the time, *Cranes Flying South* by N. Karazen. Whereas we are happy to be copied and emulated by our colleagues, some of whom manage to do an even better job using their international outreach and connections, we would welcome participation from our Kenyan publishing colleagues as far as research into new ideas and projects is concerned. At present, they seem to engage in new projects essentially to give EAEP 'a run for their money'.

This practice of poaching ideas and industrial espionage has resulted in overpublishing in some areas while others remain completely neglected. For

example, there are no fewer than *four* competing courses in Primary Mathematics on the Kenyan market, *five* in Kiswahili, *three* in English, *five* in Business Education, *four* in Science, and *three* in Art and Crafts. At the secondary school level, there is duplication in English, Mathematics, Kiswahili, Agriculture and Home Science. The only exception is Physics, Chemistry and Biology where there are fewer competing courses, the majority imported from the United Kingdom.

While competition is healthy and to be encouraged, I would urge African publishers to be original and innovative when evolving their publishing programmes. It is not enough to start publishing in an area simply because you think your rival is 'minting'. He might not be, and I know many cases where false information has been conveyed to rival publishers. I am currently devoting my energies and resources to developing core university texts, supplementary tertiary courses for teachers' colleges, and readers in Kiswahili. I am also actively exploring partnership and co-publishing possibilities with neighbouring countries in East Africa, and with South Africa, India, Ghana, Nigeria and Canada. I challenge my competitors to follow suit.

### **Marketing and book promotion**

*'They light a lamp and hide it under a bushel'*

Most African publishers assume that their work has been completed when they take delivery of their printed books from their printers. Yet, publishers all over the world know that although publication is the end of the creation process, the greater challenge lies in getting the world to know about your newborn baby. Some of the methods used around the world in promoting and publicising books include the following: advertising, entry into catalogues, book lists, and other national or international bibliographies, author visits and launch parties where applicable, mailing blurbs, brochures and posters (where applicable) to possible sales outlets, and arranging exhibitions in schools and at special functions for purposes of displaying one's products. Publishers will normally employ sales representatives to visit schools, bookshops, libraries and other possible outlets for this purpose. Others will submit their new books to newspapers and magazines for review, as well as to the electronic media. Some publishers have put their catalogues on the Internet, now popularly referred to as the 'electronic bookstore', for easy access by intending buyers. Needless to add, these books will contain full bibliographical information, including year of publication, ISBN and, in some cases, coding bars.

Such a situation does not exist in Africa. African publishers lack strategic and planned promotional campaigns. Some of them do not even print extra covers of their books for promotional purposes. There is little or no advance

information about an impending publication. Most books contain incomplete bibliographic data, and some of it may be misleading. For example, it may give a publication date which is not current, and this may discourage the buyer, particularly American academic institutions which are always looking out for the latest publications. Some publishers do send out inspection copies but these are usually too few and therefore ineffective, and little or no attempt is made to monitor their impact.

Some of these problems cannot be blamed on the African publisher as such. As mentioned elsewhere in this article, African publishers have little money and operate on shoe-string budgets. The number of bookshops, libraries and other institutions where they may sell their books are few indeed, and do not have any meaningful book budgets. Transportation is expensive, yet slow, tedious and inefficient. Telephones hardly work; few publishers have fax machines, which, in any case, rely on a working telephone line; the postal services are slow, the roads impassable part of the year; and sales promotion personnel, as in all the other sectors of the industry, are untrained and inadequately equipped for their job.

It is our view that the African publisher has not, in spite of these handicaps, approached his job with the energy, determination and innovativeness that would guarantee success. Several undertake publishing on a part-time basis, maintaining other equally demanding jobs elsewhere. Some invest their profits from a book that sells well into buying a house or a farm instead of ploughing them back into the business. Many will sit on their slow-moving or dead stocks for a long time (a hen takes only 21 days) instead of finding ways in which they could dispose of them, even at a higher discount or to a remainder merchant, if one exists, to improve their cash flow. Few are willing to try out methods like selling books on consignment terms so as to get them into bookshops and within reach of their customers.

### *Advance publicity information*

As far as I am aware, there is no African publisher who produces advance publicity information on new and forthcoming titles. Few bother to print promotional leaflets, and only a handful produce annual catalogues. Most of their catalogues have incomplete and outdated information, and their blurbs could do with a little editorial intervention. Usually such information comes when the book has been on the market for several months, and it is found that essential bibliographic information such as ISBN, year of publication, price, and market restrictions, etc., may be missing.

Until the advent of the African Publishers' Network (APNET), the African publisher did not have a database of addresses of libraries, bookshops and

even fellow publishers to whom he could mail his publicity materials, when available. But now it is possible to obtain all this information from APNET which has detailed addresses of over 1,300 African publishers, publishers associations, bookshops, libraries and a host of other book-related international institutions, NGOs, and local and international development agencies. Postage rates continue to be inordinately high, with few African countries granting special postage rates for books and other printed matter. Delays are rampant and loss of mail is a frequent occurrence. But African publishers do know a bit more about each other and communicate more frequently nowadays, thanks to APNET. The APNET journal *African Publishing Review*, published once every two months, is beginning to list new publications just released, and African publishers would do well to take advantage of this free service which, incidentally, has been offered selectively by Hans Zell's Oxford-based *African Book Publishing Record* for more than 20 years.

It is absolutely essential that African publishers should get into the habit of issuing advance publicity information even for the sake of better internal planning and management within their own organisations. Sadly, however, because of the vagaries and unpredictable nature of Africa's printers, there is a danger in issuing advance information when a book may take months, even years, to come off the press! But this is a risk worth taking.

*Book fairs, catalogues, direct mail, and other promotional approaches*

The idea of going to book fairs or holding book events is relatively new in sub-Saharan Africa. In the last 20 years or so, there have been book fairs in Nigeria (the Ife Book Fair), Zimbabwe (the Zimbabwe International Book Fair), Kenya (the Pan-African Children's Book Fair), Senegal (the Dakar Book Fair), and a new one started in Ghana in 1996. All these have been conceived and executed on an international scale. There have been book events in several other countries such as Togo, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi and Namibia. Although the number of African participants has been increasing at these fairs, their presentation and the layout of their stands has been less than professional.

Catalogues produced by Northern publishers are glossy, handy, easy to use, with complete bibliographic information, attractively produced to catch the eye at a book fair, even of the passer-by giving only cursory attention to a stand. By contrast, African publishers go to book fairs without any catalogues, or with outdated ones, the majority even without visiting cards so that they constantly have to write their addresses on scrappy pieces of paper for their impatient customers. In some cases, the people 'manning' the stands have no information about the books on display and will occasionally remove archaic calculators from their pockets to convert their local prices

into an international currency for the foreign buyer. Needless to add, few, if any, African publishers print special catalogues for book fairs with prices in convertible currencies, let alone print subject catalogues for those customers with specific subject interests. It would be too much to expect that an African exhibitor at a book fair would have a subject and author index in their catalogues to facilitate easy reference. As a result of their unpreparedness, African publishers lose a lot of orders at book fairs. And, sadly, some orders taken are not followed up, so that six months down the road the customer is forced to cancel his order. Equally, contacts made are often not followed up, and a letter may remain unanswered until the next book fair.

In some cases, especially where the displaying publisher is a parastatal or a state publisher, the civil servant whose turn to go on an overseas trip has come simply lays out the books on the first day and goes off on a shopping spree or to check out long-lost relations in the host country. When he comes back towards the end of the fair, he is surprised to find his books intact, almost as they were because, naturally, they are not attractive enough to tempt anyone to steal them! Not knowing how to deal with this stock, he either abandons it there for disposal by the organisers, or offers it to any library wishing to have it, free of charge, or remains it for a song as his boxes are full of shopping and he does not want to bear the cost of freighting the books back home.

Finally, direct mail is, in my view, the most effective way of promoting books in Africa. If you target an individual, he tends to feel honoured that you have chosen him in preference to others, and will most likely respond to your mailing. In the old days at Heinemann Kenya, we used to send inspection copies to teachers and education officers, with an inspection report form inviting comments. There was a postscript at the bottom of the page to the effect that if we did not receive the reader's comments in six weeks' time, we would request him to pay for the book. The response was approximately 75-per-cent positive and earned us valuable intelligence and a decent inspection-copy income. Unfortunately, I had to discontinue the practice because of the tedious process of sending several reminders to the reader (the latter ones usually slightly more threatening) and today, our inspection-copy vote-head is now a cost centre.

### *Quality of production*

I have already commented on the quality of African published books elsewhere in this article. But this section would be incomplete if the issue were not re-visited. It is a well-known fact that nearly 85 per cent of the books published in sub-Saharan Africa are textbooks and, for reasons already given, these do not travel beyond national borders. A cursory look at most of

them will reveal glaring spelling errors and bad grammar even in the preliminary pages and the blurb. The paper used, the design, layout and illustrations are often sub-standard. The printing and binding may be awful, displaying bad imposition on the printer's part, so that printed lines on the opposite sides of corresponding pages do not 'merge'. There may be 'see-through' because the lines are not properly 'backed-up'. Uneven inking and bad registration so evident in African-produced books turns a printed page into a smudge and interferes with easy reading.

Although all these criticisms are valid, not all of them can be attributed to the African publisher who, nevertheless, must accept responsibility for the bad quality of African-produced books. After all, it is the publisher who is the choirmaster and conductor of this mixed orchestra of players in the publishing arena. In most cases, it is he who conceives a book, identifies the author and guides him through the writing and production process. It is he who prints the book, or puts it on tender and appoints the printer. It is he who supervises the printing, scrutinises advance copies, and gives the final go-ahead for bulk delivery. It is he who pays the printer, and offers the book for sale. He is at the centre of the book chain and, even though he may not be the one who makes the most money in this game, publishing as we know it today would not exist without him. Some people have described the publisher as a 'midwife'. This definition is partly valid as far as the creation side of the chain is concerned, but when one considers the investment side of the venture and the risks involved, and the number of 'children' he has to deliver every day, one realises that the publisher is not only a midwife but the mother, father, nurturer, guardian and promoter of the book 'child', and even the undertaker if the child dies.

Factors with which the African publisher must contend include impatient and inexperienced authors with overblown egos, lack of professional training for both author and publisher, untrained and inexperienced printers working with archaic Heidelberg presses, some of them more than a century old, and lack of proper quality controls and discipline at all levels of the African book publishing chain.

How else could one justify a book that is put on the market without a date of publication, an ISBN and crucial factual information which librarians and other book buyers all over the world are guided by in their purchasing? How would a decent book be published without a blurb or any spine lettering? Admittedly, Africa does not yet have designers who will produce covers that 'beckon' the passer-by and 'invite' him to look at them. Admittedly, most African countries do not have access to good laminating and spirit-varnish-

ing equipment, to say nothing of bindery lines with proper tropicalised glues and cover-scoring facilities. Even so, my view here is that African publishers are not producing their best out of this admittedly bad technological situation. With the current mood of liberalisation and commercialisation, African publishers should begin to explore possibilities of printing their books in countries such as Mauritius, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya (in that order) whose printing and packaging industries are capable of producing books that one can proudly exhibit at Frankfurt, Bologna and other internationally recognised book fairs. It would be foolish to exhibit textbooks at such fairs, however well known and profitable they might be in your home market. The whole area of trade and general publishing is even more complex and calls for even better technical and production skills. For the moment, African publishers should devote their energies to publishing more attractive children's books for their home, regional and continental markets. General books, including fiction, do well where there is a developed middle class with more time for leisure and a disposable income. African countries have yet to reach this level and publishers would be advised to stay within the school textbook and simple children's book publishing bracket.

### **Discounts and related credit terms**

Without a doubt, the most controversial question in book distribution—and about which no one is yet agreed, including our Northern torchbearers—is that of discounts and credit terms. I remember witnessing an acrimonious exchange between two of the largest British publishers at Queen Elizabeth II Hall in London, the scene of the International Publishers Association conference in 1990. The speakers, Ian Chapman and Paul Hamlyn, lost their tempers on the set. The latter was nervously fidgeting but not surrendering an inch in their discussion of retail price maintenance in the UK. I believe Paul was advocating that the forces of supply and demand be allowed to establish the percentage discounts publishers should give to distributors. Personally, I have felt strongly that such an approach would seriously damage the ability of small, countryside booksellers competing with the big high-street bookshops and merchandising houses. In the absence of a truce which the session's chairman failed to broker, it would appear that Paul won the day, with Ian's concluding remarks being 'over my dead body'.

There are many players in the book marketing and distribution chain, each claiming to play a significant and unique role, and all apparently depending on each other to ensure the success of a publication. These include the wholesalers (distributors), the retailers (bookshops) and the merchandising houses (such as the bookshops in large department or chain stores—Deben-

hams, Sainsbury, Tesco, Asda, Marks & Spencer, to name only a few in the UK). These outlets also operate different discount structures ranging from the volume of the purchase to the terms of credit (e.g. cash, 30 days, 60 days, etc.). One such large buyer can insist on a discount as high as 75 per cent and might request that the publication be repackaged to suit the needs and tastes of his market niche. The next category consists of *bona fide* bookshop chains such as W.H. Smith, Waterstones and Dillons which may operate as trade or educational bookshops. The rest are the types of small bookshop chains one finds all over the world, with some of them running a few shops, or even only one shop in a particular area. These are the ones Ian Chapman was trying to defend, and he lost because 'small is beautiful' gave way to 'big is beautiful' when British publishers started engaging in mergers and paper-sale transactions whose main achievement was to put a lot of ill-gotten wealth into the hands of a few British publishers, Paul Hamlyn himself being a good example. A viable and vibrant publishing company would be bought by these sharks, stripped of its assets, trimmed down so that the 'unprofitable' parts of its list are scaled down or discontinued or even sold off. The result would be a 'lean and mean' company, healthy in every respect, which would then be publicly quoted on the stock exchange. The value of the stocks would increase substantially and these speculators would then cash some of the premiums thus gained, and use the newly acquired profits to stalk another company. It is through such practices under Thatcherism that millionaires like Paul Hamlyn increased their wealth tenfold without even touching or going through the daunting exercise of deciding whether or not to risk investing in a new book, or to what extent one should continue publishing in unprofitable but essential subject areas such as drama and poetry. It is against this background that my employer Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, then a member of the Thomas Tilling Group of Companies, changed owners four times in less than two years and the East African branch was eventually offered to me to buy because it was 'unprofitable' and Africa was a risky area to operate in.

Perhaps a word should be said about second-hand bookshops, remaindering and merchandising houses. Some British and American publishers have policies to destroy, remainder or sell off, at very high discounts, books (especially fiction, children's books, etc.) which do not sell or prove their worth within the first eight weeks or so of publication. These books are then usually bought by the large department stores referred to above who may be able, through their enormous sales and publicity budgets and their many outlets, to sell the stocks at a handsome profit. They have no problem in outpricing small booksellers, and this is the injustice that Ian Chapman was trying to expose to the international book community. I was very surprised that

these two urbane publishing giants (Hamlyn as Chairman of Reed Books and Chapman as Chairman of Collins), had chosen to wash their linen in the august Queen Elizabeth II Hall. But this goes to show just how sensitive the issue of discounts and retail price maintenance on books is, and how difficult it is to reconcile all the interests involved.

In Africa, there are no rules in this game of discounts, which generally vary between 15 per cent and 40 per cent. There are no large department stores with book sections, no merchandising agents, no remaindering houses, and very few trade, educational, institutional or privately owned bookshops. The few that exist are based mainly in the urban areas, supplying a small catchment area. There are hardly any bookshops in the rural areas as these areas are far too remote and without adequate access roads, rail or postal services. Most booksellers are under-capitalised, ill-trained and ill-equipped. They neither have the capacity nor capability to cater for the needs of their clientele which consists mostly of schoolteachers, pupils and specialist groups. Only churches have what one might describe as a chain of bookstores, but these normally concentrate on selling the bible, hymn book and other Christian literature. The greatest problem facing African booksellers is that they are not accessible to their would-be customers; they lack some of the key titles their readers may be looking for, and are sometimes forced to mark up their prices beyond the reach of their readers in order to cover their costs and pay excessive postage and transportation charges while operating within a small and inflexible discount structure. Publishers cannot afford to improve their discounts because they are operating on very expensive borrowed money (if they can get it), print in small and unviable runs, and do not have the budgets or the capacity or ability to promote their books. Moreover, the low sales recorded by African publishers mean that the royalties they pay to their authors are not high enough to encourage them to take writing seriously. It is a vicious circle which is difficult to break out of without tackling the larger problems of poverty and underdevelopment.

The proceeds from the book publishing business in Africa are too small to be beneficially distributed amongst the principal players involved. The authors are complaining of small royalty percentages and earnings; the publishers' low margins have resulted in losses, negative cash-flows and bankruptcies. In Kenya, for example, although the discounts extended to distributors and retailers have increased from around 20 per cent to nearly 40 per cent in the last 25 years, these still complain that their transport and other overhead costs leave them with few or no margins. In my view, the solution does not lie in extending further discounts to distributors. More emphasis must be put on widening the market base of African countries by adopting policies that

will bring about increased literacy, create more disposable income and encourage book reading and book-buying habits by building more libraries and reading centres, and generally doing everything possible to create, develop and sustain a reading environment. Greater book consumption will result in greater sales for bookshops, more library activity, more books published and a larger purse for the author.

### **Book development councils**

The idea of Book Development Councils (BDCs) was first mooted by UNESCO as a panacea for solving book development problems in developing countries mainly in the South, but in the North as well. In the mid- to late 1960s, BDCs were established in Asia and South America largely through the initiative of influential local and emergent publishers in those countries. These initiatives were largely successful in both continents: and today more than 15 countries in Asia have full functioning BDCs and at least half a dozen countries in Latin America operate equivalent book institutes. The objective of BDCs is, to quote the Indian book publishing consultant Abul Hasan, 'to stimulate and co-ordinate the publication and use of books in such a manner that they become effective tools of national development and to integrate book promotion plans into overall national development planning. The council should provide a national focal point which might serve both as a clearing house on publishing policy and as a centre where production and distribution problems could be kept under continuing study.'

UNESCO's success in these two continents prompted it to replicate the same strategy for Africa following the Accra meeting of 1968. It played a key role in the establishment of a regional book council in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in 1974. CREPLA, for this was the French acronym of the Centre for the Promotion of Children's Publications in Africa South of the Sahara, was launched with much fanfare, with the OAU and African governments pledging full support. But the project turned out to be a sitting duck. By 1984, CREPLA, under the leadership of William Moutchia, had little to show for its existence. Moutchia blamed this on lack of definition of the goals and mission of the centre. He also claimed that the support promised by the OAU and his own country, Cameroon, had not been forthcoming. But there seemed to be enough funds available in the early 1980s to enable Mr Moutchia to travel to almost every book event in Africa and beyond, expounding and promoting CREPLA's mission and vision, and appealing for support and assistance from Northern governments and international development and donor agencies, as well as African governments. He was not successful with any of these and CREPLA started to die a slow death, with support coming in only from Cameroon, where the centre is domiciled. Al-

though there is still mention of CREPLA at international gatherings, the centre is moribund, and has little to show for its many years of existence. At a publishing seminar in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in November 1995, we were informed that CREPLA has become an embarrassment even to the Cameroonian government itself, as it has achieved and continues to achieve nothing while still being supported by the Exchequer. One project which was initiated by CREPLA at the behest of UNESCO was publishing children's books for Africa, using the same artwork to produce several national editions of the same book, with local languages providing the text and/or captions. Eighteen years down the road, only three children's books had been identified for co-production and only one *Chaka* had been published in only two languages, English and French.

The failure of the CREPLA experiment can, in my opinion, be attributed to four factors, namely: bad management at the Secretariat, lack of support from African governments, loss of follow-up interest by UNESCO and other donor and development agencies, and the fact that Africa did not have a Noma who could have propped and supported it financially when UNESCO finally developed cold feet. Even more important is the fact that the concept of BDCs was UNESCO-driven and totally ignored the existence of the local publishers who were then emerging and preferred, instead, to work with African governments. And this was the recipe for disaster, mismanagement, inertia, bureaucracy in decision-making, and dwindling support from the donors on the grounds that 'the centre, so far, had nothing to show to justify its continued existence'. It was a noble idea with the right mission and purpose but it was far ahead of its time. I am not convinced that, even now on the eve of the 21st century, a project such as this can succeed in Africa. African publishers just do not have the capital to invest in order to support and develop such an idea when the donor or development agency project circle comes to an end and the funds dry up.

To date, BDCs exist in Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, Namibia and South Africa. They are more effective in the countries where they are headed by a book person from the private sector. They are ineffective where they are headed by a non-professional public or civil servant. For a book chain to work, authors, artists, graphic designers, translators, publishers, printers, booksellers, book users, both private and institutional, and libraries, be they public, parastatal, institutional or private, must work in tandem with their governments through the Ministries of Education, Culture, Commerce, Finance, and Information and Broadcasting. The person in charge should have the status, knowledge, skill, experience, strategy and alertness which only a conductor of a large orchestra has. There is no such person in Africa today,

and cash-strapped UNESCO for all its good intentions simply does not have the capacity or the will to work with African book professionals in a fast-growing private sector-driven publishing industry. As long as UNESCO continues to operate through governments in Africa, its noble efforts will come to nought. As long as it continues to hatch grandiose schemes from Paris and without consultation with those whom it is supposed to serve, it will not have the local goodwill and support necessary to enable it achieve its mission and goals.

UNESCO should realise that its programmes worked best in centrally controlled governments, especially in Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, and South America. In today's world where commercialisation, privatisation and sustainability are the benchmark, the bottom line is the most important determinant of the viability of any project. UNESCO must adapt to these changes or else its role in the field of education and culture will progressively diminish. And African governments must realise that the burden of providing services to their peoples is their responsibility and not that of donors (the World Bank in particular, NGOs and other international development or donor agencies). To achieve this, African countries should resort to less government, and empower their own people to take charge of their economies and general welfare. Unless and until these issues are seriously addressed at relevant international and regional forums, and a longer-term strategy for their resolution put in place, there will continue to be neither the goodwill, policies and superstructure nor the infrastructure that can meaningfully provide a sustainable solution to the problem of book provision in Africa.

### **National publishers associations**

One country that has made effective use of its national publishers association (NPA) is Great Britain. The British Publishers Association (BPA), together with the Book Development Council, which was earlier on privatised and re-named International Book Development (IBD), work hand in hand with the British Council which is the *de facto* cultural and educational wing of the British Foreign Office. The aims are simple and noble, namely to promote and facilitate the widest possible use of the English language throughout the world. In this they have been very successful. With support from organs such as the BPA, the Copyright Clearing Centre (CCC), the Arts Council of Great Britain, *The Bookseller*, and numerous trusts and other philanthropic organisations, the British Council has, over the last 50 years, almost converted English into a world language.

The commercial and cultural upshot of this is that the need for the English language facility has expanded tremendously over the same period. Now we

hear of English Language Teaching (ELT), English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and all sorts of other schemes which have benefited British publishers since they are best placed to provide relevant books and related materials to support these programmes. In less than 20 years, British publishers have been able to reap fortunes from these programmes in non-traditional English-language markets such as the Middle East, Spain, Italy, Egypt and Japan and are now spreading out to the newly democratised countries of Eastern Europe, Indonesia, Malaysia and China, not to forget India and the sub-continent of Southeast Asia. English has, without any doubt, become the acknowledged lingua franca of the world, with African countries such as Namibia, South Africa and Cameroon admitted into the Commonwealth, and Mozambique and Angola expressing a wish to join. The latest country to convert to English is Rwanda, where English is to replace French as the official language. But one should remember that all this brings with it cultural, commercial, social, economic and political implications. Is it proper that English should become the language of the world? What would be the dangers of this? Since English is also promoted by the USA, the undisputed world superpower, efforts by France, Germany, Spain, Italy and Portugal to sell their languages abroad have not been successful. They simply do not have the infrastructure, superstructure and the financial backing that the English language currently enjoys.

It is, anyhow, a *fait accompli* that English will be the master language of the world for some years yet, and this will put more money in the pockets of British publishers, especially the transnationals. In Africa, the situation is quite different. Only ten countries, namely Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia and South Africa, had NPAs at the end of 1995, Ethiopia's being the youngest. As I pointed out earlier, only Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Namibia and South Africa have book development councils. NPAs are often heavily influenced and controlled by government. Looking at these statistics, it becomes obvious that the most successful African publishing countries are those that are free from government control and direction. The case of Kenya invites debate. Kenya was among the countries that attended the first publishing conference in Ghana in 1968, organised and sponsored by UNESCO. At that meeting they pledged to start a book development council immediately, as reported by the Kenyan delegate Francis Pala, then Director of the Kenya National Library Service. At a UNESCO meeting in 1972, Kenya reported that it had already set up a BDC. The truth, however, is that this was not registered until 1982 (a certificate of registration exists). The sad thing is that the Kenyan BDC exists only in name, a paper tiger to this day, in spite of promises from the Ministry of Education and the Kenya National Commis-

sion to UNESCO that an act of Parliament to give it statutory status is before parliament. A UNESCO-organised conference was held in Nairobi in 1988 and its theme was 'Re-launching the Kenya National Book Development Council'. Several recommendations emerged from the meeting and the Ministry of Education promised UNESCO and the delegates that a Council would be formed at once. But, to this day, nothing has happened. My fear is that such an organ, even if it were created, would be headed by a bureaucratic civil servant with little or no knowledge or empathy with the Kenyan publishing industry.\*

The story of the Kenyan NPA is different. The Kenya Publishers Association (KPA) was registered in January 1971. At that time, it was primarily controlled by expatriate publishers working for local branches of transnational publishers. It has had a chequered career and, in 1982, split into two, with local indigenous publishers breaking away to form the Society of Kenya Publishers (SKP). Through my ten-year tenure (1982–92) as Chairman of a divided and extremely antagonistic organisation, I was able to bring back some of the breakaway partners. My finest hour was in 1990 when I was able to persuade Alexis Koutchoumow, Secretary General of the International Publishers Association (IPA), to recommend KPA for membership.

The Kenyan publishing industry is struggling to succeed in spite of the many hurdles being placed in its way by the Kenyan government, and the government's failure to fully cooperate with the other countries in the region in the establishment of a common East African market. If the socialistic, autocratic and monopolistic policies adopted by the government after the adoption of the Mackay Education Report in 1981 had been put in place at independence, Kenya would today be a disorganised book-poor nation, just like other African countries. In the new spirit of commercialisation, liberalisation and privatisation, Kenya needs less government, but more enlightened information and better publishing and book policies if it is to regain its position as a leading publishing and knowledge centre in Africa, which it enjoyed in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

The problems of book marketing and distribution in Africa are part and parcel of the problems of African publishing itself. Some of these result from underdevelopment and are not within the publishers' ability to solve. Any

\* At the initiative of the private sector, a book development council was indeed registered and launched in October 1997 during the National Book Week celebrations. Chaired by this writer, its results remain to be seen.

approach to solving these problems must be holistic because the publishing chain fails when any of its components fail. In this conclusion, an attempt is made to put forward proposals which, if put in place, would not only successfully tackle the problems of marketing and distribution, but would also strengthen the African book publishing chain itself. My view is that if the African publisher is to be empowered and enabled to deliver, the following five issues need to be addressed: policies, infrastructural development, finance, overall economic development, and market development.

### *Policies*

Most African countries continue to function without any policies whatsoever in this vital and fast-growing area of communication. A few may have an education policy, information policy, book or publishing policy, press law, or a book council. In terms of policy formulation, Namibia, South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana appear to have made some progress. It is no wonder that these are the fastest-developing countries in Africa as far as publishing is concerned. Their book industries operate in tandem with mainstream government policies and their NPAs and BDCs work closely with their Ministries of Education and Culture. Putting aside the issue of state versus private enterprise publishing, African governments must formulate policies that can enable publishing to develop within a mainstream national development strategy; otherwise we shall create, as we have done already, unnecessary structures, some of which may conflict with, duplicate or even contradict our stated objectives. It is my view that publishing thrives better in the private sector due to its very personalised yet professional style, and the complications of administering a small but complex organisation impinging on many others and involving many 'product lines', in this case each book constituting a product line on its own. It would be impossible for such an industry to be controlled centrally unless, of course, it is done in the way communist Soviet Union used to do it, that is to treat every book in exactly the same way, so that the number of copies printed and 'sold' was always the same for every book published. In these days of liberalisation and privatisation, African governments should give serious consideration to controlling education by preparing and approving curricula, and by assessing and advising schools on the strengths and weaknesses of new books appearing on the market. In this way, they would be able to control the quality of education they offer without having to engage in commerce.

### *Infrastructural development*

Services such as communication networks—roads, railways, sea routes and airlines—housing, rural electrification, schools and library development, and the establishment of tertiary and higher institutions of learning are all necessary, if a publisher's work is to be made easy and if he is to get his books to all parts of the country, especially the rural areas. This infrastruc-

ture is lacking or inadequate in most of Africa. Unfortunately, there is little the African publisher can do in such a situation and this is what causes a marketing and distribution headache. The growth of infrastructure is concomitant with general national development. A more industrialised country like South Africa has a thriving book industry, while the economic development taking place in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Kenya and Ghana, can be seen from their fairly active book industries. Undeveloped countries such as Mozambique and Angola have no book industries to talk of, while others such as Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi are still struggling. We can also include, under this heading, the infrastructure needed for book creation, production and distribution. A publishing industry requires the support of good writers, publishers, designers, artists, printers, bookshops and libraries. The absence of one, or the inadequacy of any of these players, affects the rest.

While advising that African governments should stay out of trading in books, I would urge them to give attention to developing a proper infrastructure that can support publishing and other commercial activities on a national and regional scale. Here, the strengthening of national, regional and continental lobby groups that support and represent the publishing industry should also be recommended. APNET should be strengthened, supported by national governments and granted diplomatic status in OAU member countries. NPAs should be established in countries where they do not exist, and should be consulted during the formulation of relevant government policies but act as separate independent organs. Book development councils should be set up on a national and regional basis, along the lines recommended by UNESCO, and they should not be headed by civil servants, nor be made to report to a government ministry, although relevant government ministries should be represented on such councils. Regional groupings such as PTA, COMESA, IGADD, SACO in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa, and WAC and the Federation of French Speaking African Countries in West and North Africa should be strengthened so that they can work towards improving regional contacts and trade within Africa. Regional examination bodies and literature bureaus similar to those set up by the colonial governments soon after the Second World War should be re-established with a view to strengthening local publishing and supporting publications in minority languages, especially indigenous African languages.

### *Finance*

Indigenous African publishers are undercapitalised. They get no assistance from their governments, and most banks view them with suspicion. There is no bank in Africa that we are aware of that will accept publishers' stocks as collateral at full value. International aid and development agencies are now only beginning to take an interest in African publishing and the World Bank

and Overseas Development Administration only gradually beginning to accept that African publishers have sufficient capacity to bid for and win orders, and supply publications. Previously, invitations to tender were publicised in Europe and America, usually without the knowledge of commercial publishers in the recipient country, with the result that books destined for Africa were published outside the continent. Lack of money is still the African publisher's greatest problem. He cannot afford to hire and train and retain high calibre-staff. He has insufficient funds for pre-publication research, advance publicity material, post-publication activities such as advertising, launch parties, posters and other publicity gimmicks. The quality of his books is inferior as he has no alternative but to go for cheap production. Most of his books will be in soft-back with a simple black and white cover, and where he affords full colour on the cover, he does not give it the full complement of lamination or spirit vanishing. Due to cash-flow problems, he engages in short-term projects which can bring in immediate gains but which are not sustainable. In other words, he would prefer to publish revision books rather than engage in an expensive but potentially profitable textbook project. If the African publisher could find a source of cheap money, the quality of his books would dramatically improve as would his general demeanour and that of his publishing house.

### *Economic development*

Although books are everywhere in Africa regarded as essential commodities, preference is given to other day-to-day living needs such as food, health, housing, clothing and school fees. The reason for this is visible and immediate; the damage caused by lack of knowledge and information is not visible and its effects are not immediate. There are many people living their lives today without reading the daily newspaper, let alone a book. And while people in the industrialised world are communicating through all sorts of super information highways—Internet, e-mail, fax, and other highly developed telephonic channels—some communities in Africa are still basically oral. There is talk in the North about a 'bookless' society, meaning a post-book society, while for us in Africa, 'bookless' societies are indeed pre-book societies. So, unless Africa achieves a rate of economic development that will leave its people with disposable income, decent living and work conditions and some leisure time, book-buying habits may not develop even if the publisher were to have sufficient funds to engage in the book promotional activities mentioned above.

### *Market development*

African publishing has a very narrow market base. Most African books are published in foreign languages such as English and French which, in most cases, are spoken by minority groups. Africa has over 1,000 languages, and a majority of them do not yet have transcribed orthographies. Thirdly, more

than 50 per cent of African people are illiterate and therefore have no need for books. The problem of the lack of book-reading and book-buying habits in Africa has been widely publicised and is referred to earlier in this article. Most of the books on sale in African bookshops are imported from Britain and France and do not deal with the issues that interest African readers. Many people find them fickle and irrelevant and an affront to their own culture. Earlier in this article, reference has been made to the lack of a reading environment, and emphasis placed on the need for rural libraries and rural electrification. Finally, it can only be reiterated that for a sustainable book market to emerge in Africa, we should not only address the questions raised above but should work hand in hand with our governments in order to bring about economic development. One attends to one's basic needs before buying a book. So if we can aim to improve the economies of African countries, its peoples will gradually accumulate disposable income for buying books and other items of value.

In this Conclusion, the wider problems and issues affecting publishing in Africa in general have been revisited. Marketing and distribution is part of the publishing process, and it would have been foolish to tackle this subject in isolation. Although marketing and distribution come at the end of the publishing chain, they are, in our view, what determines the success or failure of any publishing business.

# A Real Cultural Revolution

By Per I. Gedin

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*In the evolution of electronics, particularly the new technique of digital printing, Per Gedin sees a process that 'will change the face of publishing in every country' and whose advent means that 'African countries can make a great leap forward, catching up on several decades'. Arguing that the new techniques seem almost to have been invented for book production in developing countries, since they obviate the need for long print-runs, warehouses and transportation, he calls on the African Publishers' Network (APNET) to undertake a study of these techniques as a matter of priority and to investigate their full potential for the development of indigenous publishing.*

*Managing Director of Gedins Förlag since 1987, Per Gedin has been in Swedish publishing since graduating from Uppsala University in 1953. In his early years, he managed a book club and started the first Scandinavian paperback house. From 1961 to 1986, Gedin was Managing Director of Wahlström and Widstrand, a Stockholm trade publisher. Chairman of the Swedish Publishers Association 1991–94, Gedin writes frequently on publishing. His *LITERATURE IN THE MARKETPLACE* (Faber & Faber, London 1977) is widely admired.*

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## Introduction

When the first Arusha seminar was given the title, 'Developing Autonomous Publishing Capacity in Africa', these were not intended just to be fine-sounding words; we wanted real results too. It was not to be simply another seminar ending in lofty promises and nothing else, but to have a clear and identifiable outcome.

Twelve years later, we can evaluate what has happened. The Loan Guarantee Programme has been launched, probably the first of its kind in the developing world. In Kenya over a dozen indigenous publishers have been involved. A few have fallen out, but the majority have used the possibilities offered and done remarkably well.

As we assumed at the time, there was no lack of publishing capability—on the contrary. During these years publishing companies have been built and grown with a professionalism and vitality that is most impressive. The main problem was finance. There was, though, from the beginning, complete agreement between the publishers involved and those setting up the scheme that necessary funds should be provided as loans on a commercial basis with

market interest rates and not provided as grants by donor countries—which was the usual pattern.

The necessity of indigenous publishing is obvious. As the organisers of the first Arusha seminar emphasised, the publishing industry is ‘the backbone of a nation’s literacy, educational and literary programmes’. Since then indigenous publishing, from being hardly acknowledged at all, has become a focal point of interest in various ways and has been much strengthened. The infrastructure it has developed is impressive: there is the African Publishers’ Network (APNET), which links national publishers’ associations and has raised the industry’s profile on the continent generally; there is the African Publishing Institute (API) for professional training and there is ABC, the African Books Collective, for distribution worldwide. Nothing of this was in existence when we met at Arusha the first time.

So far so good. It is also important, though, to look at what has *not* been achieved.

### *Finance*

The financing of indigenous publishing is still weak. With one or two exceptions African publishers can hardly put up any resistance when the transnational publishers decide to compete. To build a strong financial base is one of the most important requirements for the future. It is adamant that the owners should not extricate any monies from the company. In principle, all profits should be reinvested.

Another very interesting possibility, which Walter Bgoya has brought up, is joint ventures. Professional knowledge of the local scene can be joined with financing from the outside. This could become a short cut to the consolidation of a company.

### *Marketing and distribution*

I will not go into detail on the issue of marketing and distribution. However, I feel that Henry Chakava is absolutely right in saying in his article: ‘Most African publishers assume that their work has been completed when they take delivery of their books from the printer.’ It is quite possible to delete the word ‘African’ to make this statement even more accurate. Far too many publishers all over the world forget that they must also sell their books.

For the word ‘marketing’ we could substitute ‘information’, which is immediately less expensive. Publishers are convinced that everyone knows what they are publishing. This is not the case. It is not usually a matter of money to inform—cheap leaflets, free copies etc. do a lot—it is a matter of awareness. Publishers must also be aware that covers and typography are part of

the marketing process. Once books are in the market place they should be looked upon as any commercial commodity. It is obvious, as with other products, that an attractively packaged item is easier to sell. And good design is not more expensive than bad design.

Sales to retailers or directly to customers is another crucial area. Most publishers are too small to have a sales force of their own. I have in vain tried to convince publishers in Nairobi that they should cooperate through a joint sales force. The fear of competition is—unwisely—greater than seeing the rationale in cooperation. This is a system that works extremely well in Europe and the US. Sales people do not care which publisher has produced a book, they only care if it is easy to sell. There are two possibilities—either that one of the bigger publishers invites some of his colleagues to share his sales force, and is thus able to reduce its costs or to increase its size, or that an independent sales force is set up, working on behalf of a number of small publishers.

Distribution, another important link in the marketing chain, poses severe problems for small publishers, especially new ones. Efficient contact with customers—retail, export, single buyers etc.—is crucial for success. An independent distributor is usually very powerful. He can decide discounts, thus favouring some publishers over others, and even refuse to represent publishers. Here, too, there is an interesting possibility for several publishers to start a joint distribution centre—and still better to link it with an independent sales force promoting the books published by the same publishers involved in this as well as selling for other publishers.

## **Fiction and general books**

The publishing of fiction and general books has not developed in the way we hoped. Our idea was that indigenous publishers would attract fiction writers and also create a market for these books. Obviously text books and, to a lesser degree, children's books, are the core of the market and, of course, the market for indigenous fiction is—comparatively—small and risky; on the other hand it is, as we know, possible to sell tens of thousand, even hundreds of thousand copies of a few books in a country like Kenya.

I am aware that you cannot command good fiction to appear; but it is possible to encourage people to write. I would suggest that someone arranges a novel-writing competition in order to test the possibilities. It would surprise me if unknown talent did not emerge. A competition is also in itself a very good marketing proposition.

## Publishing and the new technology

During the twelve years since the first Arusha seminar, then, many interesting developments have taken place in African publishing. At the same time, a real revolution has emerged at the global level—the electronic revolution.

The evolution of electronics is right now changing the future of publishing in a most intriguing way. After several hundred years during which methods and processes changed little, conventional publishing and, even more so, book production are changing radically and will soon be entirely different. I am not talking about the CD-Rom record. This will affect only a small part of the publishing industry, involving encyclopaedias, some popular children's books, etc. It will not affect traditional books any more than videos or ordinary CDs have done.

What is interesting in our context is the new digital technique being used for book production. Already today a number of publishers have all their new books on diskettes, and that is the *whole* book including colour illustrations and cover. This diskette will in the near future be used for electronic printing, also called Computer-To-Plate (CTP), or for a technique that does not even use plates or film—digital printing.

If the CTP technique is used, the book is sent on-line by computer to a digital printing press. There an 'image-setter' produces printing plates directly from the computer and the book is printed on a conventional press. This is a technique already used in England and America for bestsellers. Instead of thousands of books having to be transported all over the country, *the books are produced where they are sold*.

*Digital printing* is a process where you can print directly on paper without using plates or film. Again you can use a diskette, which will have gone first from author to editor—the manuscript's journey from author to publisher to 'printing computer' may all take place on-line. This brings the printing cost as well as the production time down considerably. You do not need any typesetting, film, plates etc. Nor do you need a long print run to bring the cost per copy down. It will virtually be the same unit cost if you order one copy or a thousand. This method is nothing else than the way you use your laser writer with your personal computer. It should, though, be noted that a good design must always be used. Many editors are already trained also in basic knowledge of typography.

This technique, also called 'Printing-on-Demand', can produce finished books at any place where a digital print plant is installed. These can be small presses, similar to copying machines with a binding facility attached. You

send the book electronically through a computer and print at the place where the books are needed. Small printing presses for 'Print-on-Demand' (a mixture between an offset press and a copying machine) will in the future be set up all over each country. There is a possibility that they will even be in the bigger book shops, so that the book you ask for is produced while you have a cup of coffee. The immediate future in the US—only a couple of years away—is that there will be presses in some two hundred cities, that can produce books in as small a quantity as you desire within 24 hours or even less.

This will change the face of publishing in every country. It will take care of your inventory; after the initial publication you don't have to stock the actual books, you only stock diskettes. You don't have to print high editions to reduce your cost per copy; you print as many copies as you have orders for and you reprint the number that are re-ordered—and you print them in the region where the books are needed. Finally, you may not even need a wholesaler if the book shop orders books directly from the publisher's data base.

This has an enormous impact not only on the publishing industry but on the educational and cultural scene. In theory, and quite soon in practice, every book that ever has been in print can be scanned in on a diskette and can for a reasonable cost be ordered anywhere in the world in as small a number of copies as you wish. For the publishing industry itself there are enormous sums to be saved, which are now squandered on overprinting (resulting in unsold stock) and transportation.

Of course, this revolution also affects African publishing. I would almost say that digital printing is a technique that seems to have been invented specifically for book production in developing countries. Its advent means that African countries can make a great leap forward, catching up on several decades. In countries with an underdeveloped infrastructure both in transportation and publishing there may be no need to build distribution centres, or to arrange road transportation. Instead, books can be sent on-line from east to west and vice versa. As someone put it: 'Today you print and then distribute. Tomorrow you will distribute and then print.'

Books can be ordered not from a distribution centre but on Internet and will be produced close to the customer. The financial burden of building up stock will be eased or even disappear. Marketing can also be undertaken by means of the Internet, which allows the information to reach people everywhere. (I am, of course, aware that 'everyone' does not have access to Internet today. But it will soon be as common as the telephone.)

This technique applies for all sorts of books where you want a rather small print run and a quick, small, new edition: children's books, academic texts, fiction and most elementary school books. In Europe practically all books and covers and blurbs are now delivered to the publisher on diskettes. If you have access to a computer you can do the same in African countries.

Like all revolutions—development can be faster than anyone believes. The machines are already here. Rank Xerox has one called Xerox Docutech 135 and there is a competitor called Océ 9245. These printers can be combined with a binding machine, a Horizon Glue Binder. It is possible to instal equipment of this kind immediately. It is not usually bought, but leased on a three-year basis. The technical development is so fast that these machines will get better and less expensive in a short time. If there is anything I would recommend donors to do to support African publishing, it is to fund the lease of these machines.

Costs are going down fast. Already now you can print and bind an edition of 500 copies of a book of 120 pages for USD 2.50 if it is on a diskette. It takes about five minutes for every copy to be printed and another couple of minutes to be bound.

Very soon every country—industrialised or not—can be a partner in this true globalisation of the world. Let me quote one of the gurus of digital development, Nicholas Negroponte, as he writes on the digital future of the world in the last chapter, entitled 'An Age of Optimism', in his book *Being Digital* (you can change 'India' to 'Africa' and 'Madras' to 'Nairobi'):

The radical transformation ... will happen just about the same time the 2-billion-strong labour force of India and China starts to come on-line (literally). A self-employed software designer in Peoria will be competing with his or her counterpart in Pohang. A digital typographer in Madrid will do the same with one in Madras ... As the business world globalizes and the Internet grows, we will start to see a seamless digital workplace.

The digital world is developing so fast that these 'prophetic' words from 1995 have already come true in 1997. To give a simple example—in Nairobi alone 3,000 people have access to the net, and make more than 10,000 daily visits. If books were on the net, these 3,000 visitors could already read them there. The same books could be printed 'on demand' wherever a suitable printing machine is placed. Publishers should make computers available to their authors, so that they can get the manuscripts on diskettes. Why not a computer room in publishing offices?

There is no doubt that the world of books—or rather the world of the written word—will be in the forefront in this development. Here Africa has an equal opportunity to take part, and very much so in publishing and bookselling.

Paradise is, as we know, though, not without the snake. This truly international system gives everyone in the world a possibility to compete. Transnational publishers can be very fast in using the new technique to conquer new markets. On the other hand, the specific knowledge of the indigenous publisher becomes even more valuable. The best books are still those produced locally, by local writers and local publishers who know their markets. Here, too, the idea of joint ventures may fit in. The main thing is that African publishers should be aware of the new possibilities ahead. I would urge that APNET immediately make a study of this new technique which, in fact, only was invented a couple of years ago, in 1993.

This is a unique possibility for African publishing to be in the forefront of developments, to continue to build a strong indigenous industry using a technique that in a wonderful way can be adapted to the specific situation of each country.

And don't let us forget the ultimate ends: to make the culture of books and reading available to everyone.

\* \* \*

In the technical revolution the latest news are old already when being put on paper. When I gave this speech originally at Arusha II in March 1996, the comments from most participants were that this is not for Africa; if this technique ever comes to us it will be in an unforeseeable future, etc.

When the same issues were discussed at Arusha III in February 1998, Print-on-Demand was not only well known—Walter Bgoya could proudly show the first book produced in this technique. The disk with the manuscript arrived in Oxford on a Monday—on Friday the same week there were finished books of high quality.

Now, the first Docutech printers are arriving in Africa and in a few years they will be common in most cities. There will be no need any more to send disks to Europe.

# The Future of Indigenous Publishing in Africa

## A Seminar Report

By Wendy Davies

African publishers are not just in business. They are part of the process of change.

*Talent Nyathi*

### Introduction

In April 1984, a seminar on 'The Development of Autonomous Publishing Capacity in Africa', organised by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, was held in Arusha, Tanzania. At this, both ideological and practical issues were analysed. Seminar participants emphasised that indigenous authorship and publishing were a cultural and educational imperative for the continent, and a number of proposals were made for strengthening autonomous African publishing. A selection of the papers presented at the seminar was published in the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's journal, *Development Dialogue*, 1984:2.

Over the next several years, many of the recommendations made at the seminar were translated into action, including the establishment of a loan guarantee scheme for publishers, piloted in Kenya and administered by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF).

After more than a decade of both progress and continuing problems the need for a new analysis of the issues facing African publishers emerged very clearly in the ongoing dialogue between publishers and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. The outcome was a second Arusha seminar, held in March 1996, and entitled 'The Future of Indigenous Publishing in Africa'.

The 1996 seminar, given the short name 'Arusha II', gathered 30 participants from Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Sweden, Canada and the UK, including publishers, writers, librarians, academics, bankers, and representatives from Northern donor and support organisations (see list of participants at the end of the Summary Conclusions, p. 96. It was directed by Walter Bgoya (Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, Dar es Salaam), Henry Chakava (East African Educational Publishers) and Per Gedin (Gedins Förlag, Sweden), all of whom had played key roles in the 1984 seminar.

On the third afternoon, seminar participants had the privilege of being addressed by the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, His Excellency Benjamin William Mkapa, followed by an exchange of ideas and concerns with the President.

Three papers provided the main framework for discussion: The Develop-

ment and Future of Indigenous Publishing in Africa: 12 Years after Arusha I (Walter Bgoya); Book Marketing and Distribution: The Achilles Heel of African Publishing (Henry Chakava); and A Real Cultural Revolution (Per Gedin), on technological developments. The marketing and distribution theme was further explored through case studies on publishing and the book trade in Kenya, and the African Books Collective; and the issue of finance through case studies on the Children's Book Project in Tanzania, the DHF loan guarantee programme in Kenya, and joint ventures in publishing. The relationship between government and indigenous publishing, which received special attention during the visit of President Mkapa, was a recurrent theme throughout the seminar.

All sessions were held in plenary, in an informal and participative ambience. In the tradition of Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation seminars, participants were encouraged from the outset to intervene at any point during the presentation of papers and case studies.

### **Developments in Indigenous Publishing since 1984**

In a wide-ranging presentation of developments in indigenous African publishing since 1984 and future challenges to the industry, Walter Bgoya addressed two fundamental questions: has an autonomous publishing capacity in Africa been enhanced or not in the 12 years since Arusha I, and what can and should now be done to make African publishing both viable commercially and responsive to Africa's needs as the 21st century approaches?

#### *The situation in 1984*

In 1984, the publishing field in Africa was dominated by transnational publishing corporations and by a number of state publishing houses. African writers tended to look to a Western rather than an African readership, educational textbooks produced externally were often highly inappropriate, and publishing in indigenous languages was neglected. The greatest obstacle to the development of autonomous publishing was a lack of investment and working capital.

#### *Achievements*

Since 1984, a significant number of African entrepreneurs have entered the publishing field. (Reasons for this include the departure of many transnational publishing companies as a result of the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, usually leaving behind senior personnel, and the collapse of much state publishing.) Precise statistics on numbers of publishing houses are not available, but at least 40 companies came into existence between 1984 and 1993. This would appear to be a conservative estimate in the light

of information from Aigboje Higo that 40 new companies have been formed between 1984 and 1996 in Nigeria alone and from Gacheche Waruingi that 12 have emerged in Kenya over the same period. There has also been a qualitative improvement in the professional operations of African publishers with evidence of enhanced publishing skills and business acumen as a result of training and experience.

The African Publishers' Network (APNET), established in 1992, is beginning to play an important role in strengthening existing national publishers' associations (NPAs) and assisting the formation of new NPAs. It has allocated substantial resources to the training of trainers in various publishing functions and to the establishment of an African Publishing Institute which will assume overall responsibility for training programmes in future. APNET's journal, the *African Publishing Review*, gives information on new publications, book fairs and developments in publishing, and is an important vehicle for the exchange of ideas. Hans Zell, publisher of *African Book Publishing Record*, has donated to APNET his archive of materials on African publishing built up over more than three decades. This is to be housed in a new African Publishing Resource Centre in Harare and will be an invaluable source of information to researchers.

Several other developments have increased sales outlets, improved communication and helped to raise the profile of African publishing, regionally and internationally. Prominent among these have been the growth of book fairs, in particular the Zimbabwe International Book Fair; the establishment of the African Books Collective, promoting sales in the UK and North America; and the formation of the Bellagio Publishing Network, focusing on communication between donors and publishers. Initiatives such as the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's Loan Guarantee Programme in Kenya and the Children's Book Project in Tanzania have also made an impact at the national level.

### *Constraints*

Despite these considerable achievements the situation of African publishing remains precarious and difficult. Many publishing houses have withered and died, and only a very few can be said to be on a reasonably secure footing.

The enormous economic problems bedeviling the African continent have resulted in an overall decline in living standards and a widening gap between a small elite and the mass of the people. Structural adjustment programmes adopted by African governments in line with IMF/World Bank conditions for credit have led to the devaluation of currencies, reduction of

expenditure on social services including education, and high interest rates. Among the consequences have been impossibly high prices for the requirements of the publishing and printing industries, unaffordable credit, plummeting production and high book prices, and drastic cuts in purchases by libraries and other institutions. The deterioration in educational provision—infrastructure, adequately trained teachers and availability of textbooks—has inevitably meant declining literacy and falling educational standards.

In the absence of measures to strengthen the capacities of small enterprises, the ‘liberalisation’ of economies and World Bank insistence on international competitive bidding place African publishing houses at a severe disadvantage. World Bank interventions in education, specifically in the provision of textbooks, have undoubtedly helped foreign publishers to procure contracts, while indigenous publishers have been given only token assistance through the single measure of a 15 per cent preference above the lowest foreign bidder in tenders for contracts. A visit to Washington by an APNET delegation in 1993 to argue for active World Bank support to indigenous publishing produced no change in Bank policy.

Participants held varying views on the question of the impact of World Bank and donor organisation credit schemes for book-buying on the rise in the volume of imports. Victor Nwankwo noted that Nigeria’s book imports had dropped, largely as a result of high UK prices, and that production in his publishing company (Fourth Dimension) had risen. Walter Bgoya, on the other hand, provided statistical evidence of sharply rising book exports from the UK to Tanzania between 1989 and 1994.

The publishing industry and book trade also suffer from internal weaknesses. Although some publishers and some—but fewer still—booksellers have gained in professional expertise in the course of the last 12 years, many are still inexperienced and unbusinesslike. Clearly, external and internal constraints are closely related. In particular, as long as African publishers are underfinanced they lack the sufficient means to train and retain high-calibre staff.

#### *The future of publishing in Africa*

In Walter Bgoya’s view, three scenarios for the future of publishing in Africa may be envisaged: one, African publishing playing an insignificant role, with the source of books remaining largely external and indigenous publishers acting as intermediaries between the ‘European’ publisher and the African book market; two, a long period of trial and error in which African publishing becomes moderately successful; and three, recognition of the

strategic importance of publishing and special support to enable it to play its full role in the overall development of the continent.

For publishing truly to become a strategic industry, Walter Bgoya argued that a number of issues require urgent attention. Among these are national book policy development, language policy and new initiatives to secure adequate finance for publishing. The debate on these issues and on marketing, distribution and technological challenges is summarised in the next section.

## **Key Issues and Debates**

### *Publishing as a strategic industry*

High investment in human capital is essential to any viable development strategy, as has been clearly demonstrated by the Southeast Asian ‘miracle’. Walter Bgoya argued that East Asian governments have been distinctly more interventionist than is normally conceded by the advocates of an unfettered free market. They have adopted effective education policies, generating a substantial increase in labour force skills, and have systematically fostered development through such means as targeted and subsidised credit to selected industries.

Indigenous publishing in Africa requires the support of governments, above all because it is vital to the rehabilitation of education. The dearth of suitable teaching materials, especially books, is acknowledged to be one of two overriding causes of declining educational standards (the other being the shortage of qualified teachers). While book provision from external sources can play a useful role in the short term, providing it is demand-driven, there is no substitute for authentic, relevant book development and production by indigenous publishers who know the requirements of their educational and cultural environment. At present, World Bank strategies for increasing book provision work strongly in favour of transnational companies, thus making the position of indigenous publishers even more precarious.

Seminar participants firmly endorsed Walter Bgoya’s contention that publishing should be recognised as a strategic industry by African governments and prioritised for support. Related activities such as book distribution and the development of libraries should similarly be accorded strategic industry status.

We are constantly told by governments that agriculture is the backbone of African economies, although agriculture is in fact extremely weak. I don’t know whether publishing is the collar bone or which bone it is, but we need to find a way of persuading governments to take us seriously.

*Walter Bgoya*

Participants held varying views about what this support might or should be expected to mean in practical terms. Aigboje Higo suggested that governments should make cheap credit available to publishers, as they do to farmers for the purchase of seeds or machinery. Theophilus Mlaki felt it was unrealistic to anticipate direct government funding for publishing—a position later articulated by the President of Tanzania, H. E. Benjamin William Mkapa. Several participants argued that governments should be persuaded to assist publishers in their efforts to obtain concessionary credit from other sources, in particular the World Bank and regional development banks.

Gacheche Waruingi commented that some governments are fully aware of the strategic importance of publishing, to the extent of being reluctant to share it with anyone else, and Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba said that calling for government support for the free publishing industry could be asking some regimes to ‘commit suicide’.

The fact that some kinds of books and publishing can be seen as a threat by government was graphically illustrated by Talent Nyathi in her account of publishing for community mobilisation and change in Zimbabwe. Initially under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, the project involved community participation in the production of books on issues such as gender and community development, democracy, elections and leadership. The views expressed were found too radical and even ‘dangerous’, donor support was withdrawn, the book team intimidated by government officials, and use of the books banned. The organisation is now independent and self-financing.

In Elieshi Lema’s view, presentation of the argument was the key issue: governments *could* be persuaded that books are central to everything, including their remaining in power. As a start, national publishers’ associations should try to set up a meeting with government officials at a high level; Henry Chakava said this had happened in both Kenya and Zimbabwe. There was a clear consensus among participants that state intervention should not mean state control of publishing.

In his speech on the cultural context of publishing, President Benjamin William Mkapa of Tanzania expressed his own belief in books and publishing as ‘a vital area of national life’. The Tanzanian Government has pledged itself to reinvigorating the literacy campaign and increasing investment in education generally, and indigenous publishing has a primary role to play in the development and production of books relevant to all levels of education. In the course of a lively and often humorous debate with seminar participants President Mkapa committed himself to raising awareness of the stra-

tegic importance of publishing not just in Tanzania but in the wider region, and added that he would be checking up on the reading habits of his Cabinet.

My government will be happy to be educated about publishing and about a positive role that it can play to make it easier and worthwhile for the industry and its captains. So, publishers in Tanzania need not hesitate to raise matters with relevant authorities in government. Indeed, I am sure that it is not only in Tanzania that such pressure from publishers must be constantly applied in order to achieve the desired results. I really do believe that serious lobbying is the only way to get things working.

*Benjamin William Mkapa, President of Tanzania*

*Reading and the  
cultural environment*

The strategic function of indigenous publishing and related industries will be realised only if, first of all, there is a clear analysis of the cultural context of books and reading.

African countries still suffer from high levels of illiteracy. In addition to the paucity of school textbooks, there is the further problem of the widespread unavailability outside the classroom of supplementary readers, fiction and general books, especially in the rural areas. Moreover, the onslaught of television and other media have undermined the habit and culture of reading, even among the more privileged and educated sectors of society. For the vast majority of people, reading is an activity to be endured during a short period at school and then abandoned.

There is talk in the North about a 'bookless' society, meaning a post-book society, while for us in Africa 'bookless' societies are indeed pre-book societies.

*Henry Chakava*

The creation of a reading culture is partly, and importantly, to do with the concrete provision of relevant books, as Elieshi Lema and other participants stressed. It is also indivisible from the question of how much control people feel they have over their lives and development. The principle and practice of participation by communities in choosing and even helping to create reading material relevant to their needs were seen as fundamental by some participants, in particular Talent Nyathi.

Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba expressed the view that when books and reading are perceived as the prerogative of an elite, and knowledge as coming from the 'centre', the majority of people have no incentive to read; by contrast, in situations of democratisation, change and excitement, people do read.

The cultural context of publishing in Africa is, as President Mkapa pointed out, one where the values and knowledge systems of traditional, oral society have been undermined—not least by the way in which the written word was superimposed historically. He called for indigenous authorship and publishing that is sensitive to the task of transforming the means by which education is imparted and minds are 'cultured' in African society.

We need to ask fundamental questions. Who plans for Africa? Where does knowledge come from? What makes people read?

*Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba*

Education is not a tool to dismember us from our traditional societies but a tool to better adapt our traditional societal values to new knowledge and the requirements of modern times ... Before African writers, authors and publishers can begin to see the book industry in these terms all efforts at promoting a truly indigenous publishing capacity will not succeed.

*Benjamin William Mkapa, President of Tanzania*

Seminar participants urged that campaigns to increase literacy and promote reading be undertaken by governments, in consultation with all players in the book chain, as a matter of urgency.

As Walter Bgoya emphasised, Africa's literary culture has been greatly impoverished by the demise of the highly respected and influential literary journals of the 1960s and 1970s, such as *Black Orpheus*, *Transition*, *Zuka*, *Busara*, *Marang* and *New Culture*. The revival of high calibre journals would provide essential publishing outlets for new writers, but this is unlikely to happen in the current frosty economic climate without underwriting by donors.

### *National book policy*

Government support for indigenous publishing presupposes the existence of policies in such areas as education, literacy, books and language. As Henry Chakava pointed out in his presentation, in reality most African countries function without any clear policies in these interrelated areas. He called on African governments to formulate policies that enable publishing to develop within a mainstream national development strategy.

In Walter Bgoya's view, the first step towards according publishing the status of a strategic industry is the establishment of a national book policy to deal in a comprehensive way with all elements of book production, dissemination and use. This requires a process of dialogue and close collaboration between government, publishers and all other component constituencies of the book chain.

In their report, *Publishing and Book Trade in Kenya*, launched at the seminar and summarised by the authors in a case study, Ruth Makotsi and Lili Nyaraki also call for the formulation of a national book policy as a priority for action by the Kenyan government. To advance this process they argue that 'sensitising forums' and an overall implementing agency are required. Participants urged that the time was ripe for the introduction of national book policies elsewhere in Africa and that the issue of developing these should be taken up by professional associations in the industry and taken into the public realm for debate.

Per Wästberg reported on two pillars of Sweden's national book policy, the Literature Support Scheme and the Library Lending Scheme. Under the latter, writers receive royalties based on the frequency with which their books are borrowed from libraries, but above a certain level the amount that would be payable to authors of the most popular books goes to poets and other writers with a small readership. The scheme works well and may offer a model for adaptation elsewhere.

Almost no attention has been given to the development of reading habits among the people. Public libraries are understocked and are staffed with untrained personnel. In the few schools where libraries are developed, this has been done through the initiative of the teachers with little or no support from the Ministry of Education.

*Lily Nyaraki*

We all know the benefits of reading, including the confidence we acquire because we know better than those who don't.

*Ruth Makotsi*

The issue of language should be central to discussions on national book policy. A larger volume of publications in African languages is not only crucial on grounds of equity, as the proportion of the population of African countries that can speak and read the former colonial language is still very small. It also makes good business sense for publishers to develop what is potentially their largest market.

It is fair to say that the slowness in development of the reading habit is partly attributable to a lack of genuine literacy and proficiency in the relevant foreign languages; and at the same time, over-dependence on foreign languages is undermining both national language development and publishing. In my view, fundamental human and societal values are being undermined, and the mass of African people are being disempowered.

Walter Bgoya

*Communication and networking*

Publishing is not an activity carried out in isolation. Communication and collaboration with other interested parties are crucial to the success of individual enterprises and to the progress of indigenous African publishing continentally.

One aspect of this issue relates to communication with government. Barack Muluka spoke of the 'frequent, almost whimsical' changes in curriculum which can result in dead stock for educational publishers, and render planning and sales projections meaningless. While acknowledging the importance of innovation in the school curriculum, he made a strong plea for changes to be planned and phased in, after consultation with publishers. Alex Bangirana stated that in Uganda government guidelines had helped publishers plan and develop suitable educational publications.

National publishers' associations (NPAs) should be involved, with governments, in the process of shaping policy relating to education and book provision. Pelle Knutsson called on donors to argue for the inclusion of NPAs in donor/government discussions and pointed out that donors would have a narrower space in which to make mistakes if they talked with the collective body rather than just with individuals, a view endorsed by Anita Theorell.

APNET has already successfully begun the task of improving intra-African communication, particularly through the *African Publishing Review*. Serah Mwangi paid tribute to APNET but said there was a need for further channels between APNET and NPAs to avoid duplication, particularly where a similar syllabus exists. Gacheche Waruingi observed that publishers in East Africa had met in 1993 to discuss regional cooperation in their profession, three years ahead of the political leaders.

When I go to Kampala [from Nairobi] I tend to be viewed as a latter-day transnationalist ... Is it possible to have a more open-border policy while protecting overall national interests?

Barack Muluka

Ordinary people show consistently that especially where currencies are convertible between neighbouring countries, cross-border trade can flourish. Wider South-South cooperation also needs to be pursued energetically, through the exchange of films and other *quid pro quo* arrangements, although more than one participant commented that publishers from some Southern countries, particularly India, seemed only to be interested in selling. In some cases, what appears to be cooperation may actually be exploitation, such as one publisher using another as an agent.

### *The electronic revolution*

Per Gedin argued that the new techniques in digital printing, whereby a book can be sent electronically through a computer and printed at the place it is needed, will change the face of publishing in all countries. This system, which he predicted would be commonplace in the North within the next five years, could also enable African publishers to take a great leap forward, a short cut of several decades. Essentially, the technique cuts out the costs of overprinting, unsold stock and transportation. It particularly favours the publishing of titles of minority interest as there is no need to print high-run editions to reduce the unit cost.

In Per Gedin's view, this is a truly international system which, in theory, gives everyone a chance to compete. Transnational companies will, of course, be fast to use the new technique but local knowledge will be very valuable. Writers and publishers who know local markets could have an unprecedented opportunity.

Participants recognised the importance of keeping these technological developments in view and acknowledged that the changes would inevitably come, whether they wanted them or not. Mary Jay observed that their successful introduction in Africa begs the question of functioning telephone lines and electricity. These are still deficient or unreliable in many parts of the continent.

Concerns were expressed about piracy (James Currey, Gacheche Waruingi, Aigboje Higo), add-on costs (Victor Nwankwo) and obsolescence (Walter Bgoya). Per Gedin recommended that APNET undertake an immediate study of the new technique, so as not to be left behind by international competitors. Diana Newton recommended Nicholas Negroponte's book, *Being Digital*, as a useful introduction to the 'bits and atoms' argument.

### *Marketing and distribution*

Describing marketing and distribution as the Achilles heel of indigenous African publishing, Henry Chakava opened his presentation with a warning that his critique might seem excessively harsh and therefore offend his col-

leagues, but that some honest soul-searching was important. Reasons for inadequacy in this vital area were of course in large measure external (shoestring budgets, generally poor support and infrastructure, etc.) but they also undoubtedly derived from internal weaknesses, at the firm level, including unwise investment of profits, part-time publishing, and lack of concerted promotional activities. Discussion centred on a number of key issues raised in the presentation.

It is our view that the African publisher has not, in spite of these handicaps, approached his job with the energy, determination and innovativeness that would guarantee success.

*Henry Chakava*

#### *Market research*

Overpublishing in certain areas, especially school textbooks, remains a problem. While competition is healthy and can lead to improved products, publishers need to be innovative and to seek out their own areas of specialisation. Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba recommended that publishers of academic books, for example, keep in closer contact with universities as one means of investigating possible new areas of academic enquiry (his own department at the University of Dar es Salaam receives over 400 research proposals a year). Several participants (Talent Nyathi, Elieshi Lema, Mary Jay and others) stressed the importance of working closely with teachers, parents and librarians so as to determine the interests and book requirements of schools and other communities.

In Henry Chakava's view, the majority of authors embark on the writing of a book because of their area of specialisation without any knowledge of whether or not there is a market for their ideas: publishers need therefore to take the lead in guiding authors on what may be a marketable product. From a rather different perspective, President Mkapa of Tanzania called for authorship and publishing that reflects a sensitive response to the interests of society.

#### *Promotion*

In general, strategic promotional campaigns are lacking. Henry Chakava said that, as far as he was aware, no African publisher produced advance publicity information on forthcoming titles. Few indigenous publishers print promotional leaflets, extra covers or even annual catalogues. Those catalogues that are produced are often inadequate, omitting essential infor-

mation such as ISBNs, and imperfectly proofread for spelling and grammatical errors. His experience was that direct mailing, especially to named individuals, constituted the most effective form of promotion; by contrast, direct advertising yielded few results. The extensive address list in APNET's database could be better used by publishers.

Book fairs, though known to be an important promotional tool, are not taken seriously enough by many publishers. Henry Chakava identified poor presentation and layout of stands, failure to bring catalogues and visiting cards, lack of follow-up on contacts, and the tendency of representatives to abandon stands and go on shopping sprees as common manifestations of a lack of professionalism.

They will go to book fairs without any catalogues, or outdated ones, the majority without even visiting cards so that they have to constantly write their addresses on scrappy pieces of paper for their impatient customer. In some cases, the people 'manning' the stands have no information about the books on display and ... remove archaic calculators from their pockets to convert their local prices into an international currency for the foreign buyer.

*Henry Chakava*

These criticisms gave rise to a lengthy discussion. Katherine Salahi said the subject would be an agenda item at the next Bellagio meeting, to be held concurrently with the Ghana Book Fair in November, and Mary Jay mentioned a forthcoming African Books Collective guide to book fairs. Participants pointed to the need for careful consideration of which fairs were worth attending and which personnel should be sent as representatives.

The latter issue emerged as particularly controversial. Attendance at book fairs and foreign travel tend to be viewed as perks, thus arousing envy among office-based personnel. Some publishing houses in the North have a policy that all staff members should attend a book fair at least once during their term of employ, based on the potential benefits of a representative learning about a different aspect of the firm's operations, including the fact that there is more to book fair attendance than joyriding. Mugyabuso Mulokozi expressed the view that trainees should be sent to local book fairs first. Some participants thought adequate briefing was the key requirement while others argued that it was not possible to brief an accountant, for ex-

ample, in public relations. Serah Mwangi noted the importance of addressing the issue within the context of overall recruitment, management and staff/career development.

There's a danger that everyone wants to be President in hell rather than an MP in heaven.

*Victor Nwankwo*

### *Discounts*

The question of what constitutes a desirable and affordable level of discounts to booksellers is another highly controversial issue. Henry Chakava argued that the practice of giving discounts of well over 40 per cent (sometimes as high as 60 or 70 per cent), now common in the North, could not possibly be emulated by African publishers. In Africa, where discounts generally range between 15 and 40 per cent, there are no large department stores with book sections, and few retail outlets of any kind, especially in the rural areas. While appreciating the severe constraints under which booksellers labour, publishers themselves operate on very limited budgets and are often unable to pay their authors high enough royalties to encourage them to take writing seriously. The solution does not lie in extending further discounts to distributors but in the adoption of policies by African countries to increase literacy and build and sustain a reading environment.

Although there may be some room for differentiation of discounts according to categories of retail customers (Heinemann Nigeria, for instance, operates varying terms for primary/secondary, tertiary/general, large-order, etc.), most participants agreed that a 25 per cent discount was as high a level as publishers could sustain. Lili Nyariki, however, emphasised the point that small booksellers get the same discount regardless of their distance from the distribution centre and the consequent costs of transportation. Some participants supported the idea of NPAs reviewing discounts on a periodic basis.

### *Strengthening bookselling*

The question of discounts illustrates the need for support of the whole book chain since—in Victor Nwankwo's words—what happens downstream affects upstream activity. Booksellers are undercapitalised, usually untrained and few in number. Their remoteness from distribution centres and the consequent problem of high transportation costs can force them to mark up prices beyond the reach of consumers. According to Mugyabuso Mulokozi, in Tanzania this can result in the reader paying anything up to ten times the publisher's price, a situation which he described as chaotic.

The majority of booksellers in Africa are generally inept and do not adopt a creative approach to their business. They sit behind their counters and wait for orders to flow in.

*Henry Chakava*

In their report, Ruth Makotsi and Lili Nyariki identify the difficulties experienced by both publishers and booksellers and the need for an integrated approach to solving these problems. They advocate the appointment of regional distributors, membership drives and greater activity by professional associations in the book industry, and more dialogue between the various professions through frequent book forums. They also recommend either the expansion of APNET to include related professions or the formation of separate regional associations. Alex Bangirana cautioned against the former proposal in the light of Uganda's experience of having one large association where non-publishers complained of being marginalised.

Parastatal distribution has been tried in the past—in Tanzania and Zambia, among other countries. It has not worked because books were largely provided free of charge and there was no incentive for the bookseller. Governments need to address the structural aspects of the problem, and to provide incentives for booksellers to set up in rural areas.

#### *The African Books Collective*

Mary Jay outlined the work of the African Books Collective (ABC), a self-help initiative established in 1989 by 18 African publishers to promote and disseminate African-published material in the major English-language book markets outside Africa. In the six years since ABC started trading, remittances to members have totalled well over six figures in pounds sterling. The collective is registered as a UK company, is administered from Oxford, and is governed by a Council of Management comprised of elected representative publishers from West, East, and Central/Southern Africa. Membership currently stands at 48.

The time-scale envisaged for becoming self-financing has proved to be over-optimistic in an unpropitious economic climate, and ABC has continued to rely on the generous support of the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida) and other donors in order to operate as a non-profit making organisation. In 1995, the collective was able to meet nearly 50 per cent of its own income needs.

Founder members each contributed a £1,000 membership fee; new full

members pay £500 and associate membership is free. These categories of membership receive, respectively, 65, 60 and 55 per cent of net ABC income from sales of their publications.

Mary Jay invited guidance from participants on future directions and priorities for the collective. Although innovation is important, she felt that ABC should retain its core mission of promoting, selling and trying to mainstream African publishers' books outside Africa. Other plans included: expanding its resource and information materials, including producing a revised version of the *African Publishers Networking Directory*; undertaking more outreach activities, including author promotions; and working more closely with APNET.

In the foreseeable future ABC would also continue its work for the Intra-African Book Support Scheme (IABSS). Run jointly with Book Aid International, this scheme enables libraries and institutions in Africa to select books for purchase from other African countries, which donors then pay for by standing order. An important contribution to the movement of books across borders, this has become part of ABC's core mission. In Mary Jay's view, there was a case for considering indigenising the scheme in due course, although this could happen only when ABC was closer to achieving the aim of operating without donor funds, since IABSS represents a major source of finance for the collective.

A very important long-term aim is to establish an office in the US. The present system of operating from Oxford works smoothly and effectively in terms of sales of scholarly and academic books, but is less able to promote trade to US public libraries and create a market for children's books, fiction and general titles.

Participants expressed their warm appreciation of the work of Hans Zell (one of the two consultants to the collective until 1995), Mary Jay (who has assumed overall responsibility since then), and the 'team' in Oxford. As Walter Bgoya pointed out, publishers are provided with excellent market feedback and the reporting system is a model of clarity and transparency. Several participants welcomed the plan to publish an updated version of the very useful *African Publishers Networking Directory* and to publish further resource materials.

Gacheche Waruingi asked that the system of preferential terms for founder members be reviewed. Most participants thought these were fair and that the excellent returns enjoyed by all members were of far greater importance

than the small differential in remittances. There was some discussion of whether there should be an ABC in Africa and general agreement that this was not a practical proposition at present.

### *Finance*

If publishers' marketing and distribution problems are partly attributable to internal weaknesses the problem of finance is almost entirely outside their control. Commercial sources of credit are largely closed to publishers. No publisher's stock is accepted as collateral and few publishers are granted overdraft facilities. Interest rates of up to 40 per cent mean that even when those facilities are allowed, they become impossible to service. Gacheche Waruingi had had to rely on family and friends for loans to Phoenix Publishers when bank credit was unavailable. In general, though, private investment is extremely hard to come by. Aigboje Higo's experience was that the wealthy Nigerian middle class refused to support publishing (although they were quick to see the benefits of international competitive bidding).

Concessional credit to African publishing from the World Bank and other international and regional finance institutions has been consistently refused. World Bank insistence on international competitive bidding for major contracts, especially of educational textbooks, has meant the exclusion of all but the most well established indigenous publishers. APNET's delegation to the World Bank in 1993 had failed to produce a shift in policy away from foreign procurement towards active support to African publishers.

Means need to be found of getting round the World Bank, a task which Walter Bgoya likened to that of trying to embrace a baobab tree. Nigerian participants cited the encouraging case of the Bank's eventual capitulation on international competitive bidding in Nigeria. Diana Newton said it was important to see the Bank as a partner rather than a 'bad guy', especially in view of some recent changes in senior personnel, and that it was also worth considering approaches to the International Finance Corporation to support private sector development. Other participants felt that the 'bad guy' label was fully justified by their experience of trying to deal with the Bank. There was general agreement over the need to hold discussions with national governments in order to arm them in *their* discussions with the World Bank. It was also agreed that APNET should make a further approach to the Bank on behalf of publishers.

Regional development banks, which offer credit at rates of as low as 5 or 6 per cent to other industries, also need to be lobbied more vigorously by governments to provide similar support to the publishing industry.

Other possible ways of obtaining financial assistance were raised, one suggestion being that airlines could be asked to reduce freight costs when they had spare capacity.

*The Children's Book Project in Tanzania*

Buy-back schemes, whereby a donor agency purchases a proportion of a print-run for free distribution and simultaneously enables publishers to accumulate capital, constitute one avenue of financial support for publishing.

Elieshi Lema reported on the first five years of the Children's Book Project in Tanzania, an initiative financed by CODE (the Canadian Organisation for Development through Education) to enhance the publishing and distribution of children's books in indigenous languages. Manuscripts were selected by a committee which included teachers and librarians. Print runs were 5,000, with the project buying back 3,000 at a 35 per cent discount. The pricing mechanism for the 2,000 copies for sale on the open market was three times the unit cost of production.

The overall impact has been an increased number of children's books (over 100 titles), improved product quality and market awareness through a training component, and a substantial rise in the number of children's books publishers. However, the crude statistics of an increase from nine to 30 publishers in five years disguises the fact that only some publishers succeeded in selling their 2,000 copies and some, especially first-time publishers, proved less than serious about the enterprise. The aim of enabling publishers to continue without assistance after five years has not been realised because returns have been too low, due partly to insufficient outlets and partly to inadequate promotional activities.

The benefits of the scheme were firmly endorsed by Abdullah Saiwaad, one of its beneficiaries. As a former publishing manager (1985–90) of a company which produced no books, he saw the publication of 100 titles nationally as a substantial achievement. As a part-time independent publisher since 1990, he had been enabled by the project to produce seven titles in a single year and was encouraged in his long-term aim of becoming a full-time children's books publisher.

Some participants questioned the pricing formula, which had allowed only small profit margins, and several advocated more stringent selection criteria in order to support a smaller number of more serious publishers. Victor Nwankwo, who had participated in a recent evaluation of the project, said there was a need for the selection of manuscripts to be more directly driven

by demand within schools. Based on her experience of community publishing in Zimbabwe, Talent Nyathi thought that community needs were best addressed by allowing an adequate consultation period. Teachers' and parents' associations are often unable to respond swiftly when asked to select books and may need as long as three months to test out books in schools. Asking schools to provide a brief summary of their reasons for selecting particular titles is an important response mechanism.

Elieshi Lema's assessment was that the project had gone a long way towards achieving its cardinal aim of enabling publishers to produce children's books but that many lessons had been learnt in the first five years of operation. Paramount among these was the need for a holistic approach to the promotion of reading, and the future should be closely tied to readership campaigns undertaken in the schools by librarians.

It has been a process of throwing seeds into the field. Some will germinate, some will not. I think that is OK for the first stage.

*Victor Nwankwo*

Following the recent evaluation, elements of the project are to be amended. Proposals include: increasing the number of buy-back copies to 10,000; improving training facilities; tightening selection criteria; undertaking more market research; and developing mechanisms for ensuring the sustainability of the project, such as creating a publisher-financed seed fund with a percentage going to new initiatives. Various interest groups have been asked to come up with proposals to put before the donors in May (1996).

*The DHF loan guarantee programme in Kenya*

The unavailability of commercial credit at the time of 'Arusha I' was the reason that the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation undertook to set up a pilot loan guarantee scheme for publishers in Kenya. Olle Nordberg summarised the stages in the setting up of the programme—a feasibility study in 1995; a funding application to the Ford Foundation, leading to approval in 1988 of a grant of USD 265,000 for three years (the grant period has since been extended twice); the establishment of a secretariat and an Advisory Board chaired by Professor Thomas Odhiambo; and the signing of contracts with cooperating banks (in 1989 with Barclays, Kenya, and in 1994 with the Co-operative Bank of Kenya, to which the larger part of the guarantee was then moved). Eleven applicants have been accepted since 1989 and an evaluation of the programme is currently being carried out.

Some publishers have fared very well, and paid off the loan; three have defaulted. The over-riding problem has been the sharp rise in interest rates. There have also been some communication problems between the Advisory Board/DHF and banks, banks and publishers, banks' head offices and their branches, and to some extent between the DHF and the secretariat (which has been too busy to monitor and follow up as required).

Reports were presented by three beneficiaries of the scheme. Each had set out to obtain loans from very different starting points—one as a senior and long-serving employee of a transnational company, one as an experienced publisher in an indigenous firm, and one as a first-time publisher.

Henry Chakava applied to the programme in 1988 during the early stages of indigenisation of Heinemann Kenya (now East African Publishers Limited). Before this, he had been able to begin buying into the company only because an individual had stood as a personal guarantor of a bank loan and had also agreed to a moratorium when interest rates rose and repayment became difficult, and subsequently when as a director of the National Bank of Kenya he had been able to obtain a subsidised loan.

Gacheche Waruingi was refused a bank loan when in 1987 he tried to form Phoenix Publishers out of the ashes of the East African Publishing House (EAPH). A first application to the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation was unsuccessful. Following a second application, a loan guarantee was approved. Regular reports to the Foundation showed that Phoenix was faring well and that the loan and overdraft facility were crucial to this progress.

After two years the bank agreed to an enhanced overdraft facility but stipulated that the original loan be repaid within three years. The problems began with the hyperinflation that hit Kenya in 1993, when interest rates rose from 21 to 35 per cent in the course of the year. An attempt to alleviate the problems by transferring money from one account to another led to the bank complaining of 'hard-coring', a term used when there is insufficient movement in an account and an overdraft stays constantly close to the upper limit. Although the situation improved in 1994 and the loan was paid off in early 1995, ahead of schedule, the bank was unwilling to make further loans without either collateral or a guarantee, so the initial objective of establishing credibility had not been achieved.

To publish her first title in 1990, Serah Mwangi collaborated with a number of women friends who together provided USD 2,000 for publication costs. In 1991, she successfully applied to the loan guarantee programme. Even

with the guarantee, the bank was unwilling to allow her an overdraft facility since, in their view, the programme had a ‘bad record’ (although in those cases where publishers had defaulted, debts had been paid in full by the guarantors!). She had had to take out a loan and prove she could keep up repayments, before finally having an overdraft facility agreed—an eight-month delay which disrupted her publishing schedule. She too was accused of ‘hard coring’.

Christa Onyango (Barclays Kenya) and Alex Malla (Cooperative Bank of Kenya) admitted some unfairness on the part of the banks, explained partly by problems of communication between head office and branches and by the fact that some publishers had ‘gone underground’. They maintained that in addition to the provision of the guarantee, banks are entitled to ask customers for a business plan and to check the viability of projects. Administrators and beneficiaries of the programme pointed out that applicants have already been carefully vetted by the secretariat of the programme and by the Advisory Board, which includes bank representatives.

One interpretation of the experience to date is that there is inadequate understanding on both sides of the ways in which the other party operates. Bank representatives said that some publishers confused loans with grants, and expected special treatment because of the guarantee, while many participants said the banks simply ‘didn’t understand publishing’ and were unnecessarily distrustful of publishers. Alex Malla asked publishers to keep banks informed of likely fluctuations in business, and both bankers said they were prepared to offer advice on sound business management.

Suggestions included strengthening of the local secretariat, which could undertake not just monitoring but also training; more communication with and involvement of national publishing associations; and subsidised interest rates to beneficiaries of the scheme. Gacheche Waruingi advocated a subsidised flat rate of 10 per cent. Per Gedin reminded participants that the programme was set up on the basis of allowing no special dispensations for publishers but purely as a means of enabling them to obtain credit and do business like any other commercial enterprise.

Bank manuals on business management were felt to have too general a target readership to deal with publishers’ concerns. Diana Newton also suggested a booklet for bankers about publishing. The importance of continuing the dialogue was not in doubt.

The energy and professionalism of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation in

their running of the scheme were warmly acknowledged. Sven Hamrell raised the question of replicability and of whether or not the programme should now be extended to other African countries. Some participants favoured fine-tuning in Kenya before introduction of the programme elsewhere. Elieshi Lema pointed out that resources tend to be taken to places where the publishing industry, and infrastructure generally, are more developed.

#### *Joint ventures*

Formal collaboration with foreign publishers or at the local level is one potential means of improving the flow of finance.

Diana Newton described the work of the International Publishing Partnership (IPP), a new initiative of the Canadian publishing industry and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) which provides administrative and informational support as well as finance for identifying and developing partnerships between publishers in Canada and the Third World. CIDA funding covers a maximum of two-thirds of the initiative's total costs, while the Canadian publishing industry contributes a minimum of one-third of total operating and programming costs.

With the long-term goal of developing sustainable publishing capacities in the South, IPP seeks to support partnerships based on mutual understanding, trust, a jointly creative approach to tasks and problems, and a sharing of costs and benefits. Activities envisaged include adaptations, translations, co-publishing, co-production, co-distribution, reciprocal distribution, rights sales, capital investment, and long-term joint ventures.

IPP manages two small funds. The Partnership Identification Fund covers part of the travel, accommodation and living expenses of a representative of a Canadian or a Southern publishing house to meet potential partners; the Partnership Support Fund is open to applications from new or existing partnerships to cover part of the cost of a specialised activity deemed essential to long-term viability. After less than a year in operation, IPP has funded 13 identification missions and supported six existing or new partnerships. It has also set up a resource centre for participating publishers, with an extensive collection of documents on publishing and other related sectors, and provides information kits (on a partial cost-recovery basis) on specific countries, focusing on the publishing industry and education system.

Walter Bgoya said he had come to recognise that despite the importance to publishers of individuality and independence there was practical wisdom in

the idea of exploring collaborative ventures on a local or regional basis, particularly as an avenue for presenting joint tenders to the World Bank and making joint applications to banks for credit facilities.

A recent and successful collaboration between Kenya and Uganda was described by Henry Chakava and Alex Bangirana. Fountain Publishers wanted to submit a tender to the World Bank for the publication of a textbook for Uganda's revised science syllabus, but had no course of their own. An existing textbook published by East African Educational Publishers to a large measure met the requirements of the new syllabus. After being advised that they stood a good chance of success on grounds of equity as well as other considerations, the two publishers adapted the course, with an important rather than a token input from Ugandan authors, and the course won the Bank tender. Costs and profits were split 50/50, and the book is selling very well.

Walter Bgoya outlined a draft framework for establishing equitable and mutually beneficial joint ventures. Salient points included the importance of assessing strengths and weaknesses, and identifying advantages and disadvantages on both sides, and the need to establish careful ground rules on division of editorial and financial responsibility and sharing of profits. The importance of compatibility, trust and professionalism are axiomatic in such ventures, which are best undertaken cautiously, on a project-by-project basis.

Victor Nwankwo stressed that any collaboration should give due consideration to the needs of each constituency and the relative strengths of the publishing industry in different countries. With these provisos, he saw distinct possibilities for joint ventures, including tripartite North-South-South arrangements. James Currey, whose list contains numerous co-publications, said it was important not to overcomplicate the process. Henry Chakava advocated moving in concentric circles, from national to regional to wider international joint ventures.

### *Other proposals*

There was strong support for a proposal made by Walter Bgoya that a conference of African writers and publishers should be organised with the aim of arriving at a 'New Deal' between the two professions and agreeing on common approaches to the task of enhancing the status of literature and publishing.

Per Wästberg proposed the establishment of an African Academy of Letters, comprised of eminent writers and humanist scholars, in order to enhance the role of culture in development and gain greater recognition and respect for

African culture in the rest of the world. It was agreed that the idea could be put on the agenda of the proposed conference of writers and publishers. Prior to this, Per Wästberg would collect and collate information about existing Academies in Africa and Europe. As a follow-up, a small group of eminent people of letters could be asked to study and make proposals on how such an Academy might be set up and financed.

In the final session of the seminar, the salient points of a draft summary conclusion document drawn up by the seminar directors were discussed and amended by the participants. The finalised Summary Conclusions follow after this Report.

# The Future of Indigenous Publishing in Africa

## Summary Conclusions

1. The second Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation seminar on publishing in Africa was held in Arusha, Tanzania, from 25 to 28 March 1996. This seminar, which gathered 30 participants from eight countries, including publishers, writers, librarians, academics and bankers, discussed the subject of publishing under the title 'The Future of Indigenous Publishing in Africa'. It was a follow-up to a seminar held at the same venue in 1984 under the title 'The Development of Autonomous Publishing Capacity in Africa'. The seminar had the rare privilege of having among its participants the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, His Excellency Benjamin William Mkapa, who not only made a key speech, but also exchanged ideas, views and comments with the participants one afternoon.

2. The seminar was co-directed by Walter Bgoya of Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, Dar es Salaam, Henry Chakava of East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi, and Per Gedin of Gedins Förlag, Stockholm. Discussions drew on a number of inputs by the participants but were centred on three papers produced by the three directors: 'The Development and Future of Indigenous Publishing in Africa: 12 Years after Arusha I' (Walter Bgoya); 'Book Marketing and Distribution: The Achilles Heel of African Publishing' (Henry Chakava); and 'A Real Cultural Revolution', primarily covering technological developments (Per Gedin). An important contribution was made by Ruth Makotsi and Lily Nyariki, whose book *Publishing and Book Trade in Kenya* (published by East African Educational Publishers) had been planned and written with the second Arusha seminar in mind and was launched on the first day of the seminar.

3. Achievements between the time of Arusha I and Arusha II were noted in the entrepreneurial activities of a larger number of trained African professionals, the establishment of the African Publishers' Network (APNET) and the African Books Collective (ABC), and the growth of National Publishers' Associations. It was also evident from other developments such as the establishment of the Bellagio Publishing Network, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation Loan Guarantee Scheme in Kenya, the Children's Book Project in Tanzania, the Zimbabwe International Book Fair and the Pan-African Children's Book Fair in Nairobi that publishing in Africa had been given increasing attention in the 12 years between the two seminars.

4. Nevertheless, these notable achievements paled in view of the enormous economic problems faced by African countries, which were only just emerging from the crisis of the 1970s and 1980s. One manifestation of the African crisis has been in the educational field. Deterioration in education has been a result not only of the collapse of infrastructure; according to gen-

eral agreement by researchers in education, the non-availability of teaching materials—of which the book is the most critical—has had the most negative impact. The consequence of this is that children coming out of primary and secondary schools are ill-equipped for employment in the modern sector and hardly employable in any meaningful productive enterprise.

5. The rehabilitation of education in Africa, which implies first and foremost the provision of books and the training of teachers, is the only viable strategy for development, as other countries, notably in Southeast Asia, have shown. Therefore, industries that are related to educational development, in particular book publishing and book distribution, as well as the development and stocking of libraries, deserve to be prioritised as *strategic industries*. As such, they should be given all the resources necessary to enable them to play their important role in preparing Africa's children for a secure and dignified future.

6. The seminar called on African leaders and their governments to accord *strategic industry status* to publishing and related industries, and to include them in their development plans as key components. Seminar participants were gratified that the President of Tanzania, H.E. Benjamin William Mkapa, concurred with them on this vital point and promised to work with other Heads of State and Government in the sub-region and beyond, to build up an awareness of the primary role of books in the educational and cultural development of Africa.

7. It was observed that the absence of National Book Policies in African countries is a major hindrance to publishing. The seminar therefore called upon African governments to enact the necessary legislation in the form of National Book Policies including National Language Policies so as to deal more comprehensively with all issues related to books and publishing than is currently the case. Publishing in indigenous languages would be well served by the existence of effective language policies. In the same vein, low and declining literacy rates call for immediate remedial action, as literacy is the basic foundation of a literary culture. Publishing can only flourish where a high percentage of the population is literate and the reading habit is strong. A new impetus must therefore be given to literacy campaigns and the promotion of reading, and inexpensive and relevant books must be made easily available so as to strengthen and sustain this skill that is so difficult to acquire but so easy to lose. Publishers' Associations have an important role to play in coordinating the efforts of all other players in the book chain as well as in promoting research in all aspects of the book industry.

8. While observing that an increasing number of books have been produced by African publishers in the period between Arusha I and Arusha II, seminar participants noted with regret that books often did not reach those for whom they were published, because of problems of infrastructure—poor transport, a paucity or absence of bookshops and book distributors, high postal rates, and faulty communications in general. In addition, African publishers pay insufficient attention to the question of marketing, distribution, and providing information about their books. This is due partly to a lack of resources, but also reflects weaknesses in management: far too often, publishers think it is enough to produce the books and to place them in warehouses. Although some progress has been achieved, greater emphasis on promotion, marketing and distribution should emphatically be the next thrust of African publishers.

9. Working individually, under great financial constraints, many African publishers have not yet fully realised the benefits of cooperation in marketing and distribution. Individualism, which may be necessary from the point of view of creativity, has in this respect been a weakness which must be overcome.

10. The problem of finance is still African publishers' most intractable problem. The financial support schemes currently in place have made a modest but appreciable contribution to African publishers, but they have been rendered ineffective by high interest rates charged by African banks. Interest rates of up to 40 per cent have made facilities such as bank overdrafts almost impossible to operate. African publishers are often forced to spend a considerable amount of time on other income-generating activities to support their operations, and are thus left with less time to devote to the primary activity of publishing.

11. Seminar participants were in agreement that a major initiative should be launched to explore all possible ways of breaking the deadlock of African publishers' lack of finance, so as to expand publishing and develop truly professional publishing houses. In this regard, they called upon African governments to negotiate with the Bretton Woods institutions and the African Development Bank for long-term loans at concessionary rates to be made available to publishers. If such resources are made available, and their application closely monitored for maximum efficiency in utilisation and accountability, African publishers would in a relatively short time be able to raise their publishing standards to international levels. Only then would international competitive bidding for school textbooks be a realistic and fair method of providing the best books at the cheapest prices. As it is now,

international competitive bidding is almost synonymous with the exclusion of African publishers.

12. One important avenue for African publishers in need of capital is entering into cooperative arrangements with other local publishers or joint ventures with foreign publishing houses. In the latter case, it was proposed that the foreign publisher would contribute financial resources, and the African publisher would contribute local publishing know-how. Initially adopting a project-by-project approach, joint venture enterprises could gradually grow in strength and scope in such a way that both partners derive maximum benefit from the collaboration. However, it is imperative that partners wishing to enter into a joint venture establish in advance the compatibility of their missions and management style in order to avoid misunderstanding and failure. The need for partners to know one another and to be wholly professional in their relations was seen as the necessary adjunct to successful joint ventures.

13. The seminar observed that important technological developments in the printing industry may drastically alter current methods of book production and distribution. In particular, the opportunities offered by digital printing must be kept in view as these make small print run publishing viable in situations where markets are of limited size. This could be a most important development for publishing in indigenous African languages.

14. Seminar participants were unanimous that the time has come for a 'New Deal' between writers and publishers in Africa. Both players now understand enough about publishing to be able to place their relationship on ethical and professional grounds where they can fulfil their respective responsibilities and see themselves as inseparable partners in the process of creation of African literature. Towards that end, a conference of African writers and publishers should be organised as soon as practicable, with the aim of drawing up a charter to guide relations between the two professions. Above all, the seminar called upon writers and publishers in Africa to make a new commitment to the validation of African cultural values and to their defence against the onslaught of television and other media which threaten to turn the global village into a global cultural dustbin.

15. The seminar agreed that the time has come to enhance the role of culture in development and discussed a proposal for the establishment of an African Academy of Letters to consist of writers and humanist scholars of high standing. Representing themselves only, they would strengthen African cultural developments and also make African culture more visible to other parts of the world. It was suggested that this idea might be put on the agenda of

the proposed conference of African writers and publishers and that a nucleus of writers and humanist scholars might be asked to elaborate on the set-up, financing and tasks of such an Academy.

### **Participants**

Alex Bangirana (*Uganda*); Walter Bgoya (*Tanzania*); Henry Chakava (*Kenya*); James Currey (*United Kingdom*); Wendy Davies (*United Kingdom*); Per Gedin (*Sweden*); Sven Hamrell (*Sweden*); Aigboje Higo (*Nigeria*); Mary Jay (*United Kingdom*); Godwin Kaduma (*Tanzania*); Pelle Knutsson (*Sweden*); Elieshi Lema (*Tanzania*); Ruth Makotsi (*Kenya*); Alex Malla (*Kenya*); Theophilus E. Mlaki (*Tanzania*); M.M. Mulokozi (*Tanzania*); Barack Muluka (*Kenya*); Serah Mwangi (*Kenya*); Diana Newton (*Canada*); Olle Nordberg (*Sweden*); Victor Nwankwo (*Nigeria*); Lily K. Nyariki (*Kenya*); Talent Nyathi (*Zimbabwe*); C.A. Onyango (*Kenya*); Abdullah Saiwaad (*Tanzania*); Katherine Salah (*United Kingdom*); Anita Theorell (*Sweden*); Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba (*Zaire*); Gacheche Waruingi (*Kenya*); Per Wästberg (*Sweden*).

# The Dag Hammarskjöld–John Steinbeck Correspondence

*Introduction by Carl F. Hovde*

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*This correspondence between Dag Hammarskjöld and the American novelist John Steinbeck, like that between Hammarskjöld and Djuna Barnes, published in DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE (1987:2), further documents Hammarskjöld's impressively wide knowledge of the arts. It is equal testimony to some basic concerns of Steinbeck, who in 1953 was encouraged in his impulse to approach Hammarskjöld by their mutual friend, the Swedish painter Bo Beskow. Jackson J. Benson's biography of the novelist demonstrates Steinbeck's feeling that in the modern world moral leadership was much needed and in short supply. This view was important in Steinbeck's admiration for Hammarskjöld, and also for Adlai Stevenson, who had been a candidate for the Presidency against Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956 and who was appointed Ambassador to the United Nations by President Kennedy in 1961.*

*Steinbeck sensed in both men a rare combination of integrity and the capacity for public leadership. He felt strongly that the world needed more visible models of rectitude and energy, and this view underlies the longest and perhaps the most revealing of these letters for Steinbeck's moral attitudes—that of November 5, 1959—proposing that the United Nations honour a small number of people in recognition of their extraordinary services to humankind trusting that their accomplishments and advice would benefit the world's only supranational authority.*

*John Steinbeck (1902–1968) is best known for the novel THE GRAPES OF WRATH (1939), which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940, but he wrote many other works including THE MOON IS DOWN (1942), whose subject was the Norwegian underground resistance to the German occupation in World War II. In 1962 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.*

*Carl F. Hovde is a specialist in American Literature, and Professor of English Emeritus at Columbia University, where he served as Dean of Columbia College 1968–1972, and is Chairman of The Lionel Trilling Seminars. He has been particularly interested in the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, in the poetry of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, and in the fiction of Herman Melville, Henry James and William Faulkner. In addition to his teaching at Columbia, he has taught in Brazil, Germany and Sweden.*

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As in all interesting correspondence, an absorbing question is the nature of the attraction between the people involved. The Dag Hammarskjöld–John Steinbeck correspondence indicates little of Hammarskjöld’s feelings about this relationship, though his interest in Steinbeck is perfectly in tune with his wide concern for the arts. It was natural that he would welcome the opportunity to meet a well-known writer—Steinbeck was one of a good many artists whom Hammarskjöld came to know as friends. Hammarskjöld himself had a strong artistic nature, of course: the meditations in *Markings*, the poems, the translations, his keen interest in music and the visual arts, the photographs of professional quality—all these were the expression of a sensibility for which art was a great pleasure because a basic need. Steinbeck joined a circle of friends which included among others the English sculptress Barbara Hepworth, the French poet Saint-John Perse, the American novelist Djuna Barnes, the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber and the Swedish painter Bo Beskow.

We are learning more about Hammarskjöld’s aesthetic sensibility and his relationships with artists as more of his correspondence is published, the most important to date being that with Saint-John Perse. If one looks at Hammarskjöld’s letters to Steinbeck on the one hand, and those to Saint-John Perse on the other,<sup>1</sup> the different personal associations are partially reflected in the fact that Steinbeck initiated the exchange with Hammarskjöld, while it was Hammarskjöld who first wrote to Saint-John Perse. Hammarskjöld and the French poet rapidly proved to be kindred spirits, something borne out in the length and richness of the correspondence.<sup>2</sup> Both were poets as well as men of affairs: well educated, culturally sophisticated, and multilingual. Steinbeck was of a different cut. Never important in public life and usually impatient with formality, he was well read but largely self-educated after desultory schooling; though he came to know some Spanish, he, like most Americans, commanded only his own language. Though he and Hammarskjöld did not become really close, they certainly liked each other. Both had a large capacity for friendship, and Steinbeck’s admiration for Hammarskjöld’s world leadership was balanced by the Secretary-General’s love of literature and his respect for all artists who practised their craft seriously.<sup>3</sup>

Steinbeck and Hammarskjöld were brought together by their mutual friend Bo Beskow whom Steinbeck had known since the winter of 1936–37. It was in late 1952 that Hammarskjöld first got in touch with Beskow to ask that he do a portrait of himself. The work started the following spring, shortly before Hammarskjöld was appointed Secretary-General of the United Nations; Beskow later went on to do the mural for the Meditation Room of the United Nations building.

If there is not much evidence here of Hammarskjöld's considered opinion of Steinbeck, Steinbeck's views of Hammarskjöld are much more clear, not only in the letters but by implication through the themes and characters of Steinbeck's fiction. On Steinbeck's part one factor was no doubt the initial interest that anyone would have in someone recently named as chief officer of the United Nations. The letters make clear that after Beskow had introduced them, Steinbeck wished to know Hammarskjöld better: the invitations, the notes, the gift of cigars show him to be attentive. Given Steinbeck's wide reputation by 1953, it was of course a developing relationship between two well-known people, and a mutual interest was natural.

But there was more than this in Steinbeck's regard for Hammarskjöld: he felt a deep admiration for a man in a position of great authority, who brought to that office a temperament and character for which Steinbeck often looked but which he too seldom found—that of the natural leader, the truly moral man who could instinctively be trusted to put the public good before everything else. Steinbeck's published letters show that there was another man about whom he felt this way—Adlai Stevenson, the unsuccessful candidate for the Presidency in 1952 and 1956. Steinbeck came to know Stevenson, but even before that he contributed to the 1952 campaign as a speech writer for some of Stevenson's supporters. After the defeat in 1952, Steinbeck wrote to Stevenson with a sense of lost national opportunity reserved only for a major leader denied: 'I hope you will have rest without sadness. The sadness is for us who have lost our chance for greatness when greatness is needed.'<sup>4</sup>

For Steinbeck, and for many others in America, Stevenson and Hammarskjöld shared qualities which made people react to them in similar ways. They were both very visible public leaders, and people saw in both an absolute honesty, an integrity so transparent that they in this way seemed simple in a rare way. Much of the personal commentary about both figures is striking in this regard—they seemed to combine great ability and great goodwill in a measure that made them stand out from ordinary humanity.

Not that Steinbeck admired only figures of this kind. He had a large capacity for friendship, and his fiction is populated with many characters in whom he found much to like. In his own life, the biologist Edward Rickerts was probably his most cherished personal association beyond his family, but Rickerts was not a public leader as Stevenson and Hammarskjöld were. Steinbeck's special admiration for them rested on his conviction that potentially or actually they brought together high office and complete dedication to the welfare of humanity.

Stevenson was of course denied the opportunity to lead the United States, but Hammarskjöld had held high office long enough to fulfil his promise in a way that the world greatly admired. Like the American President John Kennedy, Hammarskjöld died an untimely and tragic death, but unlike Kennedy he had been in office long enough to make a large difference in the world.

The ‘good man’ is a figure who appears often in Steinbeck’s fiction, and the good man who is also a natural leader appears from time to time. In the 1937 novel *Of Mice and Men* there is a particularly clear example. The character is a ranch hand, a mule driver of no cultural sophistication, but ‘there was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke. His authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love. This was Slim, the jerkline skinner ... He might have been thirty-five or fifty. His ear heard more than was said to him, and his slow speech had overtones not of thought, but of understanding beyond thought.’<sup>5</sup>

Steinbeck, like so many others, sensed a similar authority in Hammarskjöld and the most interesting letter in the correspondence reinforces this impression. In that of November 5, 1959, Steinbeck suggests to Hammarskjöld that the United Nations establish a number of honorary positions to be held by a small number of people in recognition of extraordinary service to mankind. The crucial point, however, is that he sees these people not only as recipients of a world-class honour, but as a group of advisors whose experience and wisdom could have a meaningful role in world affairs through the United Nations.

As the letter makes clear, the idea is in harmony with one of Steinbeck’s greatest literary loves—the body of legend in Arthurian romance. He once reported that the gift of a book of Round Table stories first fired his love of literature when he was young, and his last major literary ambition, which he was unable to carry out, was a retelling of the Arthurian stories for modern readers. He devoted much energy to gathering materials about the relevant texts and historical context, and he lived for eight months in England in large part to gain a feeling for the ambience.

As a writer Steinbeck is noted for his sympathetic portrayals of ordinary people, who do not necessarily have much education or sophisticated taste, and his affection for medieval romance might seem at odds with his own nature, out of harmony with his popular and occasionally populist work. The contradiction is only apparent, however, for he was never unaware of the need for moral order, and this recognition was all the more intense because

he often saw the modern world as a place that was not only fascinating but increasingly dangerous. The Arthurian tales provided a view of an ordered culture in which the leaders were in principle committed to high ideals, and if in the stories some of the characters fell short of their own standards, Steinbeck felt that they were judged through their narrative fates. In a late letter Steinbeck argues that the knight Galahad achieves what Lancelot does not because of his moral superiority. And despite the fact that Steinbeck has often been criticised for scenes of violence in which he seems as author not to take a moral stand, he was in fact never without a view, either overt or implicit, on what a worthy life was like.

His proposal to Hammarskjöld of the panel of wise advisors, or ‘peerage’, reflects his affection for the relatively ordered moral life in the Arthurian tales. It is only to exaggerate his view somewhat to see him thinking of Hammarskjöld as a kind of modern version of a noble knight, *primus inter pares* among a group of distinguished people whose accomplishments and advice would be taken into account by the world’s only supranational authority.

Steinbeck’s letter was acknowledged by Hammarskjöld but not really responded to, no doubt because of the increasingly hectic pressure of work. But there is no doubt that Steinbeck’s proposal arose from a vision of a world in which talent and wisdom would be the determinants of rule, and the idea took shape because of Steinbeck’s faith in Hammarskjöld’s dedication to the public good.

Steinbeck was of course aware that such leadership can be sorely tested. An exchange in the letters comments on the anti-UN propaganda which followed the murder of Patrice Lumumba, first Prime Minister of the Congo. Both Steinbeck’s letter of February 20, 1961 and Hammarskjöld’s response on February 28 point to the killing as both evil and stupid, and to the lies about it invented to sully the UN’s reputation. Steinbeck raised the question of motive by asking who would profit from the killing, but Hammarskjöld remained objective even under personal attack: ‘No one, in the long pull, will really profit from Lumumba’s death; least of all those outside the Congo who now strain to do so but should one day confront a reckoning with truth and decency...’ Hammarskjöld’s fortitude and evenhandedness were among the traits Steinbeck most admired, and his high regard made Hammarskjöld’s death later that year all the more shocking. Two days after the plane crash of September 18 which took the UN leader’s life, Steinbeck expressed profound grief at the news in a note to a friend, and a few days later wrote in similar vein to Adlai Stevenson, the other public figure he much revered.<sup>6</sup>

When a year later Steinbeck learned that he was to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and was in touch with Bo Beskow about the arrangements in Sweden, he asked that Beskow take him to Hammarskjöld's grave: 'If I could find some lavender, I would like to leave it there', he wrote, a gesture which he described as 'important not for him but for me'.<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \*

The manuscript letters have been transcribed from photocopies, not from the originals. Steinbeck was not an accurate typist, and obvious errors have been silently corrected. The copies of Hammarskjöld's letters do not indicate where they were written, but the location is almost certainly New York. Interpolations are in square brackets; editorial uncertainties are in curved brackets.

In the letter section references are made to the following publications: Benson, Jackson J., *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer*, Viking, New York, 1984; Steinbeck, Elaine, and Wallsten, Robert (eds), *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, Viking, New York, 1975; and Urquhart, Brian, *Hammarskjöld*, New York, 1972. In the notes these are referred to as 'Benson', 'Steinbeck Letters' and 'Urquhart'. See also Parini, Jay, *John Steinbeck, A Biography*, Heinemann, London, 1994.

## Notes

1. Little, Marie-Noëlle, 'Alexis Leger, Dag Hammarskjöld, Correspondance 1955–1961', in *Cahiers Saint-John Perse*, Gallimard, Paris, 1993.
2. See also Marie-Noëlle Little's interesting Introduction.
3. See, for example, Hammarskjöld to Leger August 30, 1956, and Little's note, *Correspondance*, p. 108.
4. Letter of November 7, 1952, in Steinbeck, Elaine, and Wallsten, Robert (eds), *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, Viking, New York, 1975, p. 461.
5. Steinbeck, John, *Novels and Stories 1932–1937*, Library of America, New York, 1994, p. 821.
6. Letter of September 19, 1961, to Elizabeth Otis, and on the 23rd to Stevenson, in Steinbeck, Elaine, and Wallsten, Robert (eds), *op. cit.*, pp. 715–16.
7. Letter of November 1, 1962, in Steinbeck, Elaine, and Wallsten, Robert (eds), *op. cit.*, pp. 747–48.

New York  
June 8, 1953

Dear Mr. Hammarskjöld,

I have heard so much that is good and pleasant about you from Bo Beskow.\* Also, by good fortune, I heard your acceptance speech.\*\* But that is not the point of this letter. If you would be pleased with a small New York garden, a glass of beer and non-political conversation, it would be pleasant to us to offer these. It would entail no social, political, snob or even religious pressure. I asked Bo whether you might like this and he said he thought you might.

Yours very sincerely,

John Steinbeck

New York  
July 8, 1953

Dear Dag Hammarskjöld,

I hope you will enjoy these little cigars as much as I do. We are grateful to you and your friend for a very pleasant evening. Please believe that this is your house.

Sincerely,

John Steinbeck

New York  
July 27, 1953

Dear Dag Hammarskjöld,

I am pleased that you liked the little cigars. I get them at the club '21' on west 52nd Street. It is the only place I know where I can get very small cigars of very good quality. Our businessmen seem to believe that a cigar is good in direct relation to its size and that they somehow become bigger men if their cigars are bigger.

I still have no word from Bo. Do you?

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\* Steinbeck met Beskow in New York in the winter of 1936–37. Beskow painted three portraits of Steinbeck. (Benson, p. 817.)

\*\* As the newly installed Secretary-General of the United Nations, on April 10, 1953.

One of my reasons for writing is this. Toward the end of March of next year, Elaine\* and I will take off for Europe to be gone perhaps until the following Christmas or even longer. At that time we shall rent this house. It occurred to me that it might be a good house for one of the smaller groups of UN representatives or for one of the people with a family, It is a pleasant house and one in which it is a pleasure to live and to entertain on a small scale. It has three bedrooms besides servant's room, four baths. I don't think you saw the upstairs but there is a library, a drawing room and bar on the second floor, two bedrooms on the third and a large bedroom on the fourth. We should like to rent it completely furnished and to people who would use it as we would use it. Knowing the shortage of such places in New York, you may perhaps think of someone who would like to have it.

We hope to see you again before too long,

Sincerely,

John Steinbeck

August 7, 1953\*\*

Dear John Steinbeck,

After I got your letter I have made a short trip to Europe. That is the main reason for my delay in sending you a reply,

No, I have not heard anything from Bo. I guess I will write him one of these days, His mother died some time ago and, of course, he may be in Stockholm again on family business which does not give him too much time for other things.

It is quite possible that I may find some people of the right kind for your house during the time you indicate. I will tell people here about it and see what comes of it.

One of these days I would like to call you up in order to hear if Mrs. Steinbeck and you would care to come and have dinner with me.

Kind regards,

[Dag Hammarskjöld]

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\* Elaine Anderson Scott Steinbeck, John Steinbeck's third wife.

\*\* Addressed to 206 East 72nd Street, New York 21.

New York\*

Dear Mr. Hammarskjöld,

What a very pleasant dinner. Thank you for asking me. Mrs. Steinbeck regrets greatly that she was not able to be there. You have quite a unique apartment for New York.

Later in the season I hope you will come to dinner in my garden again. I am developing a new field of cookery. And when you want to see Silk Stockings, please let me know. With a little notice I will have house seats for you.

I have not written to Bo. Hard to know what to say.

Thank you again for a very pleasant evening.

Sincerely,

John Steinbeck

New York  
April 13, 1955

Dear Mr. Hammarskjöld,

It was a very pleasant luncheon on the 4th of April with very pleasant people. I hope I shall be seeing them again and yourself, of course.

I have now written a mildly insulting and loving letter to Bo Beskow. He would not be impressed with the authenticity of my letter unless it were mildly insulting, but I do hope that he is happy and that he finds some measure of peace, although this would probably kill him, as you know.

Elaine has finally returned from Texas and is very happy to be home and as soon as the weather becomes a little more dependable, we hope that you can come to have dinner in our garden. We can assure you that there will be no protocol, but plenty of 'first glue'.

Thank you again for a pleasant luncheon.

Yours very sincerely,

John Steinbeck

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\* Undated; the musical review *Silk Stockings* opened in 1955: score by Cole Porter, book by George S. Kaufman et al.

New York  
February 13, 1957

Dear Mr. Hammarskjöld,

I have been reading the daily accounts of your most difficult path, and while I know few of the intricacies and pitfalls, I know enough of them to be aware of how brilliantly you have carried on a work which must often seem impossible and insoluble.

My heartiest congratulations to you, although it is ourselves who ought to be congratulated for having you there.

In June we go from Florence to Sweden. Bo is meeting us at Malmö and we go hence to Skåne to drink red wine and dance around the midsummer pole and afterward to drive, the four of us, about the country, to walk among pines and to talk nonsense all night on the beach. I wish you could be with us then. There would be a rest and a change from the rat maze and the tantalizing cheese of this past year. Perhaps Bridge of Swords would be the better simile.

At any rate, Bo sends to you his regards and his respects, and so do I.

Yours sincerely,

John Steinbeck

17 February, 1957\*

Dear Mr. Steinbeck,

I was happy to get your letter of 13 February with its kind greetings and encouraging words.

Indeed, you have been very much in my thoughts. It is ridiculous that, living a few blocks apart, greetings should be transmitted between us via Stockholm, and I felt that as soon as my situation became a little bit more reasonable, I should make an attempt to get in touch with you directly. Although I am more than happy to look forward to the possibility of meeting you and Bo in Skåne, I would certainly feel that we should try and get together before then.

You talk about a travel plan including Florence and Sweden. May my secretary give you a ring and find out for how long you are likely to be here in town? You would give me a very great pleasure indeed if Mrs. Steinbeck and you would come over one night together with a couple of my friends.

[Dag Hammarskjöld]

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\* Addressed to New York.

New York  
February 20, 1957

Dear Mr. Hammarskjöld,

In reply to your letter of February 17, we sail for Naples on March 25 on the old *Saturnia* and we're looking forward to it.

I hope that it is true that you will be with us in Skåne this summer and I know it would steam Bo up no end.

With your permission, I am going to ask my publisher to send you a new little book of mine which comes out in March, called *The Short Reign of Peppin IV*. I think it might give you a bit of amusement in these troublesome times. It has a serio-comic, satiric approach, not important nor serious, but fun I think.

Thank you again for your very kind letter.

Yours,

John Steinbeck

March 16, 1957\*

Dear Mr. Steinbeck,

First of all, warm thanks for your letter and for your enchanting 'Fabrication' which has delighted me while waiting for cables on the short reign of the UN. I had really hoped to be able to arrange one evening while we were still both in New York, but events have taken the lead and here I am, forced to rush out to the Middle East after days which have given me no chance to follow my own personal wishes.

Thus, these lines, in conveying to you my warm thanks for your kindness, are just an expression of regret for missed opportunities here and the hope that we will be able to join around mid-summer at Bo's and my places in Skåne.

With all good wishes,

[Dag Hammarskjöld]

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\* Addressed to New York.

Sag Harbor\*  
August 7, 1957

Dear Dag Hammarskjöld,

I am very glad you have been able to persuade the Melancholy but Charming Swede to leave his haunts of coot and hern for your glass menagerie on the East River. It was good and time he escaped. And I do hope he gets the commission.\*\* It would do wonders for him and I think he is a very significant artist. His growth has been constant during the twenty years I have known him.

Will you please put the enclosed letter in his hands when he arrives. I am staying in the country resting up from my recent invasion of Europe. I hope you can drive out with Bo and Greta. We may not be able to furnish anything as exciting as the funeral of the murderous mole, but I can fire a twenty-one gun salute from my pier and I can take you fishing in my little seaworthy boat. We have a tiny cottage here and a little pier on our own bay. I have often wanted to invite you out here to shuck off the slings and arrows for a little time. It is very restful and I think you would like it.

We went through the harrowing days of your expected arrival in Skåne, with Oscar Longneck running up every hour with a new telegram. There hasn't been such excitement in Skåne since Harald Bluetooth. And then we had to miss your arrival. Perhaps that was just as well. The emotional strain might have been too great.

If you can come out here we might vary the Beskow ritual of burying things. We might dig something up. Captain Kid's treasure is still somewhere on Gardiners Island,\*\*\* and failing that we might dig up some clams or oysters, surer and in the long run, probably better.

Again I can't tell you how pleased I am that you have pried the Beskow out of his ivory Sweden. He may not know how much he needs a change, but I do.

I hope to see you soon and meanwhile the felicitations of Elaine and of me.

Yours,

John Steinbeck

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\* A shore community near the eastern end of Long Island, with access to the open ocean through Gardiners Bay.

\*\* The commission was to paint the mural in the Meditation Room at United Nations Headquarters. Beskow completed it that year. In 1961 he painted the mural in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library at the United Nations.

\*\*\* Long in the possession of the Gardiner family, the island lies off eastern Long Island. Legend has the famous pirate's treasure there.

August 8, 1957\*

Dear John Steinbeck,

The feelings you express in your welcome letter are fully shared by me. It was high time to get our friends out and I think that the renewed contact with this part of the world, as well as the rather challenging task, will do both a lot of good.

I am also happy because it gives me such a splendid opportunity to get in touch with you again. It was too bad that our roads did not cross in Skåne, but I guess that Sag Harbor will make up for what I lost, because I would certainly be most happy to come out to your place with Bo and Greta as soon as I can get away. Let me get in touch with you again after their arrival when we know more about the time-table.

I guess that they will stay here a couple of weeks. I will be very happy if, during that time, Mrs. Steinbeck and you could come back for one night so that we could have an evening together at my place; it has its inconveniences in the summer, but the air-conditioning puts up a wind surpassing even that which you have from the Atlantic.

Anyway, I was happy to hear from you. I will give your letter to Bo and I will get in touch with you again early next week.

With best hopes for the future both in Sag Harbor and on Manhattan,

Dag Hammarskjöld

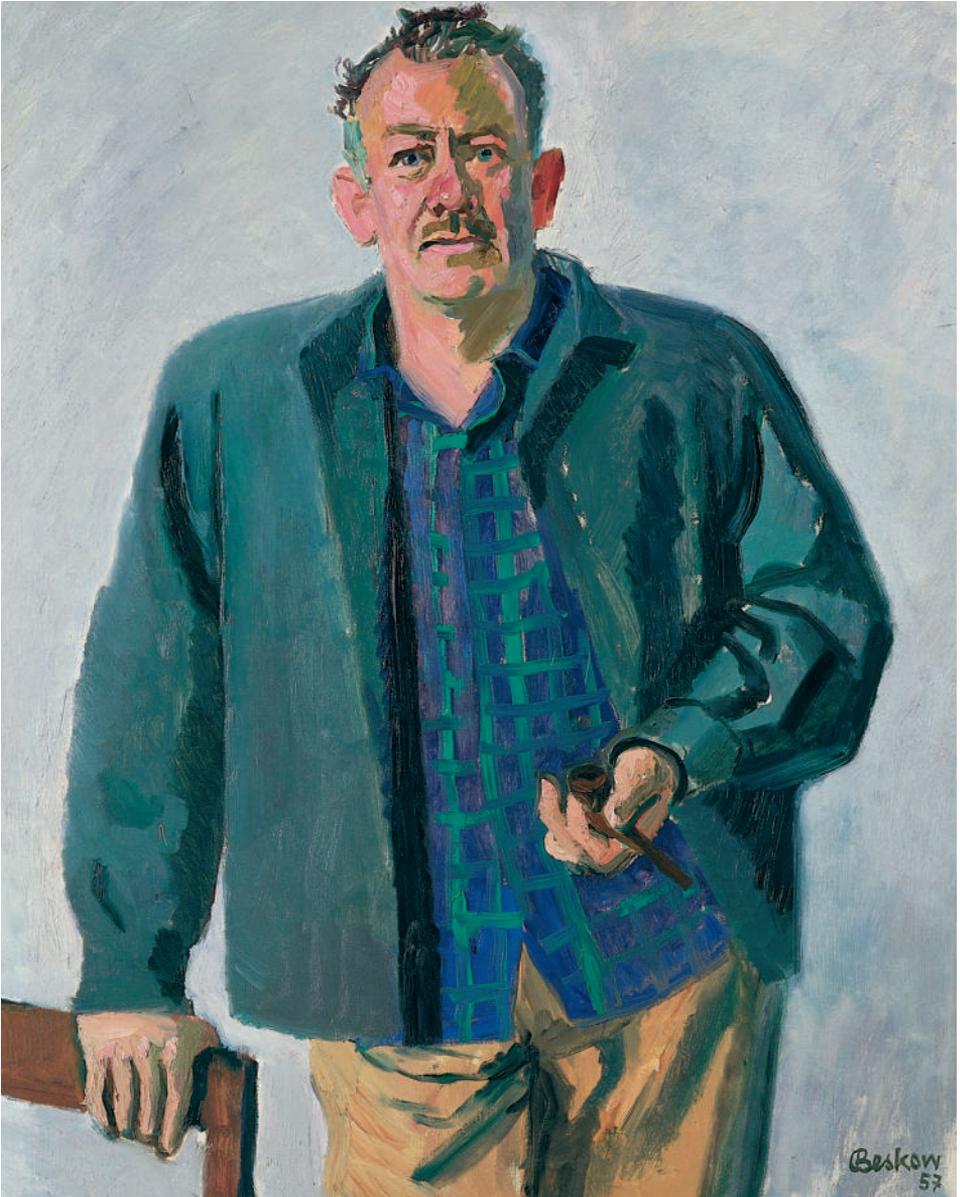
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\* Addressed to Sag Harbor.



*Dag Hammarskjöld*

Portrait painted by Bo Beskow 1953 (by courtesy of The Swedish Central Bank)



*John Steinbeck*

Portrait painted by Bo Beskow 1957 (by courtesy of Greta Beskow)

February 8, 1958

Dear Dag,

I haven't yet thanked you for sending me your *Linnaeus Tradition and Our Time*.<sup>\*</sup> I took it down to the Caribbean with me where I could read it at leisure and I must say I have liked it very well.

I have loved Linnaeus for a long time not only for the sharp and poetic observation which you bring out but also for some gigantic protean taxonomic jokes which still make earnest and humorless zoologists squirm with unease.

It was good to see your own mind at work with the good and unsticky clay. Your address brings me back to the lovely prose of Charles Darwin in the ecstatic observations of the Cruise of the Beagle.

I have been away a great deal lately and I read that you have also. Now we will stay home for a while. I have mountains of books to read out of which I hope to produce a lordly and smouldering mole hill.

We hope to see you before too long,

Yours,

John

New York  
February 13, 1958

Dear Dag,

The UN called me yesterday about going to the Near-East to do some kind of definitive work on a film about the refugee situation there. There is nothing I would rather do. I was sad that I had to refuse.

Not only am I in some highly concentrated work which has been put off too long, but Elaine has to go to the New York Hospital for some long needed surgery and will be there for about two weeks. Not a dangerous operation except that surgery is always serious and if it is close to home it is double double serious.

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\* Dag Hammarskjöld's speech to the Swedish Academy on 20 December 1957, translated from the original Swedish by the Swedish journalist Sven Åhman.

There are far too many things to do, things one wants to do and can't simply because there are too many. I just wanted to tell you that I would, under normal circumstances like to do this job more than I can say. I think it is important to do. So little is understood about the situation. I don't really understand it myself and consequently would stand to learn and perhaps to transmit what I learned.

But that is out for the present. I would not like to be away during this time and there will be a period of recuperation during which I will be needed here. And I suppose that one's basic feeling of duty lies with one's own. I am not brave enough to feel otherwise.

This letter is by way of explanation, in case my refusal has been brought to your attention. But naturally I am pleased to have been considered as competent to do the work.

Yours, as always,

John

February 18, 1958\*

Dear John,

Thank you for your note of the 13th. I was most distressed to hear of your wife's illness and I hope everything is progressing well. Obviously, you have no alternative but to stay near at hand.

I am happy to learn at any rate that you were attracted by the proposal. Certainly, from our point of view, there could have been no better choice.

I hope we will find an opportunity to get together soon, but I would like to wait until Mrs. Steinbeck is well again.

[Dag Hammarskjöld]

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\* Addressed to New York.

New York  
November 5, 1959

Dear Dag,

With all of your problems, I should imagine a letter from me, particularly a long letter, might be a terrifying prospect, but I feel it necessary to write it, and there is no one to send it to except you. On the surface what I have to say may sound silly, even childish, but I think its soundness to be established as you think of it, and it is not nearly so silly as many of the things with which we are preoccupied. I hope you will give it your friendly attention.

For the last eight months I have been living in Somerset in a cottage not unlike yours in Skåne, a tiny place set in a meadow. I have been finishing three concentrated and fifty casual years of research in the English middle ages. I only returned to New York last week. Meanwhile I have been reading of your non-sedentary life. It is long since I have heard from Bo. I don't know whether he is angry with me or preoccupied with his new baby. I did read that you got a long two-day vacation in Skåne.

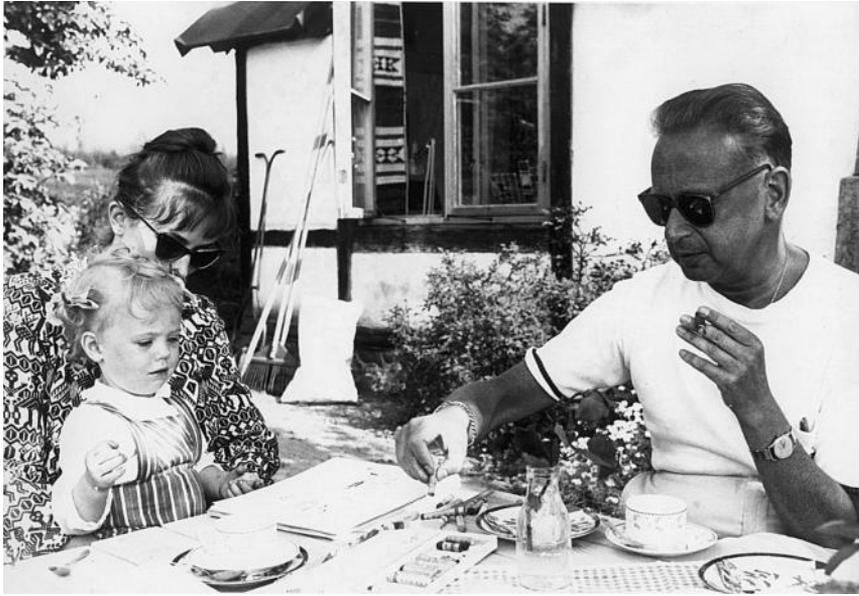
I arrived at home for the culmination of the TV Scandal.<sup>\*</sup> Except as a sad and dusty episode I am not deeply moved by the little, earnest, cheating people involved except in so far as they are symptoms of a general immorality which pervades every level of our national life and perhaps the life of the whole world. It is very hard to raise boys to love and respect virtue and learning when the tools of success are chicanery, treachery, self interest, laziness and cynicism or when charity is deductible, the courts venial, the highest public officials placid, vain, slothful and illiterate. How can I teach my boys the value and beauty of language and communication when the president himself reads westerns exclusively and cannot put together a simple English sentence.

I know your feeling and your devotion because we have often discussed them, and I think you know my fervent wish that the UN grow in power and stature. But we have also discussed the necessity that this be a long and a slow process. Very gradually it must become more desirable to be a member of the UN than to be a citizen of Texas. This does not mean that Texas need suffer except in exclusiveness. It is equally desirable to cease to be solely a Slovak or even a Swede except as a matter of sweet and strong sentiment.

As you know, I have studied government with an ecological eye. It is an organism like other organisms, having its traits, its tendencies and its weaknesses. It must have certain qualities or diagnostics to qualify as government at all. Two of those qualifying functions the United Nations does not have—the ability to enforce and the ability to reward. Without those it is a castrate organism and it is about one of those facets that I am writing this long and perhaps boring letter.

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\* It was discovered that the most popular 'quiz show' on television, a program on which contestants won cash prizes for answering factual questions, was corrupt: the chief winner was given the answers in advance.



Dag Hammarskjöld at Rytterskulle, Hagestad, the summer house of the Beskow family, drawing with his goddaughter Maria Beskow (1959).



John Steinbeck and Bo Beskow together at Rytterskulle, Hagestad (1957).



John Steinbeck at the maypole celebrating Midsummer at Rytterskulle, Hagestad (1957).



Dag Hammarskjöld at his summer house, Hagestad

Many ugly things have been said about feudal government by people who don't know much about it. There were evils as there are in our system but it should be remembered that medieval authority lasted for a very long time—longer in fact than ours seems about to last if the tendencies toward extinction continue. Feudal authority on all levels had the right and the power to punish and to reward. Leadership surrounded itself with the strongest and most effective members of the community and kept them loyal through fear and gratitude and to a certain degree through trust in the strength of the bond.

The nobleman enjoyed certain privileges but he also bore a heavy burden of responsibility. The system may not have been all good but it had its points. When we destroyed it or placed it on the open market for cash, we substituted nothing to fill the vacuum in certain areas.

Men do not work for money or women or Cadillacs. These are merely the magnets for admiration, respect or envy. I don't know why I am reading you a lesson in government when you know much more about it than I do. But I did feel it necessary to fill in this preface. Now I will get to my specific suggestion.

Let us put force aside for the moment and deal with that other arm of authority—reward. Rewards like punishments have a twofold purpose. They acknowledge a service and they make service desirable to the thus far unrewarded. We have reduced rewards to simple money and that is only a go-between. I know that you are not afraid of words so I may as well plunge into this.

I propose that the United Nations establish a nobility, limited to the lifetime of the recipient and conferred only on those men and women who have provably contributed to the knowledge, beauty, understanding and wellbeing of the world at large. I submit that neither money nor pressure should be able to open the door to this chamber. From now on I shall leave out the suggest and submit and think and presume and put it straight.

The ones so honored should bear a title and it should be used so that it becomes associated with the name. I think for example of Dominus or Domina, shortened to Dom. and having the double emphasis of Master, together with the older meaning—one who builds and defends a house. Don't forget that the original meaning of knight was servant.

This peerage should be very small in numbers, not over a hundred. It should include men like Salk, Einstein, Casals, Picasso, Shostakovich, Bunche, the healers, the builders, the creators but only after they have built and created, writers, artists, scientists, creators whose work has not been undertaken primarily for profit but the result of which is a better world and a healthier, happier, more aware people. Politicians should be passed over unless, like Ralph Bunche, their product is peace.

This group should *not* be self-perpetuating like the academies for such organizations tend to become cliques or birds of a similar feather. Candidates should be submitted to a screening committee of the United Nations but the honor should only be granted after a vote in the General Assembly. Unanimous vote should not be required, since any alive and inquisitive man is bound to have made some enemies or aroused some envy.

This peerage should have a definite status under the United Nations, and also a function. Any proposal having to do with the arts, letters, sciences, education or welfare in general, matters of ethics, aesthetics, philosophy or plans for extending knowledge through group action should be submitted to this house of experts for its opinion, and its decision should only be as binding as it is wise and should never be accepted without vote in the General Assembly. But the house should be endowed with great prestige. The Domini should be set apart and above other men as their work or contribution has been greater than that of other men.

Now an empty title is valueless and this one would have to have enormous and unique value. However the rewards should not be financial.

The Nobel Committee gives money while the resulting publicity sells books and in the case of scientists probably causes promotions in their academic habitat. I submit an even greater reward, a snob award, and that after all is the only basic reason for any kind of reward. The Domini should be considered above reproach so that while keeping and valuing their national status they should be accepted as honorary citizens by all the nations that have voted for their elevation. They should be immune from customs and immigration regulations or the laws of duration of sojourn. It is implied by their position that they will break no law nor outrage no custom. By their very nature they would not—their nature as individuals. They should have an exalted position in the sense of protocol ranking with or above ambassadors. Dom Pablo Dom Jonas Dom Albert should be made household words known and respected all over the world.

Since they would only be elevated *after* they had performed their service they would not be a young group and consequently not subject to the naggings of ego ambition or greed. It should in effect be the highest court of honor for service to the world.

Now if this seems a fairytale dream consider the advantages

1. It would have great snob appeal and this is an excellent thing if aimed in a good direction.
2. It makes it more desirable to be a member of the World rather than a citizen of Little Rock.
3. Since the house would be composed of eminent men it would be of great value to the UN.
4. As the highest honor in the world and preferably the most coveted, it is possible that kids would find it more desirable to contribute than to accumulate.

5. It would help to destroy insularity and balkanization, since it would cut across all boundaries both in membership and in freedom.

6. With the power of reward in its hands the United Nations would greatly gain in prestige.

7. It would be very cheap at a time when there is little money available. The peerage should under no circumstances receive any money. In fact that should be one of their chief prides—that it is a completely clean honor. Their pay would be in the currency of respect, honor, and open admiration, which is after all what most people want although they go about it in less admirable ways.

No money should be given to the Domini except perhaps transportation and maintenance when they are called into session. For by their very nature the candidates would not be rich men. They should be paid only with honor and respect. They may not be interested in this, but we could finally tell our children that there is a reward for goodness and for integrity. That an honest and true man is not a fool.

What I am suggesting is that the United Nations create a new kind of Noblesse. A Noblesse of the mind. A Peerage of the Spirit. This proposal would give the United Nations a weapon it does not have, a sharp and subtle weapon that could be used to advantage against the armies of the small, the mean and the greedy.

There it is, Dag. What do you think of it? Of course it presents difficulties but nothing to compare with the spiritual anarchy and despair in which we drown.

I'd love to see you with your coat off and your feet up. We might even sing and dance about the Frog who has no ears nor wings but he can jump-jump-jump.

Remember how good I am at that around the Midsummerpole?

Yours as always with respect and affection,

John

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\* The Frog Dance refers to a Swedish children's song-dance, popular when parents take their small children to dance around the midsummer pole. The children show that the frogs have neither ears nor tails.

November 9, 1959<sup>\*</sup>

Dear John,

I was delighted to get your long revolutionary letter to which, in due time, when I have had time to think matters over, you will have my full reaction by letter or, preferably, orally some evening when you may find it possible to have a quiet dinner at my place. Let me get back to the matter when I return from my forthcoming trip to Laos.

My first and superficial reaction to your letter is not concerned with the idea itself, but with one crucial difficulty which it presents. Are not just the people whom you would like to see honoured those who are most likely not to wish to be honoured? Anyway, we shall have to talk about this and other aspects of your idea.

A bientôt and with kindest regards,

Dag Hammarskjöld

December 12, 1959<sup>\*\*</sup>

Dear John,

I have been planning and planning and planning to have a quiet discussion with you one evening regarding your *Domini and Dominae*, but destiny, in the shape of United Nations affairs and various social engagements, has not been helpful. Now I am off on a six weeks trip to Africa next week, and that does not give me much hope that we could get together before Christmas. However, things will, I think, get better after my return in February. May early Spring see us together, 'singing and dancing' about the jumping Frog.

With kindest regards,

Dag Hammarskjöld

P.S. I saw your picture in Karsh<sup>\*\*\*</sup> 'Faces of Greatness'. It is a striking study, but makes me regret again that Bo's pictures of you have not been shown in the States.

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\* Addressed to New York.

\*\* Addressed to New York.

\*\*\* Karsh of Ottawa, a prominent Canadian portrait photographer.

New York  
December 15, 1959

Dear Dag,

I have your letter of Dec. 12, and the spring will be much better for me also. I have had a weakening illness.\* Indeed I only got out of the hospital a few days ago. In the springtime I will be much more agile to do the Frog Dance.

I do hope you will be able to get to Sweden for Christmas. This of all holidays draws one to his rootland, where dear and remembered things can spring to life again for a little time, the time when almost meaningless words become tempered with sharp and deep emotion.

I never send Christmas cards. Will you please consider this an abiding wish for your good health and contentment and also an expression of gladness that you are there.

If you should see Bo, please convey to him and to Greta my affection and my contrition that I have been so neglectful.

And in the spring we will surely get our feet up. The purpose of the Domini is not designed for the pleasure of the receivers of that title, but to make a better and more valuable contribution desirable.

Greetings,

John

TDDE BLOOMFIELDHILLS MICH OCT 3 455 P EST

DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD

ATTN MISS ALM

NAR JAG TANKER PA MULLVADEN FRON SKANE VIL JAG ERBJUDA SAMMA ARA  
TILL MULLVADEN FROM MOSKVA AFFECTIONATELY

JOHN STEINBECK\*\*

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\* On December 3 he had suffered a mild stroke, and spent a week and a half in the hospital. (Benson, p. 863; Steinbeck Letters, pp. 655–56.)

\*\* For unknown reasons, this cable was sent in Swedish by Steinbeck to Hammarskjöld. In English translation, it would read: 'When I think of the mole from Skåne, I should like to offer the same honour to the mole from Moscow.'

The background to the mole story, which appears in Steinbeck's letters of 7 August 1957, 10 October 1960 and 20 February 1961 must have been told by Beskow to Steinbeck. In his book *Dag Hammarskjöld. Strictly Personal. A Portrait* (1969), Beskow tells about Hammarskjöld's sympathetic interest in his struggles with the moles in his Skåne garden during Hammarskjöld's visit to Sweden in July 1955. The painting which Beskow refers to, 'The Mole's Funeral', he gave to Hammarskjöld on his 50th birthday. Beskow comments that Hammarskjöld in his letters to Beskow could symbolically refer to the moles' undermining activities.

October 5, 1960<sup>\*</sup>

There are many moles around. With patience we will dig them up in order to properly dig them down again. We should meet soon for consideration of strategy.

Kindest regards,

Dag Hammarskjöld

Somewhere in Wisconsin  
October 10, 1960

Dear Dag,

Elaine put your very kind wire in my hands. I am wandering slowly about looking at and listening to my own country. I have a truck with a camper top, am self-contained and alone and completely unrecognized. I ask no questions, just listen. I don't know what I will find—maybe nothing but it had to be done. I was working with memory and that's good but largely inaccurate.

From my listening to people on farms in bars at stores and in service stations I am sure of only one thing. If you were running for our presidency, the other candidates would not stand a chance. I have never known such an effect as you have caused. And if the going is rough on the East River, and it is, let me assure you that you are the one hope of the people I have been hearing.

This transcends all party and even individual self-interest.

I wish I could see you now even to make you laugh a little but I must edge on in my snail shell. I've been too long away from my own rootlets.

As you know, in our isolationist middle west there has been doubt and reluctance about the value or desirability of the UN. Well that is all changed now. The Moscow mole has out-clevered himself. Perhaps he has no better eyesight than other moles.

My wishes go with you and those wishes multiply daily. You even make it seem that the mole buries himself.

With the best,

John

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\* Addressed to Steinbeck in New York.

Sandy Lane Hotel  
Barbados, British West Indies  
February 20, 1961

Dear Dag,

I am asking my daughter to put this in the hands of Miss Alm because I want it to come exclusively to your hand.

The news filters through down here. The moles seem to be very busy in the garden, a complicated labyrinth of burrows and holes and yet designed for one purpose quite obvious I think. I congratulate you on standing firm. But I have watched the news hoping a question would be asked—not a charge—simply a question, one which would be asked by any village policeman and yet it has not been asked in the UN.

When a murder has been committed by a person or persons unknown the first question asked is—who stands to gain by this death—who profits by it? In the case of the killing of Mr. Lumumba,<sup>\*</sup> the United Nations not only could not profit from it but is certain to be embarrassed by it. The Western Democracies, while they may not have favored his policies, can only be injured by his violent death. One must look then for a person or group to whom his murder has value, a nation which can use and is using the murder as a weapon with which to carry out a plan of disruption it has not even tried to conceal. This murder must be embarrassing to you, to the United Nations, to the United States and the other nations which have stood behind you and your actions and policies. To have connived at or condoned this death would be a stupidity beyond belief. This is no charge that the Moscow mole is implicated in the killing although the past does not preclude such a supposition. But the mole did leap upon it and use it as a propaganda weapon in a direction toward which he was committed. I respectfully submit to you that this question should be asked in the Council or Assembly.

Who stands to profit by this murder and who has instantly seized upon it as a means to a previously announced end? Perhaps Mr. Stevenson<sup>\*\*</sup> could ask this question. Not being able to reach him with certainty of privacy from here, I have not suggested it to him. Perhaps you might care to.

Meanwhile, our hopes and good wishes are with you.

Yours,

John Steinbeck

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\* Patrice Lumumba, first Prime Minister of the Congo. His murder, probably on January 17–18, brought bitter accusations against Hammarskjöld and the United Nations' role in Africa. (Urquhart, pp. 500–01; and especially 506 and following.)

\*\* Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, the permanent representative of the United States to the UN at the time.

February 28, 1961<sup>\*</sup>

Yours of 20 February has come to hand, and I note that one cannot escape the Congo's tentacles even down in Barbados. They clasp us tightly enough here.

Your approach to the Lumumba tragedy—his murder was, in Talleyrand's words, 'more than a crime, it was a major stupidity'—is unique; no one in these parts, at least, has suggested it, and it invites thought. I suppose there are many possible answers to the question you pose, but I incline to the conclusion that *no* one, in the long pull, will really profit from Lumumba's death; least of all those outside the Congo who now strain to do so but should one day confront a reckoning with truth and decency. There may be immediately some propaganda exploitation of this blunder; indeed, we have been seeing it in staged bursts in many parts of the world, but to what avail, really, and even those efforts have required unbridled distortion. It is, I imagine, at its earliest that the big lie shines brightest; does one ever endure? Events in the Congo move quickly and, it seems, so far always badly or in bad directions; memories, even of ghosts and legends and certainly of synthetic martyrs, are short and everything soon gets swallowed up in the confusions, frustrations and sheer imbecilities of that arena.

In any event, your goodwill and good wishes mean much—more than ever, in times such as these.

[Dag Hammarskjöld]

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\* Addressed to Steinbeck in Barbados. This letter was in large part printed in Urquhart, p. 506.

May 20, 1961<sup>\*</sup>

Dear John,

What a delicious and delightful book you sent me with 'continuing faith'.<sup>\*\*</sup> And what a fine piece of craftsmanship showing with effortless ease how we are, all of us, in the face of all those compromises which we fool ourselves into calling small. And what an encouraging meeting for all your friends with an author to whom the basic decencies are basic realities and who, therefore, makes the reader feel a little bit cleaner and want to be a lot cleaner than before meeting the mind back of this story.

From this you see that you gave me a great pleasure and some very fine hours when you sent me your book. I also am happy for your generous and friendly thought in giving it to me.

I look forward to seeing you and Mrs. Steinbeck in a few days. I hope we shall have a very relaxed evening together—although I might feel like telling you about a few of the things / see happening and which really make continuing faith as necessary as it makes it difficult.

Dag Hammarskjöld

New York  
June 1, 1961

Dear Dag,

We had such a specially good evening with you on Thursday last. It picked us up no end to see you again. You really are a perfect host—with such exquisite judgement in bringing stimulating people together. We thoroughly enjoyed the relaxed air and the good talk.

And the superb dinner which I'm still dreaming of!

Thank you so much for including John and me.

Our united admiration and affection.

Elaine

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<sup>\*</sup> Addressed to New York.

<sup>\*\*</sup> This was Steinbeck's novel *The Winter of our Discontent*, published in April 1961, and which Dag Hammarskjöld considered to be a 'near masterpiece'.

Sag Harbor  
August 17, 1961

Dear Dag,

After our short discussion at your dinner, I am sad that we couldn't pursue the subject in private. However, you have been very busy, and I came out here to complete a book.

We are sailing for England Sept. 8 on the Rotterdam. I am taking the boys aged 15 and 17 on a long trip around the world. We plan to be away ten months, will move by every kind of conveyance and very slowly. It seems to me the best present I can give these boys. Even if they do not know it at this time, the world will stay with them.

But I have another purpose in writing this letter. I think you know my feeling about you personally and about the United Nations. If there is anything I can do during this slow journey of a private or public nature that would be of service to you, I would gladly undertake it.

I know you have access to expert and official information in all areas but I have also found that the unofficial and inexpert point of observation and research is sometimes of value by its very indirection and lack of preconception.

I shall be in New York between August 26th and Sept. 8. If you can think of a non herculean labor to be performed, please let me know. What strata I do not penetrate, my sons will.

Yours in the faith,

John

August 19, 1961\*

Dear John,

I was delighted to hear from you with a letter interpreting again in such deeply encouraging words your approach to shared worries and hopes. The greatest service that you could render us all would be to bring out, with all your mastery of form, in an ever simpler way and with increasing limpidity, the spirit for which you are a representative for and among your friends. If you permit me to be terribly preposterous, I would say that I hope that you will manage to make the architecture of your work, and its unavoidable ornaments, so invisible or translucent as to make your strong inner light shine forth and illuminate the simplest of human relations and the simplest of human characters. You have done so several times already but I believe that you could do it now in an even more definitive way—and that we need it.

I am happy for your sake, and for that of your boys, that you will go on this world trip, but I regret it personally—we have not seen much of you here—and I regret also if that would lead to a long interruption in your work. However, you are certainly right that nothing could, without their knowing it, be more of an experience for the future for your boys. Let us hope that neither Krushchev, nor anyone of those others who have the same mistaken view of their place in life, interferes with such sound plans.

I am happy for your kind offer to do whatever I might feel you could during your world trip. Off hand I could not mention anything in particular, but in a general way there is quite a lot which somebody with your position and background can achieve. Could we not talk it over when you get back to town? I would love to have an evening alone with you if you would care to come. Please get in touch with me on your return to town so that we can make an arrangement to meet before your departure.

[Dag Hammarskjöld]

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\* Addressed to Sag Harbor.

September 5, 1961\*

Dear John,

It was a great pleasure to have you with me the other night. Enclosed I send you the book by Buber,\*\* in which I recommend you to read the first paper 'Dialogue' and the last 'What is Man?'

I further send you letters to the five gentlemen on whom we agreed. If there is anything you would wish to change in the letters, please let me know before your departure.

With all good wishes for your trip and rich experience both for yourself and for your family.

Dag Hammarskjöld

New York  
Sept. 7, 1961

Dear Dag,

A good and rewarding evening for me. I am grateful for your friendship, and your letters are flattering.

I shall take advantage of your invitation to keep you informed. The best of all news is your assurance that you are strong and well.

I am including a remembrance for Miss Platz\*\*\* who has been so kind,

We sail on the Rotterdam tomorrow at noon.

Ave but no vale.\*\*\*\*

Yours,

John

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\* Addressed to New York.

\*\* Martin Buber (1878–1965), *Between Man and Man* (first English edition 1947). Hammarskjöld admired Buber, and was working on his own Swedish translation of Buber's *Ich Und Du* while on the aircraft whose crash took his life. (Urquhart, p. 587.)

\*\*\* Hannah Platz, Hammarskjöld's secretary.

\*\*\*\* Hammarskjöld's death on September 18 was a severe blow to Steinbeck, expressed in two letters from London: to his agent Elizabeth Otis, September 19; and to Adlai Stevenson, September 23. (Steinbeck Letters, pp. 715–16.)

In his letter to Dag Hammarskjöld August 17, 1961, Steinbeck indicated that during his forthcoming ten months journey around the world, he would be glad to be of whatever service he could be as an ‘unofficial and inexperienced’ observer of events and developments. In response to this offer, Hammarskjöld wrote a number of letters of introduction to Heads of State and Heads of Government whom he thought Steinbeck might wish to call upon, namely the President of the United Arab Republic, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion, the Vice-President of India, Dr S. Radakrishnan and the Prime Minister of Burma, U Nu. He also addressed one of the letters to Professor Martin Buber in Jerusalem, which is reproduced below.\*

5 September 1961

Professor Martin Buber,  
c/o Hebrew University of Jerusalem  
JERUSALEM

Dear Professor Buber,

As my friend, John Steinbeck, is going to visit your country, I wish to send with him my warm personal greetings.

Of course, he is in no need of an introduction. Such an introduction is provided by ‘The Grapes of Wrath’, ‘Of Mice and Men’, and most recently by ‘The Winter of our Discontent’, not to mention his other works.

He is, as you will know, one of those observers of life in our generation, who feel that its survival will depend on our ability to know ourselves and to stick to basic human values with the will to pay what it may cost.

I know that you may have no time to receive him, but I also know that he would be very happy if you could—and so would I.

With kindest regards,

Dag Hammarskjöld

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\* The text of all five letters of introduction is identical.

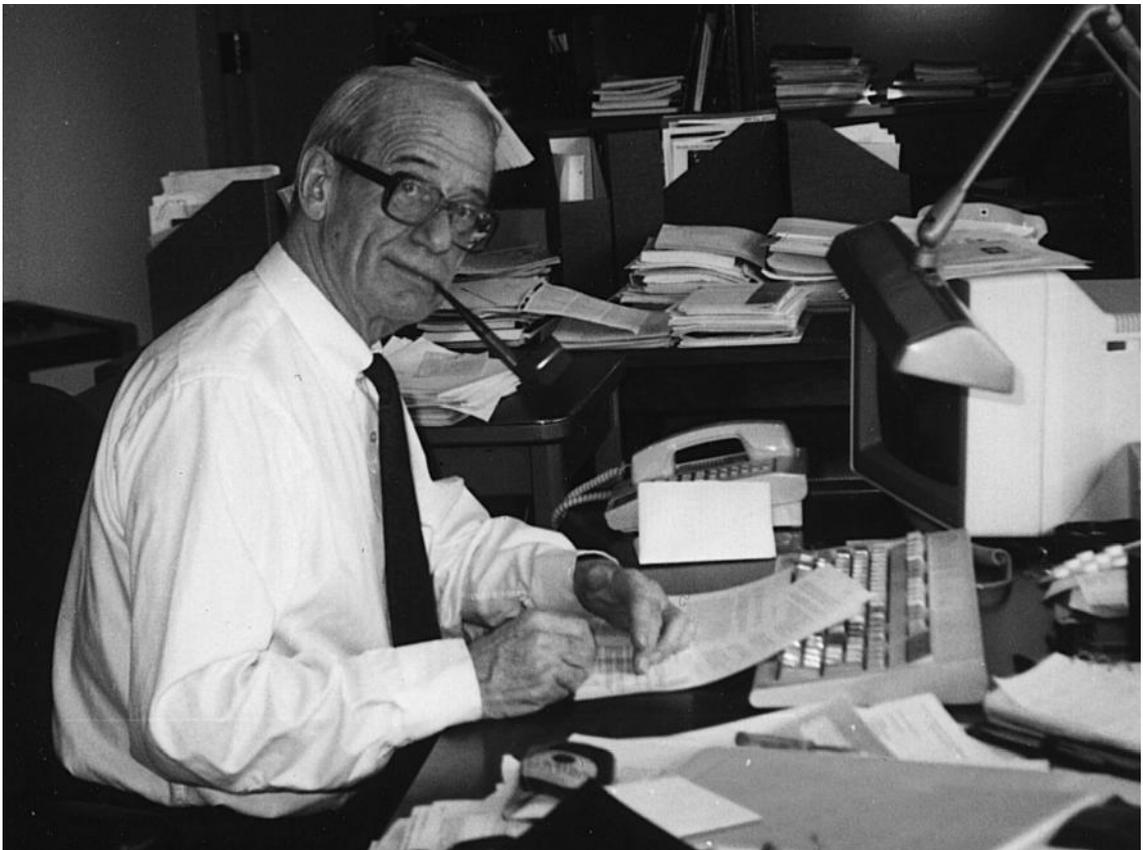
# Göran Ohlin in memoriam

A tribute from the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

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*Göran Ohlin was a world-renowned economist whose scholarly work was impressive in its breadth and depth and an international civil servant of rich experience. His relationship with the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation began in 1972, when he was professor of Economics at the University of Uppsala, as he became a member—at its inception—of the Advisory Editorial Committee of DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE. Returning to Sweden in 1993 after retiring from his post as Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Secretariat, he was elected a member of the Board of Trustees of the Foundation. He became Chairman of the Board two years later and served from January 1996 to his death on 28 June of the same year. This speech was given at his funeral by his predecessor as Chairman of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Ambassador Ernst Michanek.*

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I speak on behalf of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, of which Göran Ohlin was the Chairman of the Board of Trustees. I do so at the request of the interim Chairman, Professor Martin Holmdahl, as I was Göran Ohlin's predecessor as Chairman.

At the time of Dag Hammarskjöld's service as Secretary-General of the United Nations in the 1950s (1953–1961), the young Göran Ohlin pursued an academic career as a social scientist and professor at Stanford, Columbia and Yale. In 1962 he joined for a short time the Institute for International Economic Studies (the Myrdal Institute) at the University of Stockholm.

While the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation was becoming active internationally in the mid-1960s Göran Ohlin, in Paris, was busy contributing to the work of the Development Research Centre of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the OECD.

When in 1969 he became a professor of economics at Uppsala University, Göran Ohlin was already well known for his studies in the theory and practice of foreign aid. He soon became an important—and always readily available—member of the wide global network that the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation was gradually building up. His studies and published papers from that time showed an impressive breadth and depth within the wide field of economic, social, cultural and political development, focusing on the poorer parts of the world.

He made a great contribution to international understanding of the precarious economic situation of the so-called Third World: the problems of excessive population growth; its food, nutrition and health needs; the impact of foreign aid policies; and the rapidly increasing debt burden of even the poorest countries.

He played an important role in international development cooperation, not least in the increasing participation of Sweden in this endeavour. He became a well-reputed writer and an often-heard lecturer and discussant at the seminars and other meetings of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation; from its beginning in 1972 he was a member of the Advisory Editorial Committee of the Foundation's journal, *Development Dialogue*.

Göran was eager though cool; angry, I think, deep inside but mild and friendly in his manner—patient, and often with a joke ready to lighten a serious subject or discussion; in short, a generous personality.

He had a gift for helping people to come to grips with problems, and to agree on well-formulated texts and proposals for joint action.

Such characteristics proved invaluable when he worked with international commissions on major world issues, such as the Pearson Commission Report in 1968–69, entitled *Partners in Development*. Ten years later, as the Executive Secretary of the German Chancellor Willy Brandt's Independent International Commission on North–South Issues, he was responsible for producing its reports: *A Programme for Survival* (1980), and *Common Crisis: Cooperation for World Recovery* (1983).

It was logical that, at the age of 60, Göran Ohlin should be appointed Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, with responsibility for, *inter alia*, the World Economic and Social Surveys. He served in this position until 1992.

It was equally logical that in 1993 he should be elected a member of the Board of Trustees of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, and that in 1995 he was asked to serve as Chairman of the Board. We knew that his health was fragile, but we observed that his intellectual capacity was unbroken—and that he was in fact eager to serve.

His knowledge, and his experience of how the UN System functions, were a great asset to the Foundation and particularly to its work on UN reform, undertaken jointly with the Ford Foundation. This project, which dealt both with the leadership and organisation of the UN System, produced a number of significant reports from 1990 onwards, culminating on the eve of the 50th Anniversary Year of the United Nations in 1995.

Göran Ohlin was not given the opportunity to fulfil even one year as Chairman of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. But he worked on important United Nations issues up until the very last weeks of his life. He accepted a commission from the Secretary-General to review, together with Bernard Molitor, the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Regional Economic Commissions of the UN—to help solve questions closely connected with the reform efforts just referred to. He travelled far and wide, and he delivered his draft report in April 1996—on time, as requested and promised, as always.

A few days ago, the Foundation received a letter from one of the two leaders of the Ford and Hammarskjöld Foundations' UN project, Erskine Childers, who had just read the Ohlin-Molitor report. This letter says, *inter alia*,

This paper shows all the incisiveness and searching of mind for which we all remember Göran. His was the kind of mind that 'worries at a problem' without concern for mere correctitude, only for what verities and ways of improvement he could find in its surrounding universe.

When Göran began working on this assignment, he looked so well, and was so alert and obviously happy to be 'back in harness'. If he had to go, he would surely have wished to do so while working. He will be remembered well as a kindly, courteous and astute gentleman civil servant.

Be it my privilege to associate myself and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation with those words. The Foundation is deeply grateful for the contributions that Göran Ohlin has made to its work and to the world community, over a lifetime.

*Ernst Michanek*

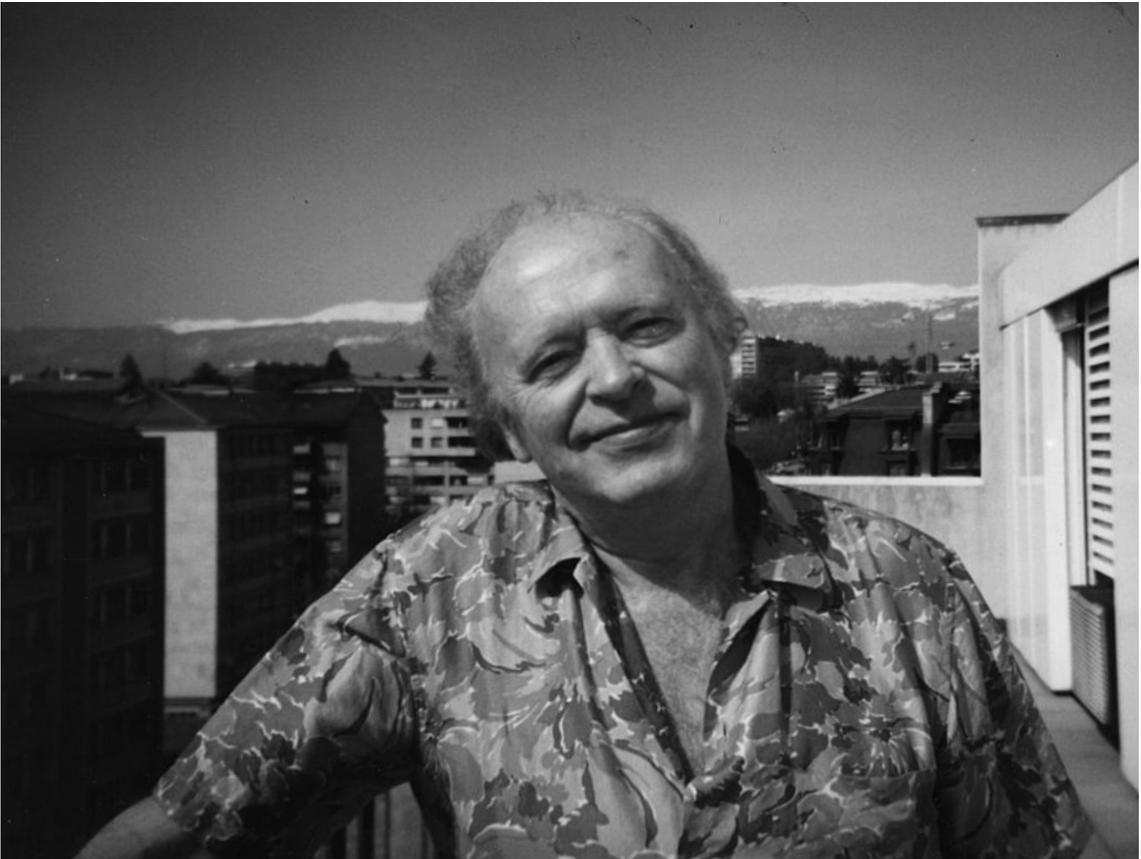
# Erskine Childers

**A life dedicated to building a working world community**

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*Erskine Childers grew up in Ireland and began his working life as an independent writer and broadcaster specialising in international political and developmental affairs. In 1967 he joined the United Nations and served for 22 years with most of the organisations of the system at all levels and in all regions. His close cooperation with the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation began in 1990 when he co-authored, with Brian Urquhart, the first in a series of studies on UN leadership. Before his death on 25 August 1996, he and Sir Brian co-authored another four studies on UN reform, under a programme developed by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the Ford Foundation. This eulogy was delivered in St. John's Church, Laragh, by Sven Hamrell, former Executive Director of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation.*

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It is not easy for me to speak on this occasion as a representative of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation about a man who has meant so much not only to me and to our Foundation in Uppsala but first and foremost to those ideas and ideals of public service, national and international, that he had inherited from his ancestors and shared with Dag Hammarskjöld—ideas and ideals that were to be embodied in the Charter of the United Nations and expressed in the dedicated work of its most outstanding international civil servants, of which Erskine Childers was one. It is not for me to speak here of his family heritage, but allow me to say that he often spoke to me about what the Irish heritage meant to him in his international work and that he wanted to spend the end of his life in a little cottage close to his ancestral home, Glan, which became a mysteriously attractive place to those of us who listened to him. A concrete example of what Ireland meant to him in his international work is that when asked to join the Board of the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), an advocacy organisation established to protect the world's plant genetic resources, he did not hesitate for one minute. He simply had to accept because he was too painfully aware of what the potato famine had meant to his country.

But the Foundation's relationship with Erskine had at first little to do with his Irish origins. It derived from the fact that we knew from the Congo crisis that Erskine Childers and Dag Hammarskjöld had in common a commitment to justice, equity and fairness in international affairs and a healthy distrust of the powers that be and of the vested interests of the former colonial empires in the four principal Third World continents, Africa, Arabia, Asia and Latin America. What attracted us was not least his profound understanding of the conflicts in the Middle East, accounted for in his early books and in his magnificent essay about 'The Western Image of the Arabs', but also, and even more important, his twenty-two years of service, since 1967, with all the organisations of the UN System at all levels in all regions of the world, ending his career as Senior Adviser to the UN Director for Development and International Cooperation, an office that was established as a result of a proposal made in the 1975 Dag Hammarskjöld Report on Development and International Cooperation, published under the title *What Now: Another Development*.

No wonder that we in the Foundation were anxious to benefit from Erskine's experience and wisdom, that we invited him to contribute to *Development Dialogue*, that our Board asked him and the former Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs, Sir Brian Urquhart, to team up after their retirement to look into the leadership issues in the world organisation and into the whole issue of a reform and renewal of the UN System.

This was one of the most important decisions taken in the history of the Foundation. A better team could not have been found and it led to six years of intensely productive work and five singularly important studies in UN reform, namely:

- (1) *A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's United Nations*, published in English, French and Spanish editions in 1990;
- (2) *Reorganisation of the United Nations Secretariat: A Suggested Outline of Needed Reforms*, 1991, proposing, *inter alia*, four Deputy Secretaries-General;
- (3) *Strengthening International Response to Humanitarian Emergencies*, 1991, largely Erskine Childers' work and a remarkable achievement because of its practical orientation;
- (4) *Renewing the United Nations System*, 1994, based primarily on Erskine Childers' development work and summarising his experiences and conclusions, a book so rich in its theoretical and practical dimensions that it is likely to be consulted for years to come;
- (5) *A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's United Nations—A Fresh Appraisal*, 1996, recommending in a concluding chapter that the General Assembly adopt a comprehensive new approach based on a concerted search for the best possible person as Secretary-General to serve for a single term of seven years, urging the five Permanent Members to relinquish their veto over candidates and advocating that all governments, civil society organisations and the public at large be able to contribute suggestions at the outset and review a shortlist of candidates at mid-point.

These five studies in their many editions have so far been printed in well over 100,000 copies, made available through personalised mailings to cabinet ministers, foreign service officers, government officials and not least to non-governmental or rather civil society organisations all over the world.

Few decision-makers or political activists can therefore today claim ignorance of these studies. They also testify, to quote Sir Brian Urquhart, to Erskine Childers' 'enormous capacity for hard intellectual work', to his dedication to the ideals of the United Nations and to the endless struggle for human rights and gender equality, and to his abiding conviction, to use his own words, that 'the only hope of effectively dealing with the world's major problems in the interest of humankind is through the progressive development of a working world community'.

But Erskine knew that writing was not sufficient, that personal communication and institutional implementation of ideas and ideals were equally im-

portant. He therefore joined the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) as its Secretary-General in 1996, accepting a travel schedule and a series of speaking engagements that might have killed a much younger man. He paid for his commitment with his life, true to his family traditions.

We have also in the Hammarskjöld Foundation received many indications of what Erskine Childers meant to his friends in high governmental positions as well as to his ‘comrades in arms’ in the non-governmental world. I will just single out a passage from a faxed letter received only a few days after his death at the WFUNA Conference in Luxembourg on Sunday 25 August. It was sent to us by his old friend Charles Weitz, who had been International Coordinator of FAO’s Freedom from Hunger Campaign (1960–71) and who had served as a consultant to Erskine Childers and Brian Urquhart in the preparation of *Renewing the United Nations System*. Charles Weitz wrote:

I was devastated. Erskine Childers had become such a central figure in my life—from the years of the 70s when he was among the few in UNDP with whom I could have thorough, honest, relevant talks, into the 80s when he oversaw my lecturing for the United Nations in Canada and the USA, to several complex, delicate evaluation missions which I had done for him and then into the wonderful world of Reforming and the leadership studies ... what a great mind, what a great human being, what a potent and correct force in a world where so many seem to have lost their way ... Erskine was truly a giant.

Reading a letter like this, one is bound to ask oneself, what can be done to honour a man like Erskine Childers except trying to carry on to the best of one’s ability the work to which he had committed himself?

I have, in fact, come to think that two more things can be done and should be done.

In 1991, after we had published Brian Urquhart’s and Erskine Childers’ first study in UN Reform, *A World in Need of Leadership*, I received a remarkable document from Erskine. It began like this:

‘“Acquit you well” is rather archaic shorthand for a guiding standard among those who wish to serve their society—local, national, planetary. It implies that there are standards, of ethical behaviour, cultural sensitivity, and human rights against which one should measure one’s efforts and try to acquit oneself as best one can. This is a book about such public service, seen through some of the stories of a multi-national family.’

What followed were 740 typed double-spaced pages of a fascinating and sometimes extremely dramatic family history illustrating the deadly serious moral issues facing the public servants in the family on both sides of the Atlantic over several hundred years. It would be a great loss to humankind if this remarkable work did not reach the printed page.

A tribute of a different kind to Erskine Childers would be to gather his many speeches and occasional papers produced over a long period and no longer easily available. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, not being a publishing house, is precluded from performing such a public service to the world, but there is little doubt that such a gathering of Erskine Childers' fugitives would be greatly appreciated by many readers and many political activists all over the world and not least in his own country and in the Third World.

In concluding, one might ask how Erskine Childers perceived himself towards the end of his life. I think it can be said of him as it was said about a man he did not like, Winston Churchill, that 'he longed for fame but it was of a historic kind'. I think that this longing is now being fulfilled. I think that Erskine Childers' reputation is now secure, perhaps one of the most secure reputations of the kind he aspired to and that can be achieved in our time. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation is grateful for the opportunity it has been given to assist Erskine Childers in his work.

*Sven Hamrell*

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