

Development of the Book Trade in Tanzania

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Abstract

The primary focus of this study was an assessment of the development of the book trade in Tanzania covering authorship, publishing, printing, book selling and other means of distribution. The study embraced all types of publishable literature such as books, periodicals and other ephemeral materials.

A historical approach was taken, in this study, starting from earliest times, through the colonial era, up to the present time. In each period, all known details pertaining to the book trade were briefly discussed. In the process, achievements and shortfalls were revealed.

The study noted that Tanzania, like many other third world countries, was facing problems with the book trade. Indeed, the many problems that faced the trade greatly outweighed Government efforts to salvage the book trade. This was notwithstanding the fact that the book trade was an important vehicle by which information is disseminated to Tanzanians, and that no society could survive without such service.

Despite the many Government efforts to promote literacy and the reading habit, Tanzania still faced serious problems with regard to the book industry. According to the study, the country was a clear example of a where two opposing social forces were at play the growing literacy, hand, and the declining book production, on the other. Many forces internal and external, have continued to act unfavourably towards the trade. Most of the problems revolve around two key areas authorship and publishing.

With regard to 'authorship', the study noted that there were still inadequate textbook authors in Tanzania. Even most authors of fiction did not write literary novels. Generally, the book trade was comparatively young. The Government did not have a clear policy on authorship. Its system of a panel of authors for writing textbooks deterred many good authors.

Further, the system of sharing the royalty among a multitude of authors discouraged many authors. In a panel, not everybody contributed equally to a publication, but the proceeds of such book were distributed equitably.

Moreover, it was very difficult to get reputable publishers in the country. Most of the existing publishers were constrained in terms of resources, publishing skills, specialisation or even business skills. Many would not accept every manuscript brought to them for fear of risk of not being able to sell, or not having adequate knowledge on what the manuscript really contained.

The non-availability of printing equipment and spare parts, in particular, was a critical deterring factor. Many publishing houses had to stop production for a long time if their machines broke down because spare parts could not be obtained in the country. They had to fill in many and cumbersome application forms requesting for foreign currency from the central bank in order to import the needed parts. Many applications were delayed or rejected outright.

Similarly, no printing machines were being manufactured in the country. They had to be imported, and this meant going through the arduous procedure for obtaining the required foreign currency.

In general, all these problems and many others bogged down the publishing industry and the book trade in its entirety. Despite several government efforts, the future of the industry was still bleak.

There was need, therefore, for the Government to create an enabling environment for the survival and growth of the book industry. With regard to authorship, for instance, there was need for a clear policy which would encourage people to publish. The system of panels of authors should be reviewed to allow as well individual authors in their respective areas of experience.