APNET’S COUNTRY REPORT OF AFRICAN PUBLISHERS IN COVID-19 PERIOD

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African Publishers Network Secretariat
Bureau of Ghana Languages Building, Kawukudi Culture
P. O. Box LT 471  Lartebiokorshie, Accra, Ghana
Tel:+233 302 912 764  Mob:+233 246946773
E-mail: info.africanpublishers@gmail.com  Website: www.african-publishers.net
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Background

The recent Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) outbreak has had devastating global effects on life, health as well as the economy of almost all sectors, including the publishing industry in Africa. The year 2020 has been very challenging for book publishers across Africa and the world at large due to the aforementioned global pandemic. Comparatively, among all the continents in the world, Africa has the least developed publishing industry relative to technological advancements especially in the area of electronic publishing which serves as an alternative source of income generation for e-book publishers at all times, including lockdown periods such as this.

In order to know the current state of the African publishing industry, African Publishers Network (APNET), the pan-African network of National Publishers’ Associations (NPAs) across Africa, with its immeasurable interest and effort in the welfare and growth of publishers and the publishing industry, has conducted a survey to communicate to all the extent to which COVID-19 has and is affecting publishers and other stakeholders in the industry.

The current state of the publishing industry in Africa with individual reports from 26 African countries that responded has been captured below. The report contains snapshots of the effects of COVID-19 on publishers, the contributions of publishers in the promotion of reading in the lockdown period, the collaborative role of governments to develop reading and or learning platforms and whether there are support packages from governments to help minimise the financial risks of publishers, booksellers and other stakeholders in the industry.

The survey provides an opportunity to learn from the challenges, contributions and possible solutions of other African countries.

The Current State of the Publishing Industry in Africa

COVID-19, as indicated in the opening remarks, has affected almost all sectors. Only a few sectors including food and health are functioning in most countries. African governments are putting in place measures to contain the disease and help achieve quality health for their citizens. Other government initiatives include tourist site and border closures, fewer international trips, cancellation of cruise lines, airline suspensions, and cancellation of regional
and global events. Many African international book fairs have been cancelled and others with dates in the third and fourth quarters of the year are also being considered for cancellation or otherwise.

Educational institutions are closed and many businesses in Africa have been locked down to reduce and prevent further spread of the disease. The closure of schools automatically stops the distribution and sales of physical books because schools are the main clientele of publishers and booksellers which have always focused highly on textbook publishing since it has a specific market. Bookstores are also closed, thus terminating the possibility of selling books.

From the survey, the e-book publishing model is still not well developed among African publishers. Some of the countries have indigenous publishers without e-books while others have just a handful of them. So, African countries with an appreciable number of e-book publishers are few. Practical knowledge and solution to getting more publishers to develop and operate in the electronic book publishing model is the expectation of all African countries. Since e-book publishing in Africa is not as well developed as those of other continents, African publishers are probably the most affected by the pandemic.

A few governments of the countries that responded have plans to create online libraries as well as TV and radio educational programmes for students. However, some of the North African countries face restrictions on electronic book publishing and accessibility.

Some African publishers are benefitting from general support packages by their governments – a few of the countries have had promises by their government to buy books from publishers. Others are optimistic that their government would support the industry at the right time. APNET humbly requests all African governments to include the publishing industry in their support packages to minimise the financial risks and keep publishers in operation. With a decreasing income, or even lack of income, expenses, including salaries of workers, office rent, book warehousing costs and other operational expenses of publishing firms keep increasing publishers’ liabilities; thus, the need for government’s intervention.

Though the IMF had indicated earlier in March 2020 that the impact of COVID-19 on global growth was difficult to predict, the IMF is certain that 2020 growth will slow down significantly from the projected 3.3% to rates far below the 2019 outturn of 2.9%. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) predicts that the Africa 2020 projected GDP growth will drop by 1.4% from 3.2% to 1.8 % as a result of COVID-19. The World Bank
estimates that a 1% decline in developing countries growth rates traps an additional 20 million people into poverty *(Ministry of Finance’s Statement to the Parliament of Ghana, March 30, 2020)*.

Likewise, it is difficult for APNET, NPAs or any foreign body to quantitatively predict the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the publishing industry in Africa. However, the following outlines the adverse impact of the disease on the publishing industry which justifies the support of government and any interested organisation:

i. Drastic decline of revenue due to little or no sales of books and decline in remittances;

ii. Disruptions in national and global supply chains with a drop in value creation and delays in the shipment of major printing materials, books and other publishing materials;

iii. Stoppage of ongoing publishing projects and a reduction in the quantity of published titles due to the attendant disincentives to publish;

iv. Slowdown in investments and the potential lay-off of workers if this unfortunate situation persists;

v. Significant job losses for businesses, big and small;

vi. Unanticipated increases in health spending and high prices of other goods and services;

vii. Higher debt burden on publishers and stakeholders in the publishing industry; and

viii. Potential collapse of publishing firms.

Many African publishers are generously providing free e-books to support governments’ reading projects. However, it is important to note that some countries including the Czech Republic, the National Municipal Library is buying 10 million CZK worth of books (e-books inclusive) from Czech publishers. This is an equivalent of 370,000 EUR. NPAs can advocate for such book procurement by government.

Below are snapshots of reports from publishers’ associations/ publishers of African countries.
1. ALGERIA

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in Algeria, it is not only publishers that are locked down but also printing firms and bookstores. There is no opportunity to sell either physical books or eBooks due to some payment issues in the country. As a result of this situation, all the publishing firms are facing very serious problems, since they must pay their employees and pay for all other operational expenses without undertaking any commercial activities such as book distribution and book fairs during this period. According to Mr Mustapha Kallab Debbih, President, National Organisation of Book Publishers in Algeria. ‘Our organisation, the National Organisation of Book Publishers in Algeria (ONEL), tried to encourage people to read books during this time by thinking of some price reductions and other offers, but the lockdown made this very difficult. Unfortunately, till now, there is no support from the Algerian government to publishers, so Algerian publishers must face their destiny alone.’

2. BENIN

As at today, Beninese publishers are not engaged in anything due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Meetings among publishers and writers have decreased significantly. According to booksellers, sales have dropped tremendously because of the containment and distribution has dropped too. In the case of electronic publishing, online sale of electronic works varies from one publisher to another. Publishers in Benin have no measures for online libraries to enhance reading during the COVID-19 period. Mr Gerard D. Houessou, President, Publishers Association of Benin submits that ‘Publishers adhere to strict compliance by the Beninese government. However, the government has done nothing special for publishers in these trying times. Each publisher is left to fend for themselves in order to avoid the coronavirus.’

3. BURUNDI

According to Mr Dieudonné Nshimirimana, President, Burundi Publishers Association (BUPA), ‘Publishers are not locked down, but we cannot organise some activities, especially the World Book and Copyright Day as usual. Books are still sold in the country but our main customers were foreigners who have left Burundi last week. We are setting up a publishers’ meeting to organise this activity. No support from the government to publishers during and after the COVID-19.’

4. CAMEROON

Publishers are not locked down in Cameroon. They are subject to the same requirements as all activities in a Coronavirus situation and there are no exclusive measures taken against publishers.
The pandemic has had negative effects on the book industry in Cameroon: a slowdown in the monitoring of current editorial projects, a decline in the submission of texts for publishing, a complete cancellation of physical book promotion activities, and a considerable reduction in the purchase of books. However, some pockets of book sales remain. Jean-Claude Awono, of Efrikiya Publishing House argues that having people confined causes them to come back to the conference and solicit books. ‘We have thus benefited from visits by expatriates, mainly selected in Cameroon, who take the opportunity to know what is happening in terms of literature in the country. Our digital partner also reports a craze at the conference that is doing something to increase sales figures.’

Regarding online libraries, publishers were not contacted by government. However, there are many links from online libraries that circulate in social networks. For the moment, no government support action for publishers is envisaged anywhere. Perhaps measures will be taken to support the publishing industry; this is not certain for the moment.

5. CONGO

Publishers in Congo cannot work or do anything due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was reported that there is no technology to do electronic publishing in Congo and therefore would need the technology to publish digitally. The Congolese government does not support publishers but publishers are hoping for a better future.

6. CÔTE D'IVOIRE (IVORY COAST)

With regard to Côte d'Ivoire, like other countries, COVID-19 impacts the socio-economic environment of the country in all its compartments. The publishing and book industry is specifically affected by this global pandemic. Obviously, the survival of publishers is seriously threatened by the health crisis. With the schools closed and bookstores practically no longer running, the risk of technical unemployment and cessation of activities threatens the sector. The slowdown in all the activities of the education system prevents bookstores from being active by making sales to the point that some have already freed some of their staff. The sale of books in electronic version is not yet dynamic for various reasons. At the same time, Mr Anges Félix N'Dakpri, President, Cote D’Ivoire Publishers Association, is not sure that this is a priority at this time for the population. ‘The government has promised support measures for all economic operators. We are waiting to see! By experience and by prudence, we want to plead with the government for a sectorial emergency plan to support the publishing and book industry.’

7. EGYPT

All educational institutions and organisations are closed in Egypt. The Egyptian government has put measures in place to bring everything under control. Some of the publishers have eBooks and some of them have created free online reading platforms on their websites while others are selling their ebooks via other hosts which include Jumia and
Amazon. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education have promised to buy books from all Egyptian publishers. According to Mr Mohamed Ibrahim Radi, Executive Director, Egyptian Publishers’ Association, the Egyptian Publishers’ Association is waiting for this promise to be fulfilled.

8. GABON

In Gabon, publishing firms closed a few days after schools closed because of the Coronavirus. The main clientele and bookstores are also closed since publishers’ activities are linked to the school programme. Publishers have not developed electronic books, but this is also an opportunity to explore. ‘There is no book policy here, no support for publishers, and certainly no Coronavirus,’ Mrs Sylvie NTSAME, President, Alliance of Publishers of Central Africa reports.

9. GHANA

The lockdown of two regions, Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi, which are the leading regions with the highest commercial activities in Ghana has been lifted, though there is a probability of a future lockdown if the infections increase. All schools remain closed until further notice by government. The publishing industry is adversely affected and publishers in Ghana with closed offices are currently working from home. Some publishing activities including marketing, sales and promotion of books have been halted and bookshops closed.

For over a year now, textbook publishers have not sold textbooks from kindergarten to primary level (KG-Primary 6) because a new curriculum was introduced in April 2019 and publishers were not given the opportunity to sell off the existing textbooks. Currently, KG-P6 textbooks are being developed and some have been submitted to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) for assessment pending approval. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the situation as income generating activities come to a halt.

Very few Ghanaian publishers have online eBook portals on their websites to sell eBooks to Ghanaians while others sell their eBooks on international online bookstores to the global market. The Ghana Library Authority (GhLA), a government agency in charge of public libraries and reading under the Ministry of Education, has launched a digital online reading platform and is inviting publishers, authors and owners of literary rights to donate reading materials (fiction, non-fiction and journals) for people to read freely.

Mr Asare Konadu Yamoah, President, Ghana Publishers Association (GPA) reports that the government has prepared a Coronavirus Alleviation Programme (CAP) to address the disruption in economic activities, the hardship of the people, and to rescue and revitalise industries. The Central Bank of Ghana has made available a minimum of one billion Ghana Cedis (GH¢1 billion equivalent to US$182,000,000) to households and businesses, particularly small and medium scale enterprises. The commercial banks are, in addition, responding to the Bank of Ghana’s 1.5% decrease in the policy rate and 2% in reserve
requirement with a three billion-cedi (GH₵3 billion equivalent to US$550,458,000) facility to support industries especially in the pharmaceutical, hospitality, service and manufacturing sectors. Publishing is a service-oriented industry which per the understanding of the Ghana Publishers Association falls under the service sector; however, the Association will seek clarification and advocate for publishers’ share of the amount. The government is providing additional relief, such as extension of the tax filing date from April to June; a two per cent (2%) reduction of interest rates by banks, effective 1st April 2020. No water bill for three months from April to June and 50% reduction in electricity bill for 3 months (April to June), free for electricity users with 50kilowatts or less. Most of the government supports are general which are also to the benefit of publishers.

10. GUINEA

The publishing industry is not officially locked down but like most other businesses, the book sector is very affected. And this will last for many months to come. According to Mr Aliou Sow, CEO, Editions Ganndal, ‘there are some opportunities to sell our eBooks with international partners, namely Worldreader and Youscribe.’ Editions Ganndal has also created a free library online to help students and other young readers to access free reading opportunities during the COVID-19 confinement (http://editionsganndal.blogspot.com). There is no support from the government to the publishing sector and the promise of government does not include cultural industries and publishers.

11. KENYA

Mr James Odhiambo, Executive Secretary, Kenya Publishers Association states that about 90% of the staff of publishing firms including essential workers and specifically publication and editorial teams may be working either from home or the office because publishers are going to have grade 5 submissions this year. Electronic books can be sold at the moment but not physical books, since most bookshops are closed. Most publishers have their own portals and some are contributing through the Kenya Education Cloud that allows learners to access content free of charge. The books were donated to the Kenya Education Cloud that is managed by Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development under the Ministry of Education for the period of the COVID-19 after which negotiations will continue. Mr Lawrence Njagi, President, Kenya Publishers Association also reports that the support government has given is to insist that debts owed by the Ministry of Education be paid to Publishers immediately. Other supports include reduction of taxes especially PAYE, reduced corporate tax from 30% to 25% and reduction of VAT from 16% to 14%. Revenue Authority has been ordered to make VAT refunds immediately to free cash they have been holding.
12. MALAWI

A lockdown has just been declared effective from 18th April for 21 days. But since February, when COVID-19 became apparent and schools were shut down, no book sales activities have taken place. Publishers were in the middle of developing primary school materials, but submission dates have been postponed and publishers are unable to conduct meetings with authors due to the ban on gatherings above five people.

According to Mrs Molini Linda Masamba, President, Book Publishers Association of Malawi, ‘There is no publisher in Malawi with eBooks, therefore online sales and online libraries are nonexistent. Currently, there is no government support to any industry, but even if there was, it is doubtful that our industry would benefit. It is never acknowledged by government.’

13. MALI

Mr Hamidou Konaté, President, Malian Book Publishers Association reports that the situation in Mali is the same with what is happening in other African countries. It is very bad and there is no support from government as at now. Publishing online is not functioning. Bookshops are closed and publishers are staying home. Publishers are still waiting for the situation to become better.

14. MOROCCO

Bookstores and publishers are locked down. Only grocers, chemists and hospitals are open. Everything has come to a halt. eBooks and selling online in Morocco are not developed. There are very few online sellers: one in Casablanca and the other in Rabat. It is not possible at all to receive eBooks from abroad. The Professional Union of Publishers of Morocco is working with the Ministry of Culture that is responsible in order to find solutions to this limitation of accessing eBooks globally. A programme of aids will be ready soon and the publishing industry just had a new Minister of Culture who is very active and wants to work and collaborate with publishers to enhance the industry. Publishers are working with the ministry to develop an electronic library but it is not likely to be ready soon. However, the Ministry of Culture will buy books once the online library is ready. The national library is open to some online books and some publishers put some of their books online or on their Facebook page. Mrs Amina Hachimi Alaoui, an active member, Professional Union of Publishers of Morocco concludes that the government has paid the salary of employees of small structures about US$200 for each employee. The new Minister of Culture has released arrears in support of the cultural industries (US$133000). This support give oxygen in these times of quarantine.
15. NIGER

Malam Abdou Bako, Founding Member, Network of Independent Publishers of Niger, provides an insight to the situation in Niger. According to him, ‘We cannot say that publishers are locked down at the moment but our activities have slowed down significantly. For my part, I sold my books mainly in national languages to NGOs that carry out literacy programmes. And now all the NGOs are no longer working because of the pandemic. So no book sales, neither physical nor digital. In my case, I contacted my partners (YouScribe) to allow me to give an access link to my few children books for free during this period of COVID-19 as my way of contributing to literacy. In addition to this, the Ministry of Culture of Niger contacted publishers to make a donation of books which will be made available to confined COVID-19 patients. I am actively providing as many as a hundred titles, all genres combined, to support that initiative. For the moment, the government has not thought of us in the sense of helping us specifically. The measures taken by the government for all businesses also affect us, in particular, the reduction in synthetic taxes with regard to its payment with the extension until the end of June.’

16. NIGERIA

Currently, Nigeria, Africa’s largest economy, is suffering a major economic blow and fast experiencing a huge crisis as result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its adverse impact, particularly among local publishers, cannot be over-emphasized. At the time of putting up this report, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) recorded the total confirmed cases in Nigeria as 627 with over 20 deaths, notable among which was the death of the Chief of Staff to the President of Nigeria. A very sad development to the nation! Hence, while observing all guidelines to curb the virus, proactive efforts are being made to support contact tracing, testing and to reduce further transmission.

In order to curtail the spread of the virus, there have been lockdowns in most states within the federation for a specific number of days with further extensions in the periods. Publishers in the book industry in Nigeria have been compliant with the stay-at-home directive of the government since they also value the safety and well-being of everyone in society.

The federal government through the president also ordered that all schools from the elementary to tertiary levels should remain closed until further notice. Several working groups have been constituted to develop and deploy response strategies for the education sector to cater for educational needs at an emergency level. Some states in the country have designed and started implementing on-the-air learning programmes to make up for the gaps created by the absence of physically attending classes. By extension, bookshops and publishing firms in some states in the country where there are lockdowns are closed while some publishing firms are yet to completely shut down operations as they adopt a Work from Home policy.

The disruption of business activities has dastardly affected the book industry in the area of operations, revenue, budgeting and planning since COVID-19 became a challenge especially for an industry that largely (over 75%) focuses on churning out physical
products. The cessation of movement, the introduction of physical distancing measures and the prohibition of mass gatherings have halted the publishing business outlook in Nigeria, placing stakeholders’ investment and employees’ jobs at risk. The decision to close educational institutions and schools in the attempt to contain the pandemic has led to the interruption of the physical distribution, marketing, sale and distribution of books. This has negatively impacted sales and caused a downturn in revenue and ROI for publishers. Although digital/electronic books have started experiencing a demand spike as many people try to engage themselves at a time like this, the few digital publishers that specialize in the sale of eBooks are not left out in the crisis as transactions and operations are still limited.

The government, through the Central Bank of Nigeria, has put in place fiscal, monetary and micro-financial strategies, stimulus packages and intervention funds for various categories of enterprises from small to medium and micro in form of loans and loan repayment waivers to ease the pains of restrictive policies and cushion the economic effects of the lockdown. The Nigerian Publishers Association according to its President, Gbadega Adedapo, is working closely with members to complement the effort of government by providing printed and electronic educative materials for circulation to sensitize the citizenry on necessary precautions to stop the spread of COVID-19 among many other support gestures that individual publishers have extended to their immediate business environment.

The book industry currently craves and advocates that the book sector should be considered and prioritized in the economic stimulus programme of the government. This is not only to sustain the education sector and associated businesses but also to ensure a quick recovery from the economic shocks.

17. RWANDA

Publishers are locked down and only essential businesses are going on in Rwanda. Only digital publishing can continue and that is quasi non-existent in Rwanda. Only very few publishers have a very small portion of their content accessible online. So far, there has been no specific government support for the publishing industry, Mr Isaie Mico Myiza, Chairman, Rwanda Children Book Organisation (RCBO) reports.

18. SENEGAL

The President of Senegalese Association of Publishers, Mrs. Aminata Sy highlights that all the players of the publishing industry are slowed down because of confinement. Only a few booksellers operate and the publishing sector is not very developed in Senegal. The government has promised to support culture during this difficult period. Publishers are under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and are expecting the promise to be fulfilled.
19. SIERRA LEONE

Publishers are free to do their work as far as the business climate allows. According to Sierra Leone Writers Series Publishers (SLWS), one of the leading publishers in the country, ‘Writers have time to start, continue and/or complete their manuscripts. We have received more submissions than before for the same period.’ A children book development workshop organised by CODE Canada in partnership with PEN Sierra Leone was held in early April and ended a day before a three-day lockdown imposed by government. The few bookshops in Sierra Leone are open for business till evening. There is a 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew. More eBooks are being previewed. WhatsApp versions of books are made with the consent of authors and shared freely. There is no support from government to publishers to minimise risks now, Mr Mohamed Sheriff, Immediate Past President, PEN Centre Sierra Leone concludes.

20. SOUTH AFRICA

Publishers in South Africa are under COVID-19 lockdown. The effects of the lockdown on the publishing industry is that, like the rest of the citizens, it helps to stop the spread of the virus and therefore saves the lives of people involved in the industry. However, there is no doubt that a prolonged lockdown period will adversely affect publishers’ viability, leading to a decline in income and employment. There is no opportunity to sell physical/printed books in South Africa as books do not fall under the category of essential services in the country’s COVID-19 lockdown regulations.

The online sale of e-books has always been in existence and continues to happen even though the volumes are less than those of printed books. According to Mpuka Radinku, Executive Director, Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA), on April 17, 2020, PASA wrote a letter addressed to the Ministries of Trade and Industry, Basic Education and Higher Education, and Science and Technology to request them to reclassify books as an essential service to enable publishers to support education. ‘We await their responses.’ Individual publishers have made digital editions of their materials available on their own websites with some of the links on the PASA website at http://publishsa.co.za/industry-news/covid-19. To date there has not been any support specifically designed for publishers by government to mitigate the effects of COVID-19. It is also fair to say that government did set up the Relief Fund which is meant to support all businesses in distress.

21. SUDAN

El Faith Mohammed Elhassan, President, Sudanese Publishers Association reports that during the month of March, the role of publishers was normal in Sudan until the end of March and the beginning of April when the ban on selling and roaming was imposed on all commercial places, including publishing houses and activities. The ban started for certain hours during the month of March, and during the ban, the selling of physical books in libraries was active but when the hours of the ban increased, physical book sales and other
publishing activities stopped. Unfortunately, electronic publishing is very weak in Sudan whether it is paid or otherwise. Publishers could not activate electronic sales before the health conditions exploded.

22. TANZANIA

Publishers are not locked down. The government has not locked down economic activities. Only schools, colleges and universities are closed down. The government only stressed the importance of observing all precautions like hands hygiene, social distancing and wearing of masks. All community activities have to observe hands hygiene and social distancing.

Since schools have been closed down, there are no purchases by schools. Very few parents visit bookshops. The market that was already too small has dried up altogether due to the closure of schools. Only about two publishers have their own eBook platforms. These publishers market non-curriculum-based books on those platforms. Most of the publishers do use platforms hosted by third parties, mostly abroad. Most of the books marketed through those platforms are “trade” and not curriculum-based. The reason for this is that eBook sales for school books are still insignificant in the country.

The Tanzania Institute of Education established an e-library for all its books. It is their own library and that is where they keep their books for now – though they do not have a list that covers all subjects. The e-library was meant for use by schools through a small fee. Being a government institution, since COVID-19, the fee aspect was removed and teachers and pupils/students can now access it for free, but the traffic data of visitors to their library is not available.

There is no government support to publishers. According to Gabriel Kitua, President, Publishers Association of Tanzania (PATA) they ‘are still in dialogue with the government and publishers met with the Commissioner of Education who advised that we write down and send the challenges he learned at that meeting to the Ministry of Education. He later confirmed that the Permanent Secretary had assigned the issues to the commissioner for action. Apart from that, we are still waiting on any action from their side. Since the advent of COVID-19, when following up, we have been told that they are busy with the pandemic and its impact on closed schools. I can respond that there is no support for now and after the pandemic to publishers.’

23. TOGO

Publishers in Togo are not really locked down. They are still working but there are no more meetings with authors and most other clients. Publishers work via social networks, essentially WhatsApp. Of course, it is quite bad for the publishing industry because publishers and booksellers cannot sell books even through bookstores since everybody is focused on basic needs. Bookstores do not pay publishers for books sold because of the present condition. It is quite difficult to sell physical books and publishers do not have
many eBooks. However, we are doing some sensitisation on COVID-19 and encouraging people to read during the lockdown. Publishers, including Graines de Pensées, are also donating books to children in the neighbourhoods and to some associations including those working with women in prison, Mrs Christianie Tchotcho Ekue, Founder, Graines de Pensées & Mrs Yasmín Issaka-Coubageat, Editor and Co-founder, Graines de Pensées report.

No online national library has been launched for people to have access to books and read. So far, government has not announced any support for the publishing sector but some artists, publishers and authors are working on a document to lobby for this.

24. UGANDA

Ugandan publishers are fully locked down and there are no book publishing activities taking place. However, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) is planning lessons on radio and TV. As a result, the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) has been asked to prepare materials for those lessons. It is very difficult to think about selling books both online and physically when schools are closed. The problem is that in Uganda very few publishers have digital books, hence there is very little electronic book circulating online to libraries. At the beginning of the closure, a few parents bought some books but ever since the economy slowed down, all buying and selling have dried up. Some schools already had online platforms with their students and they have lessons online while others are waiting for government’s educational programmes on TV and radio. The government is supporting mainly the health sector and the vulnerable people and not private entrepreneurs like publishers, Mr Musoke Majwega, President, Ugandan Publishers Association & Mrs Vicky Sentamu, Secretary General, Uganda Publishers Association report.

25. ZAMBIA

The publishing sector across the country has already seen a huge drop in anticipated revenue for 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis. The model that works for publishers is having events for authors to launch books and boost sales. As Dr Mwape Sunday, Director, Standards & Curriculum, Zambia & Mr Anson Banda, President, Book Publishers Association of Zambia (BPAZ) report, the information from many is that many publishers and booksellers are locked down especially when presidential directives were made.

There are very few publishers that have stepped up the innovation to sell books on electronic platforms but things are generally on standstill! However, some publishers are trying to come up with ways they can assist the Ministry of General Education in reaching out to learners and teachers in providing e-learning materials. Selling physical books has stalled at the moment, and eBooks have not been ventured into by publishers, except for one or two NGOs, though not on a large scale, around Lusaka. Online libraries are not there. However, there is a Kenyan NGO that is trying to introduce this but only in local
languages. This is something that needs to be tackled. Many are having this conversation but limitations abound. Few publishers are working with PDF, Amazon among others, but limitations in connectivity and limited tools in ICT especially those who have been in publishing and not printing digitally are challenges.

During the COVID-19 period, not much commitment has been made despite assurances to share measures by the Minister of Arts and Culture. The government has made a general commitment through the Bank of Zambia to make funds available through banks to be accessed by businesses as loans to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. This is general to all sectors, not exclusively as measures to support the publishing industry. As one of the emerging publishers remarked recently, ‘There are serious financial and logistical difficulties confronting publishers, yet Zambian publishers like Sotrane need to step up to supporting society in general as well as their communities with many initiatives during the global COVID-19 crisis.’

There is no government support. Right now, the government is planning to start delivering lessons on radio and TV but they have not engaged publishers on this. Only individual publishers are trying to ask the government on how they can help. COVID-19 is a wake-up call! The solutions being found in reaching out to the teacher and learner should not be abandoned after this pandemic, but should be improved upon and used even when things are back to normal!

26. ZIMBABWE

Publishers in Zimbabwe are locked down. The effect is that with a lockdown on schools, revenue dries up. The development of new products including printing is slowed down. The selling of physical books has stopped completely for the duration of the lockdown. However, as Mrs Natsai Gurupira, Chairperson, Zimbabwe Book Publishers Association (ZBPA) argues, there is much scope now more than ever before for the sale of eBooks. In instances where eBooks are available, publishers are providing these through their websites and during this lockdown some selected titles are being provided for free. Some online libraries are making arrangements with publishers to avail the reading public of eBooks. At the moment, the government has not yet provided any form of support. The government has not come up with an e-book library. The biggest mobile operator in the country has started an electronic library but they are paying for the ebooks. As the epidemic progresses and the government in turn continues to make an assessment of the impact on the economy, publishers wait to see if support will be made available to the publishing industry.
Conclusion

African publishers have experienced a fall in the economic activities of publishing and are predicting a further fall due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Although it is difficult to ascertain the specific percentage decrease of the economic value in the publishing industry, it is in line with the prediction of some international bodies for Africa in other sectors.

Recommendations

Based on the country reports, the following are recommended:

- National Publishers’ Associations should write a well-justifiable situational paper to propose some support from government to the publishing industry after COVID-19. The support packages should not focus only financial support but should also include bulk book procurement, purchasing of eBook licences, creation of soft loans for publishers, tax reliefs and other motivating initiatives and policies.

- APNET would support NPAs with an authority letter to help request for economic stimulus packages from their government having known the specific needs from the association.

- There should be more training on electronic publishing for African publishers. The upcoming APNET Regional Training for Trainers in Africa will train recommended participants by NPAs on electronic publishing, among other things, who can help train other publishers in their respective countries.

- The associations should share all research work, updates and information received from APNET and other organisations including IPA and ADEA with their member-publishers.

- There should be regular publishers’ meetings to discuss individual challenges and possible solutions and share with APNET.