

# The Book Chain and National Development: Issues and Imperatives

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The aim of this paper is to identify the factors that promote book production which is considered as a critical variable in nation- building. In addition the work examines some important conditions that are imperative for the sustenance of the book industry in developing countries especially Nigeria.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The exploratory approach was adopted for the study. First a conceptual framework was developed to identify the nexus between national development and the book chain. The next approach was the identification of the critical factors that are paramount in maintaining a functional book chain that would be able to drive national development.

**Findings:** The paper found out that an effective book chain that would be able to enhance national development requires motivated authorship, enhanced printing and publishing mechanisms, effective book distribution and marketing, and efficient library services backed up with high literacy level, high reading culture, multi-lingual publications and motivating government policies. Also institutional joint publishing and electronic publishing were identified as the innovative strategies for the survival of the book industry.

**Practical Implications:** National development is endangered in an environment where the book-chain is not strong enough. Literacy level and participation of the citizenry in nation-building tend to be very low and this conversely affects the overall standard of living.

**Originality/Value:** The value of this paper lies in its identification of the important factors that are vital to the growth of the book industry as a vehicle for national development. It is argued that the stakeholder in the book chain (writers, printers, publishers, book sellers and the library, including the government) should maintain a healthy partnership to ensure effective flow of information. It also articulated the imperatives and innovative strategies for building a strong book chain that would sustain national development.

**Keywords:** Authorship, Book-chain, Education, Literacy, National Development, Nigeria, and Publishing.

**Paper Type:** View Point.

## Introduction

The book which has been described by UNESCO (2002) as a manufactured commodity, an expression of identity and culture is also seen as one of the major tools in national development. This is because information and knowledge derived from books have helped in the development of the broad areas of human knowledge in arts, science and technology as well as in many other spheres of human endeavor, including government, politics, economics, industry, environment and the overall living standards. Aje (as quoted by

Fadina, 1995) asserts that “the book is the best legacy that human race can claim to have, adding that the slogan “knowledge is power” is enshrined in the book which in itself is a receptacle and reservoir of knowledge. Stressing on the importance of the book, UNESCO (2002) argues that without constant flow of books in society, investment in economic development and efforts to sustain social progress will be undermined. Thus, books, according to Sisulu (2004) are not regarded as developmental luxury but as essential especially in the new information

society where the acquisition of knowledge and information are seen as important factors that dictate the wealth and poverty of countries, communities and classes. This could account for the disparity among nations of the world where the industrialized countries characterized by a more viable book industry (Stringer, 2002) and application of technology in their day to day living, enjoy more improved standard of living than the developing and the least developed countries. This form of disparity existing among these countries has been described by UNESCO (cited in Olude 1995) as knowledge gap resulting from information gap and both leading to wealth gap with its consequent life quality gap.

It is obvious that knowledge derived from books help in developing the human intellect and critical reasoning which are applied in every developmental effort. By implication, no meaningful development can take place in a country where the citizens are predominantly illiterate. This is why Adam Smith in his thesis the “Wealth of Nations” defines development as the development of humans. According to him, the development of a nation does not depend on infrastructural development or capital accumulation but on the development of individuals who themselves are the agents of development. Thus, the positive transformation of a society depends on human intellectual development, which is made possible through education and learning requiring books. In addition, the adoption of innovations and application of new technologies for economic growth in the world of today require training through the use of books and manuals (UNESCO, 2002). This rightly shows that the level of development of the book industry of any nations is a very important index for measuring the development of such nation as noted by Agbebi and Fadina (1995).

A strong book- chain is therefore required in every nation to ensure the development, maintenance and enhancement of the human capital which is the hub of national development. For the book – chain to be strong and make the desirable impact, there is need for a high level of literacy coupled with a reading culture without which book production cannot be meaningful . The circumstances of modern life depend on the development of good reading habits for implementation of national goals and at the individual level for the fullest and most

beneficial participation in a society (Dike, 1997). This indicates that reading like learning is a life-long process. It is therefore imperative that the book industry be strengthened to ensure an uninterrupted relationship between the author and the reader. This could be achieved by creating a favourable environment for optimum performance of stakeholders in the book chain (the writers, publishers, printers, book-sellers, and the librarians). This work therefore tends to examine the critical elements that are necessary for the maintenance of a strong link in the book chain for enhancement of national development.

### **The Basic Elements of the Book Industry**

The book industry is characterized by three basic elements, the book, the book-chain and the consumer or user of information.

The book is a large scale literary composition which serves as a source of information or sphere of human endeavor.

There is the existence of a system referred as the book-chain through which interaction or link in the book production is maintained until it gets to the hand of the user or consumer. UNESCO (2002) describes the book-chain as the system of components that combine to sustain book production, especially the movement of books as economic products from the author to publisher, to printer, to book seller and to the consumer.

Other elements of the book industry include the following:

The author/writer who conceptualizes an idea and writes it down in the form of manuscript.

The publisher reshapes the idea into a more readable form through the process of editing to meet the needs of a particular audience.

The printer manufactures the idea into a bound volume for easy usage.

The books are distributed and marketed to the consumers through the booksellers and the libraries. Notable among the books sellers are the bookshops, and book vendors.

The libraries are established as book distribution agency to serve different kinds of clientele based on the type of the library. Hence, there are the national, public, university, school, special and private libraries.

The consumer or users of information are regarded as very crucial for the sustenance of book production. Thus their needs and interests

are paramount in the process as their willingness to read determines the success of a book project.

A consideration of the above elements shows that for book production to make the desirable impact, the link in the system which bridges the gap between the writer and the reader has to be strong enough. There is need for constant flow of information without which investment in national development cannot yield the desirable result of financial growth, human capital development, industrial growth and environmental upliftment as well as enhanced standard of living and poverty reduction).

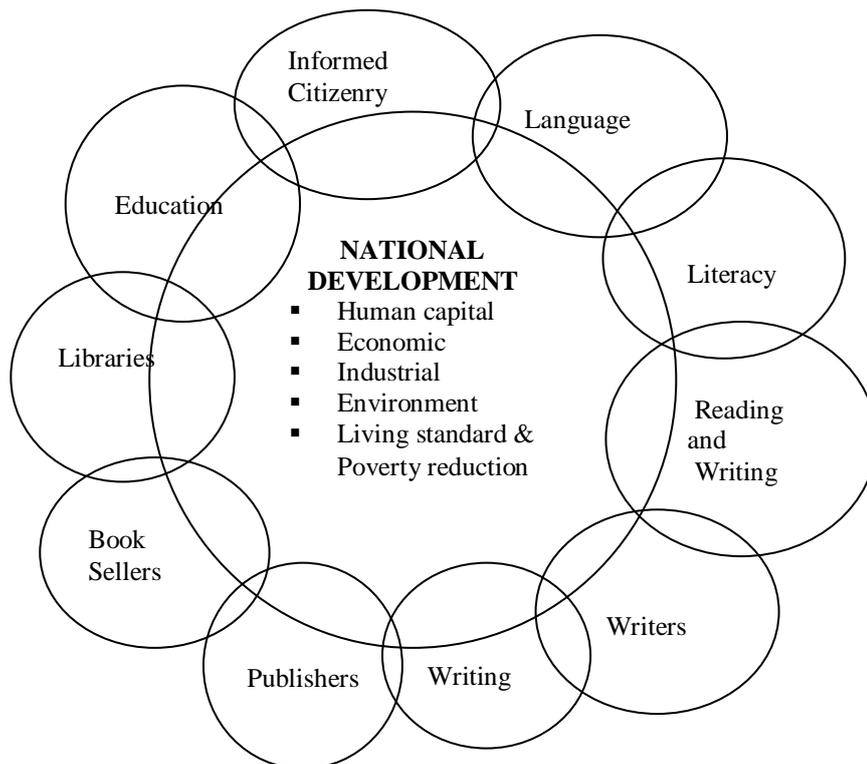
Apart from ensuring that the author/writer is motivated to write by ensuring a balanced economics of book production, one important factor that ensures the sustenance of the book chain is readership. A book that has gone through the process of writing, publishing and printing without attracting enough readerships cannot make the desirable impact on national development. Related to the issue of readership are the issues of literacy and language. Where the consumers are not literate enough to read and understand the language of publication, readership is adversely affected. Also the state of the library services of any nation affects the

book-chain as they impact on readership and literacy. Thus, readership, literacy and language as well as library services determine the strength or otherwise of a book-chain and conversely, national development.

**Driving National Development through a Functional Book Chain**

It has been stated that the scope and development of the book industry of any nation is among the acceptable indices of measuring the level of development of the nation (Agbebi and Fadina 1995). This is because education, which is facilitated by the information and knowledge derived from book is seen as the gateway to the social well-being of a particular nation. Thus society’s national development invariably depends on a viable book industry through which educational growth is achieved.

A number of issues therefore need to be addressed for the maintenance of a viable book industry that would be able to drive national development. The concepts and issues that are critical to the evolution and sustenance of a national book-chain in a typical developing country are illustrated in the conceptual framework in Figure I.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Book Chain and National Development**

**1. Literacy:** Literacy is seen as a very essential factor for the growth of the book

industry. An illiterate society cannot read books, hence UNESCO (1998) describes the illiterate as a non-reader who makes no meaning out of any

written word or symbol and cannot use it in any form of communication. This implies that an illiterate person cannot function effectively or make any meaningful contribution to his personal or community's development UNESCO (1990 & 2003) as cited in Obi (2000) and Egonu (2010) respectively defines literacy as the ability to read and write a simple sentence of everyday life and as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contents.

An individual with the above skills and abilities should be able to acquire information and knowledge which can immediately be used to improve living standards. This implies that literacy is the most easily available and valid measure for educational results; absence of which can impede the economic development of a country especially in the current rapidly changing technology – driven world (CIA World Book 2008).

Egonu (2010) reveals that the available statistics on Nigeria literacy level as presented by UNESCO (2005) shows that Nigeria has a total high illiteracy rate of 70.7 percent. This represents 77.8 percent for men and 63.8 percent for women. At the regional level, (Africa) about 25 percent of the population are literate only in the two most widely spoken languages, French and English which implies that majority of the population are literate only in their local languages. This situation discourages book production since only very few can read books which are most often published in the official languages especially English language and French. Thus there is need to enhance the literacy level of the populace in the official languages for improved readership and promotion of the book production.

**2. Reading Culture:** Equally important as literacy in the growth of the book industry is the reading culture prevailing in a particular society. It has earlier been mentioned that a book that has gone through the processes of writing, publishing and printing without attracting enough readership cannot be regarded as a valuable asset for development purposes. In addition to enhancing national development, readership also promotes inter-cultural and historical communication like literacy. According to Zezela (2002) “reading is one of the most enchanting gifts of human

communication across the spatial – temporal divides of history and culture”.

It helps the individual to develop critical consciousness (conscientization) for increased productivity, greater participation in civic life and better understanding of the surrounding world.

Low reading culture has been identified as a very serious problem affecting the book industry in Nigeria. According to Nwoga (2002), “most people, especially those in rural areas are unable to read and generally people in Nigeria do not have a culture of reading .Most people perceived reading simply as a means of passing examination more than a pleasurable exercise.”

**3. Language:** A buoyant book industry is guaranteed by the language of publication .Language is described by Zezela (2002) as the composition of the skills and materials to be read. Multiplicity of language has been identified as a significant barrier to the book-chain. The number of language currently estimated and catalogued in Nigeria is 521. This includes 510 living language, 2 second languages without native speakers and 9 extinct languages. In some areas of Nigeria, ethnic groups speak more than one language. English is the official language chosen to facilitate the cultural and linguistic unity of the country. The major languages spoken in Nigeria are Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Ibibio, Adamawa Fulfulde and central kanuri. Since English language is regarded as the official language most of the publications are on this language. It is pertinent to note that most ethnic groups prefer to communicate in their own local language, thereby making English exclusive preserve of a small minority of the country urban elite. With approximately 75% of Nigeria's population in the rural areas, the major languages of communication in the country remain tribal language, mostly Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Thus a reader whose local language is not English finds it difficult to understand the vocabulary, grammar, word – association, discriminate selection of adverbs and adjectives, evocative references and subtle expression found in English language book (Alemna 2002). Promotion of the book-chain therefore, requires also the publication of books in the local languages.

**4. Writers/ Authors:** All over the world, the sustenance of literacy activity and programmes within any society depends a lot on

the collective decision of a few writers who keep the torch of literature burning. To a large extent, Nigerian book industry owes its survival in the face of extremely hostile conditions to the mutual determination of the nation's often neglected writers community and a few other public spirited people whose individual contributions, either by way of financial or moral support, to the growth of the reading and writing culture will remain unforgotten for a long while. In 1981, the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) was established by frontline Nigerian authors led by the celebrated novelist, Chinua Achebe, for the purpose of encouraging the collection, recording, transcription and translation of oral literatures of the country from the original language into other Nigerian and non-Nigerian language. Irrespective of the above efforts, there is seeming shortage of textbooks and learning materials and the resultant fall in the standard of education as a result of the rapidly expansion of the education system.. Thus there is need to promote and sustain the book industry to ensure the production of enough textbook for schools.

To achieve, this, the writer/author who is the key stakeholder in the book-chain should be encouraged by acknowledging the economics of book publishing and ensuring that the writer gets reasonable royalty from his work. The writer actually needs to be encouraged rather than being marginalized by the publishers. This could be by way of instituting awards and giving them grants that will sustain them throughout the stages of book writing and publishing to avoid succumbing to the dictates of some capitalist publishers who would always want to offer meager amount of money to collect their manuscript for publication

5. **Publishing:** The publisher, like the writer is a major key player in the book chain. He complements the work of the writer by reshaping his ideas into a more readable form through text copy editing. In other words, the publisher is regarded as the "gate keeper" of the book industry. According to Akinleye (1995) publishing is making information public. It is the ability to produce printed impressions as information for public utilization

Taking cognizance of the above onerous role of the publisher require that publishing should be encouraged and sustained for a viable book industry. A number of problems beset publishing and there is need to address them for

progress in the book – chain. These include low readership, illiteracy and multilinguals. As noted by a Ghanaian book expert Amu Djoletto, the cultural industry of publishing is not given the status it demands in a continent of underdeveloped readership, where 1,200 languages are spoken of which only about 600 are published (Zezela, 2002). Other problems identified by Zeleza include, "shortage of capital and skills, poor marketing and distribution infrastructures, including libraries and unfavorable state policies" (p.3). The above situation, no doubt leads to high cost of print publication thereby making the materials unaffordable to the reading public especially the poor masses

6. **Book distribution and marketing:** For maximum productivity in the book-chain there is need for effective distribution and marketing of books that have been published. Book distribution and marketing are also regarded as at the forefront of the publisher, without which publication of book stops (Bassey, 1995). Book are distributed and marketed through several channels which Oyebole (1995), quoting Bankole (1985) describes as a set of institutions which perform activities or functions required to move books from publishers to book buyers. According to Oyebola, four channels exist in Nigeria for this function-the commercial book distribution channel, the government book distribution channel, the academic bookseller and the library book distribution channel. A viable industry requires that these channels should be able to distribute published work effectively to ensure that readers get required material without being frustrated. However, numerous problems have been found to beset this important aspect of the book-chain. According to Oyebola (1995) book distribution and marketing are faced with such problems as lack of adequate capital and high foreign exchange rate, poor relationship between publishers and booksellers, poor communication networks, lack of government policy on book prices and piracy. Others include, shortage of locally published books, lack of skills and training of booksellers, lack of facilities like warehouses for government publications, institutional bureaucracy and insufficient library facilities to serve the nations population. It is pertinent to stress on the problem of poor relationship between publishers and booksellers realizing the fact that the most vital means of ensuring a balance in the book-chain is through

the cordial relationship that exists between the two. The bookseller is expected to buy books from the publisher in bulk and sell to the consumers to make his gains. A situation where either the government, institutions or individuals purchase books directly from the publishers would terribly undermine the book-selling business since the selling of these books are the main source of livelihood for the bookseller.

Related to this problem is the issue of authors advertising and selling their books by themselves which do not ensure the even distribution of these materials to the targeted population. There is thus, the need to facilitate effective distribution and marketing of books by encouraging the book sellers.

**7. Book Printing:** Related to book publishing is book printing which according to Akinleye (1995) is the principle of transferring of an image and its imprint elsewhere for record purposes; thereby enabling readers to own individual copies of printed pages of published materials. Hence, printing complements publishing and their ultimate goal is education of individuals. A viable book industry requires good functional printing infrastructures especially in the area of paper manufacture, well established binderies, qualified technical staff, and steady power supply (Akinleye). However, the situation in Nigeria shows that there are no functional paper manufacturing companies to the extent that printers depend on papers imported from outside the country for book production. There is also the problem of unstable and unreliable national electricity supply, lack of quality binderies as well as qualified technical staff for repair and maintenance of equipment. (Nwoga 2002). All could therefore, amount to production of insufficient quantity of required books and high cost of available ones hinders effective access to books and consequently discourages readership.

**8. Library Services:** Libraries are defined as social institutions created to conserve knowledge; preserve the cultural heritage; provide information; under gird and underpin education and research; and to serve as fountains of recreation (Aguolu and Aguolu 2002). To perform the above function effectively, libraries acquire, organize, store and disseminate information materials for the satisfaction of users' information needs, in teaching, learning and research. Thus libraries occupy a central position in the distribution of books. They are

often the most effective means of getting printed matter to the reader.

Libraries are grouped into six according to their organizational structure (Attama and Ezema, 2002), and the target population they serve. These include the national library, public library, academic library, school library, and special and private libraries. Though, these libraries serve different groups, there are functions common to all of them. These including educating, informing, promoting reading culture as well as sustaining literacy and providing useful entertainment.

To perform these functions require effective service delivery procedures which should be targeted towards enhancement of effective access to materials available in the library for promotion of readership. However, a lot of problems tend to hinder effective library services in Africa. Commenting on the current state of libraries in Africa, Rosenberg (2002) noted thus:

*The early promise of libraries has not been fulfilled in Africa. Buildings and other facilities have not been maintained, Shelves are either empty or full of out-of-date and irrelevant materials, funding is inadequate, and the percentage of the population using the services is negligible (p.10).*

Other problems include ineffective cooperative arrangements among libraries, inadequate infrastructure and other working tools, inadequate number of qualified personnel and non-computerization of library operations (Uchendu, 2005). On the issue of computerization, the authors observed that many libraries are itching to computerize their operations but only very few have been able to achieve it. Asamoah-Hassan (2002) as quoted by Uchendu (2005) attributes this situation to "inadequate telecommunication facilities, low level of computer literacy on librarians, dearth of computer gadgets and poor level of internet capabilities" (p.64).

A critical analysis of the problems facing library services in actualizing the desired goals reveals that lack of finance is at the root. Libraries are not adequately funded and often times, they depend mostly on donations or external assistance which are never enough and may not be able to provide current information resources. Thanks to the advent of the information and communication technologies and the attendant

diverse information resources through which the libraries now access current information, though they are expected to play supplementary role to provision of print materials.

### **Government Policy**

The survival of the book chain depends to a large extent on availability of government policies geared towards ensuring accessibility of information and protection and promotion of the interests of authors and publishers. Such policies include legal deposits, copyright issues and freedom of information, among others. These policies are formulated with laudable objectives but there is absolute lack of political will on the part of the government to enforce them. The legal deposit law has not been adhered to due to lack of seriousness on the part of the government to specify a time limit for such deposits and the resultant penalty for offenders, hence limiting free access to information. Irrespective of the legal protection given to authors and publishers on intellectual property as contained in the copyright laws, some booksellers pirate other people's works in order to make gain as a result of weakness in copyright enforcement. Also the freedom of information is often hampered by censorship especially when the government feels threatened by allowing certain information to be circulated thereby denying the reading public such information there is no doubt that the above situations have hamstrung the achievement of the objectives of the national policy which invariably affects national development.

### **Imperatives**

The book chain has been recognized as the key foundation block in education and the general well-being of any nation. It is important therefore, to support the system in order to ensure an enabling environment for educational growth. To achieve this, a number of factors have to be built into the system.

**1. Government Support:** The state should formulate/enforce a comprehensive national information policy to take care of copyright issues, legal deposits (especially on locally published materials), and freedom of information, library services and a fair tax for educational publications to make every stakeholder in the book chain comfortable.

**2. Encouraging Writers/Authors:** It is a known fact that the survival of the book chain depends largely on the willingness of authors to write. Based on this they need to be encouraged

as they strive to achieve their sole aim of making their works to be read. In the face of the high cost of publishing which inadvertently affects the prices of books, grants should be awarded to writers in order to lower the cost and make prices affordable to the reading public.

**3. Promoting Indigenous Publications:** The quality of indigenous publications should be improved to attract international market. Similarly, publishers should improve their products to compete with multi-national publishers

**4. Educational Training:** Short intensive training programmes should be organized for the stakeholders in information services – authors, publishers, printers, booksellers and librarians to enhance their knowledge and skills.

**5. Support from Agencies:** Non-governmental agencies like the National Book Development Council, the Book Aid International, the British Council and United Nations agencies, cultural centres, Education Trust Fund have been promoting the advancement of book development in diverse ways, through funding, providing materials, equipment and technical knowhow, including the organization of book fairs. More efforts are needed especially in the promotion of book fairs at various levels of government in order to educate the public on the importance of reading and for publicizing and marketing publishers' output.

**6. Application of ICT:** The introduction of ICT, has to a great extent ameliorated the weaknesses inherent in the traditional print publications especially in terms of cost, accessibility and currency of materials. Encouraging electronic publishing is therefore, paramount to the survival of the book chain as it facilitates speedy publishing and dissemination of information and at a lower cost too.

**7. Networking/Cooperation among Stakeholders:** It is important that the stakeholders should have a level play ground where they come together in a cooperative effort to discuss issues bordering book production and chart the way forward. In other words there should be a body that coordinates the respective associations of writers, publishers, printers, book sellers and librarians which should regulate the activities of these associations to ensure that every bottle-neck to the promotion of book production is dealt with.

## Innovation

High cost of published works has been exerting much pressure on book development in Nigeria. Any attempt at improving the system should be targeted at lowering the prices of published works while the interest of the author and the publisher is considered. Hence joint publications by institutions have been identified as one of the innovations for promotion of traditional print publications. Ivowi (1995) argued, while supporting institutional participation for book development, that research findings need to be published and textbooks for use in schools need to be developed at affordable prices. He further identified levels and forms of institutional participation. The levels include:

1. Development of texts;
2. Orientation/training courses on the use of text particularly school text books;
3. Review of published books;
4. Research on readability

The form of participation according to Ivowi depend on the relationships of the institution with the publisher which may include:

1. Institution serving as the author
2. Institution paying for all services.
3. Institution being a co-publisher.
4. Institution serving as publisher

Joint publisher seem to a very effective form of participation because it ensure that all participant in the process- the authors, the publisher and the co-publisher get the royalty due to them under mutual agreement. This is unlike what obtains in the author-publisher relationship where the publisher at his discretion determines the author's royalty.

The advent of ICT with the introduction of electronic has brought a new innovation in book development. Electronic publisher has been useful in acceleration book production, requiring minimal training and the cost of publishing. They have the power of combining conventional print media, with video and chat features, which engender immediacy and interaction more easily than static text and providing links to other text cited in a publication (Zezela 2002).

## Conclusion

This paper has contended that a viable book-chain is critical to the human capital

development of any nation. There is no doubt a nexus between the quality of a nation's human capital and its overall or sectoral development. An enlightened citizenry is the bedrock for the construction of a nation's development initiatives. It is further contended that effective book production mechanism is necessary for the enhancement of human capital development which invariably culminates to financial and industrial growth, better environment, poverty reduction and improved living conditions. These are indices of national development. The need for partnership of all stakeholders in the book-chain is imperative in order to guarantee free flow of information and knowledge. But the free flow of information and knowledge will be no beneficial value where illiteracy level is high and reading culture is poor. Government interventions are crucial to motivate national authors, publishers and all other partners in the book production-distribution chain. In the final analysis, and with specific reference to a developing country like Nigeria, the nexus between the critical issues in the book-chain and national development remains a symbiotic one.

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