

Capacity building in the African book industry

Background

For the vast majority of people living in Africa, access to books is limited, because of poverty and illiteracy, tradition and the absence of written material in local languages, and poor distribution systems. A market for school textbooks emerged with the era of independence beginning around 1960, with both publishing and distribution controlled by the state through ministries of education and state publishing houses, often in collaboration with northern publishers such as Macmillan, Heineman and College Press.

But apart from this phenomenon in the educational sector, the African book industry, albeit with considerable variations between countries throughout the continent, remained weak and did not really see any significant change until the 1990s. Variations are due to differences in historical development, the economic and political situation, readership and market size, and technology and communications infrastructure. Certain problem areas, however, cut across these differences, namely inadequate access to capital, underdeveloped marketing and distribution systems and the shortage of qualified staff as well as the dominance of northern publishers.

During the 1990s, conditions and prospects for publishing have improved in many African countries. Economic liberalization has entailed the breaking of state monopolies, and dramatic improvements in communications technologies and the globalization of information, along with democratization, have contributed to a greater demand for books. As a consequence, the textbook domination of the African publishing industry is giving way to other publishing. In the 1980s and 1990s a series of conferences and initiatives moved this development in African publishing significantly forward. African literature and the challenges confronting it were highlighted at a number of book fairs and conferences

in Africa and Europe, one of the most important being the Publishing in the Third World Conference in Italy in 1991. At the 6th Zimbabwe International Book Fair, that same year, African publishers representing nine countries from all over Africa came together to discuss a strategy for cooperation. This led to the formation of a network, The African Publishers Network, APNET, with the overall aim to strengthen and promote indigenous publishing. APNET began operating in 1992 with a secretariat established in Harare, Zimbabwe.

The network has developed into a multi-purpose venture: building partnerships by linking African publishers and maintaining contact with publishers in the North; advocacy; information sharing; training and capacity building; research and documentation; channelling of funds from northern donors to African publishers; and, promoting the economic interests of the latter through trade promotion. APNET today has members in almost thirty countries, in all regions of Africa, and is still expanding. It is headed by an all-member General Council and a Board consisting of seven members representing different language areas. Since its beginning, APNET has been supported by about ten donors of which Sida, Rockefeller Foundation and NORAD have been primary contributors and the only core funders. External funding dominates APNET's budget. Swedish funding up to 1998 amounted to nearly 7 million SEK.

The Evaluation

In mid-1998, Sida, backed by APNET and the other donors, commissioned an evaluation of APNET to assess achievements so far and to provide information on how the network is best supported to meet the objectives. The study was carried out in the second half of

The African book industry is traditionally weak, but has seen promising changes in recent years. The African Publishers Network, APNET, supported by Sida and nine other donors from its establishment in 1992, has significantly helped to link publishers within and between the different regions of Africa. According to the evaluation presented here, the network has also played a decisive role in the creation of new National Publishing Associations across the conti-

nent. Moreover, APNET is seen to have been instrumental in strengthening the status of the publishing industry as well as providing a generation of African publishers with entrepreneurial skills. However, APNET has not yet shown ability to set priorities answering to the comparative advantages of the network as compared to national endeavours. It is also heavily dependent on donor funds and will have to generate resources of its own in the future.

1998 by COWI Consulting Engineers and Planners AS, based in Denmark, and the report is entitled *Strengthening Publishing in Africa. An evaluation of APNET* (Sida Evaluation 99/2). The evaluation sums up and analyses what APNET has accomplished in terms of the activities described above. It also includes an assessment of the relevance and effectiveness of donor support for APNET, identifies and analyses negative and positive aspects of the programme, and makes recommendations for the future.

Strengthening Publishing in Africa. An evaluation of APNET
 Lars P Christensen et al
 Department for Democracy and Social Development
 Sida Evaluation 99/2

The COWI evaluation team comprised six members: economists, managing consultants and publishing experts. Mr. Lars P. Christensen, economist and team leader, Cecilia Magnusson Ljungman and Bodil Folke Frederiksen made up the Denmark-based team. Simon Matsvai (Zimbabwe), Maïra Sow (Mali) and John Robert Ikeja Odongo (Uganda) contributed to the evaluation activities in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Guinea, Ghana and Kenya. Case studies were conducted in four of these countries (not Ghana) and also in Nigeria. The team surveyed African publishers through a questionnaire in nine countries, interviewed publishers and donors and conducted three workshops.

Findings

Overall, the evaluators find that APNET has worked to achieve a sense of common cause among African publishers and succeeded in gaining recognition as a truly Pan-African institution in spite of a heavy reliance on external funding. In the first six years, the number of countries with APNET members more than doubled. Some of the key findings presented in the report are summarized as follows.

- APNET has directly contributed to the formation and revitalization of National Publishing Associations (NPAs) by serving as a channel in sharing experience and information and through its training. Constraints in all networking efforts have been the limited capacity of many NPAs, also language barriers and weak communications infrastructure. An important networking and competence building tool has been The African Publishing Review (containing articles, news, conference reports, book reviews etc).
- Training programmes, focusing on areas such as book marketing, electronic publishing and computer skills have played an important role in upgrading skills of employees at various levels in African publishing firms. Evaluation surveys, however, indicate room for improvement, including a system for recurrent updating of curriculums.
- In trade promotion, an activity given growing attention, APNET has during the last four years staged collective African exhibits at no less than 27 book fairs world-wide. In addition, about 250 publishers were sponsored to attend 14 different African book fairs. APNET has also organized a programme of seminars and workshops for its members on trade promotion.

- Expectations among the many stakeholders associated with APNET are high but pull in different directions. Some want to see APNET primarily promote the economic interests of African publishers, e.g. through trade promotion. Others do not see APNET as possessing a comparative advantage here and would like it to focus on channelling funds; others again would like the network to continue in a multi-purpose function. The multi-purpose role of APNET is manifested in its current 3-year programme (1997-2000), well structured and comprehensive but lacking, as the evaluators see it, a clear statement of focus and priority.
- APNET has established good relations and a constructive dialogue with donors. Of significant importance here has been the Bellagio Publishing Network (BPN), an informal association and forum for discussion and collaboration between donors, African publishers and others committed to strengthening indigenous publishing and book development in Africa. BPN predates APNET and has served as an instrument in the dialogue as well as in supporting APNET during its initial build-up phase.
- APNET, however, is heavily dependent on donor support. This dependence, together with a consequential readiness of the APNET management (Secretariat and Board) to satisfy the varied expectations of donors, hampers APNET's effectiveness. It leads to unpredictability in donor funding, earmarking and custom-made reporting, sometimes also a lack of consistent and timely implementation and follow-up of programmes. All compounded by NPAs often being weak through lack of resources and skills.
- In spite of considerable concern within APNET over the heavy donor dependence, there have been no significant attempts to explore self-financing options. A survey conducted by the evaluators revealed scope for cost recovery through enhanced income generation and by introducing membership fees and cost-sharing of APNET services. Introducing such mechanisms however, according to the evaluators, requires a demand oriented strategy for services. A requirement in the longer term is growth within the African publishing sector leading to increased earnings of NPAs.

Recommendations

Addressing some of the above findings, recommendations made in the report include the following.

1. *Expanded advocacy.* APNET should continue to expand its advocacy and lobbying efforts to promote the cause of African publishers, but in doing so focus more on the larger policy issues affecting African publishing and book development. Such issues include intra-African trade and increased African participation in tendering of textbooks.

2. *Clearer role.* A clear definition of its role, a stronger sense of common direction, together with a higher degree of self-financing, would allow APNET to become more selective when determining strategies, primary activities and choosing its main partners. The priorities of APNET should be clearly established in the 3-year programme.

3. *Management improvements and strengthening of NPAs.* APNET's Board should provide the Secretariat with a much clearer mandate and standard procedures for the relationship between the two, enabling the Executive Secretary to develop internal procedures for improved effectiveness. For the further strengthening of NPAs, a detailed budget should be prepared and improvement of training be facilitated through the introduction of training evaluation tools.

4. *Strategy for self-financing and donor relations.* APNET should develop a comprehensive strategy for increased self-financing with a gradual introduction of fees and cost sharing mechanisms, in addition to addressing income-generating opportunities. APNET should further strive to enlarge its donor funding base and urge that all major donors contribute to the core programme, the 3-year programme serving as a joint funding proposal, and accept common reporting.

Lessons Learned

Supporting networks has become an important feature of assistance to the process of institutional development, or capacity building, an area of support where measurable goals are comparatively hard to determine. Activities are often to some extent experimental. Fund-

ing often comes from several donors with different levels of engagement and expectations and thus varying steering signals. These factors together enhance the need for all stakeholders, funders and implementing bodies, to be clear and agreed on the objectives and modalities of the support, and to establish mechanisms for monitoring, recurrent review and timely follow-up that allow for necessary adaptations of the supported programme or activity and the ways of managing it.

Though the evaluation presented does not elaborate on any general lessons learned, the combination of APNET and the "sponsoring" Bellagio Publishing Network (BPN) can be seen as a replicable model or mechanism with an interesting potential for addressing the coordination and follow-up needs referred to. In supporting APNET, BPN has facilitated dialogue, coordination and coherence of approach, between APNET and its donors and stakeholders. An important result of the APNET-BPN set-up has been the willingness expressed by donors to establish a joint approach to core funding and a common reporting format. As APNET organizationally and operatively matures, many feel that it should gradually take over coordination and other tasks currently performed by the BPN secretariat, thereby empowering APNET and, in the process, enhancing the cost-effectiveness of operations. ■

Training of journalists in eastern Europe: changing the role of the media?

Background

For almost half a century mass media in most countries of Central and Eastern Europe were part of the prevailing political system, and to a large extent used for propaganda. In the mid-eighties, however, the officially proclaimed "glasnost" in the Soviet Union initiated the gradual opening up of societies to new trends in the presentation and dissemination of information and news. In the Baltic states, independent newspapers began to appear and the situation of mass media has, with some notable variation between the three countries, improved gradually ever since. Within the region as a whole, the degree of media independence today varies greatly between countries; from Estonia and Poland where media enjoy a situation similar to that in the western countries of Europe, to Ukraine and Belarus with varying degrees of political control. Developments are shaky, however, and the situation will continue to differ between countries, perhaps increasingly so, in the years to come.

Supporting the development of a free press is regarded as a vital element of support to democratization, which is very much part of the overall objectives of Swedish support to the countries of the region. Sida has therefore funded a training programme for journalists from Central and Eastern Europe. Since 1993 al-

most one thousand journalists, most of them from print media, have attended some sixty training programmes in a variety of skills and subjects. Sida's contribution to the training amounts to some 20 million SEK. A central element of all courses, some of which include study sessions in Sweden, has been to convey experience and knowledge on conditions and requirements for the development of a free and critically investigative journalism. The training has been carried out by a university institute in southern Sweden, the Institute for Further Education of Journalists (FOJO). In 1992 FOJO introduced an international training programme with support from Sida.

The professional training of some one thousand Central and East European journalists during the five-year period 1993-1998 has had an influence on mass media in the countries concerned, this evaluation claims, in the sense of improving the quality, appearance and openness of many newspapers. The training has also upgraded the professional skills of the participants many of whom have since been promoted. In the longer perspective the programme is expected to benefit the transition to transparent and democratic societies. The effort has so far been supported by Sida with some 20 million SEK.

The Evaluation

In 1998 Sida commissioned an evaluation of the programme, in order to find out how the Sida financed training had been carried out and received by the counterparts, that is, journalist associations, media and individual journalists in the countries concerned, and to assess the results and expected impact of the training. Assigned for the task were Tiina Meri, a former freelance journalist with an Estonian background, and Börje Wallberg, a specialist in human resources development. They carried out the study in September-October of 1998.

The Training of Journalists in Central and Eastern Europe

Tiina Meri, Börje Wallberg
Department for Central and Eastern Europe
Sida Evaluation 98/36

The evaluation, entitled *The Training of Journalists in Central and Eastern Europe* (Sida Evaluation 98/36), is based on interviews with some 50 journalists in Lithuania, Latvia, Russia and Ukraine, most of them working for newspapers. Interviewees were selected in close consultations with counterparts and study visits were made to newspapers in these countries. Interviews with Polish and Belarus journalists were also added, although these countries were not visited. The evaluation is also based on documentary studies and on interviews and discussions with FOJO and Sida representatives.

Findings

- In regard to the overall objectives of Swedish support to the countries of the region, notably the promotion of democracy and common security, the evaluators find the FOJO training of journalists highly relevant. The different programmes have been successively well developed by FOJO on the basis of experience gained and demands from counterparts in the region.
- Criteria and procedures for the important selection of participants, carried out by FOJO as well as counterparts, have been found to be strategic and relevant to the objectives of the training. The often high educational and professional levels of participants (many chief editors and their deputies), people expected to influence the transformation and improvement of their newspapers or radio/TV stations, has been a decisive factor in reaching the positive results of the training programme. Several participants, in-

cluding women, have been promoted having returned from the training.

- The courses have been well received and seen as professionally conducted. The evaluators report on the learning and feedback they found to have taken place. On their return from training, participants have in almost all cases deliberately initiated discussions and changes, technical as well as procedural. Areas of important change include graphic design and layout; economic matters and sales promotion; techniques in information gathering and checking and in how to differentiate between news and opinions; reader contact; and, establishment of cross-border networks, an area where FOJO has been pro-active in developing preconditions.
- The FOJO administration has developed considerable competence in its work in the countries of the region, not least by making use of a wide network of professionals in Sweden and elsewhere. FOJO, however, needs to have its administration and reporting routines developed further to enable it to take on an expanded training task.

Conclusions and recommendations

The evaluators conclude that the FOJO training programmes have contributed significantly towards improving the competence and capacity of focal people working in the mass media in all the partner countries of the region. A whole range of journalists have undoubtedly acquired new knowledge and perspectives on their profession and its importance in society. To what extent this training of individuals has had an institutional impact on the mass media and its role at national level is, however, according to the report, difficult to assess in the short perspective. The political situation in each country provides the framework within which media can work. If rigid, there is little chance that training journalists will affect the situation.

In the evaluators' opinion the time has come to focus on long-term institutional development: to ensure the support contributes to the development of a national capacity that can take over the training, with gradually diminishing foreign inputs. For this reason, and to meet the changing needs of the target groups, the evaluators suggest that Sida, when considering a continuation of the programme, review the ultimate goal, strategy and content of future Swedish support in this area. ■



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Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)
S-105 25 Stockholm
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