

**ONE MARKET, DIFFERENT REGULATION; AN EXPERIENCE
OF CROSS-BORDER BOOK TRADE IN AFRICA.
BY SAMUEL MAJWEGA MUSOKE**

MK Publishers Ltd is a leading publishing house in East and Central Africa with subsidiaries in Rwanda, Zambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Burundi.

We chose to pick this cause to solve the problem of scholastic material that were not having Ugandan/African touch. Such material were giving foreign examples which could not easily be comprehended by African children. Indeed this has been our strength wherever we have been.

The book industry among the noblest profession helps to develop the minds and the cultural life of nations. The book as a social artifact is used to divert, entertain, inform and self-educate societies. As such, we publish

books which match with the cultures and nature of the nation in which we operate.

Africa would be one market for us all to operate but the national boundaries come with different regulation which cause a lot of challenges especially to this publishing industry.

This presentation is therefore based on a series of observations and experiences by MK Publishers Ltd as always encountered as we set a new trend in book publishing in Africa.

One Market Different Curricula

It is very absurd that under the same African union with a lot of regional integration, different countries still use varying curricula. A publishing firm in Uganda to develop a satisfying academic material for Rwanda has to start from scratch. This involves retraining staff, hiring authors and or editors, using new research findings, taking more time than expected, etc. Harmonization of curricula for integrating countries will reduce cost and create big market for publishers.

One market different currencies

A publishing firm in country X bids for a project in country Y and wins the bid, the time lag between the date of signing the bid contract and the actual time of payment range from 1 to 3 years or even more. Such bids have has preferably been made in local currencies which are commonly affected by inflation and as a result many publishers have made terrible losses which sometimes lead to closure. Our prayer is for countries to develop regional currencies or pay at dollar rate to support the survival of publishing firms in Africa.

One Market different biding regulations

The evolving method for some governments is that they buy the cheapest material. This means that, the cheapest publisher takes it all. This has caused unnecessary price competition, compromising the quality of the books, reducing the much need profit margin and threatening Publishing Industry survival.

One market different copyright policy

Some countries will only accept your book if you surrender your copyright to them for five years after print and distribution. There after you are not allowed to print for local sales. Worse off is when the tenure elapse

the curriculum is changed and books are given to another publisher. Such policy regulation locks the publishers out of the market and may give a doubt whether your material were not used to develop books for the new curriculum.

Way forward

African publishers can breakthrough on cross-border book trade by;

- Establishing an information network among African publishers.
- Producing a newsletter in at least three languages for African publishers and partners around the world.
- Consolidating and strengthening publishing training resources in Africa.
- Accelerating the Intra-African book trade, including licensing and intra-African co-operation within the book industry.

- Assisting the creating and strengthening of African National publishing associations to enable them lobby for lifting of boundary and licensing limitation.
- Strengthening indigenous publishing in Africa including protection and promotion.
- Initiating and developing policy studies relevant to African publishing and formulating strategies, that can be employed by governments, donors, banks and lenders, overseas partners and African publishers and their associations counteracting stakeholders seen as counterproductive to interest of indigenous publishing in Africa.
- Participating in collective exhibits and bargaining.

Much as Cross-border book trade is riddled with problems and barriers, which include currency, customs, and tariffs, transfer of money, and transportation of

books, communication and information, different publishers experiences which varies country to country. Cross border book trade is inevitable because it gives opportunity to different publishers to gain market and comparatively improve their product qualities.