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Ending Book Hunger: Social Publishing and the Power of  
Mission-Driven Innovation

# Ending Book Hunger: Social Publishing and the Power of Mission-Driven Innovation

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## OVERVIEW

Around the world, billions of people find that books are too expensive, too difficult to find, or are simply not being published in the languages that they speak. The problem of “book hunger” is pervasive across the developing world. It is also a serious issue for lower-income adults and children in the United States. Unfortunately, for-profit publishers have little financial incentive to attend to this unmet demand. These underserved markets simply have too little spending power. Mainstream publishing is poorly suited to meet the needs of “neglected audiences,” including the poor, minority subcultures, speakers of local languages, and readers with print disabilities. This market failure comes at an enormous social cost. The lack of affordable and appropriate reading material is holding back education as a path out of poverty. Billions of people are effectively being denied the basic human right to read, for pleasure as well as for knowledge. Yet a solution exists.

This book examines the growing sector of “social publishing,” an emerging non-profit sector driven by the belief that all people should enjoy opportunities to read, regardless of their income or native language. Social publishers operate in a variety of forms on various continents. In South Asia, Pratham Books pursues the goal of “A book in every child’s hand,” reaching 50 million readers in more than 10 Indian languages with books costing less than a dollar apiece. The African Storybook Project works in Uganda, Kenya, and South Africa to produce simple and affordable stories to help young children develop a love of reading. Room to Read has published more than 1000 new titles in 13 African and 14 Asian languages, while distributing over 15 million copies in local communities. WorldReader uses cell phones and e-readers to make 28,500 titles available in 43 languages and 69 countries. In the United States, First Book provides steeply discounted new books to 160,000+ schools and community programs and leverages its buying power to commission books featuring more diverse authors and characters. The Dolly Parton Imagination Library mails new books to the homes of more than 750,000 American children each month. Meanwhile, Benetech offers more than 200,000 titles in braille and other adaptive formats to readers with print disabilities, and HathiTrust makes millions of digitized library books accessible to the disabled.

The phenomenon of mission-driven publishing for neglected audiences is aptly described as “social” in at least four senses. Social publishers are defined by the centrality of *social mission*, rather than profit, as the guide for their actions. They understand their products as *social goods* to be directed to wherever they are most needed, rather than based on ability to pay. To achieve this goal, they typically

distribute their books for free or at a marginal cost. As a result, social publishers rely heavily on *social subsidies* in the form of government funding, corporate sponsorship, and private philanthropic support. Many, but not all social publishers also engage in *social production* of creative content, leveraging new digital platforms for collaborative content production that is shared rather than sold.

This book will offer a descriptively rich, accessible account of the inspiring world of social publishing, drawing upon extensive interviews with organizational leaders driving the evolution of this emerging sector. The book will offer a theoretical frame and a pragmatic guide to understanding both the potential and challenges of social publishing. Case studies of organizations both in the United States and abroad will explore the many challenges social publishers face – including geographic, cost, and language barriers – and the innovative solutions they are developing to forge a new business model for low-cost, multilingual, truly multicultural publishing. The book’s central objectives are to document the emerging practices of social publishers, to generate insight about what makes their efforts successful or unsuccessful, and to derive broader lessons from this particular case study of social innovation.

A key theme of this research is the role of social mission in driving business model innovation. The prevailing business models of for-profit publishing have simply not succeeded in reaching readers from low-income, minority language, and disability communities. Operating on a mission-centric rather than profit-centric model, social publishers seek to produce books that are appropriate, attractive, and affordable to these neglected readerships. As a result of this core difference, social publishers cannot simply imitate the established business models of for-profit publishers. Instead, they are forced to innovate radically different strategies in the areas of content acquisition, production, and marketing. These innovations include free-to-the-reader pricing, digital distribution, open licensing, and distributed authorship. A full appreciation of these innovative business models for social publishing is central to solving the problem of book hunger sustainably and at scale. More broadly, understanding the phenomenon of “mission-driven innovation” can also inform other initiatives in philanthropy, nonprofit management, social innovation, public policy, and corporate social responsibility.

My intent is not simply to celebrate the accomplishments of these social entrepreneurs, but also to adopt a critical perspective and pose difficult questions. Does social publishing’s pressure to produce and distribute books at the lowest possible cost undermine quality, or threaten the ability of professional authors and illustrators to earn a livelihood from their work? Can social publishing be funded in ways that do not compromise the independence of authors and publishers to write and distribute material that challenges authoritarian governments, traditional gender norms, or other power structures? Is it realistic to hope that social publishing can reach sufficient scale to serve billions of people worldwide who currently find that books are too expensive, too difficult to access, or simply unavailable in their languages? What exactly will it take to realize this potential and finally bring books to billions of new readers?

## **CHAPTER SUMMARIES**

### **1. Introduction**

Mainstream publishing serves a tiny portion of the market, while billions of readers are currently underserved. In this chapter, several alternative normative framings of the value of expanding access to reading material are explored--including economic development, equal opportunity, and human rights. The introductory chapter sketches an engaging overview of the emerging field of social publishing and its potential impact on the problem of book hunger. It also situates social publishing in the context of broader themes of social innovation, open access publishing, open educational resources, and open business models. Finally, it highlights key findings of the research, including the central new concept of mission-driven innovation.

## **PART I: FIVE CENTRAL CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL PUBLISHING**

In this section of the book, each chapter focuses on a central challenge that social publishers must work to solve. Each chapter leads with the story of one organization that is making particular strides in addressing that challenge. The experiences of other organizations are introduced later in the chapter to round out the picture. Each chapter serves to make an important theoretical point, presented at the end.

### **2. Making Books Affordable**

This chapter specifically focuses on the efforts of social publishers to bring books to low-income readers who have trouble affording them, within language markets that are otherwise vibrant and well functioning. The U.S. cases of First Book and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library are highlighted. More generally, this chapter situates the case for thinking of book production and supply as a “social sector” similar to health care or education, in which a mixture of for-profit, charitable, and government activity is appropriate and explores how social publishing complements the role of public libraries.

### **3. Enhancing Cultural Diversity**

This chapter specifically focuses on the ways in which social publishers are not just bringing down prices, but also changing what gets published. First Book’s “diverse books” initiative and PJ Library’s impact on Jewish children’s literature are considered, as well as several international examples. The point is made that social publishers are able to bring books to print that otherwise would not have been considered marketable because they reflect and appeal to subcultures that have less buying power, either because of their small size and/or relative poverty.

### **4. Breaking Language Barriers**

This chapter focuses on the efforts of social publishers to address language barriers in book publishing. The cases of Pratham Books (India), Room to Read, and The African Storybook Project are highlighted. The chapter highlights the special challenges involved in publishing for less lucrative language markets, including lack of economies of scale, challenges of ensuring translation quality and addressing

cultural sensitivities. This chapter points out that multilingual publishing is easiest in the field of children's literature, and critically considers what it would take to extend multilingual publishing into adult fiction and nonfiction.

### **5. Paying for Publishing**

This chapter examines the various cost-recovery strategies social publishers have devised to fund their operations, including sales of hard copy books, government and corporate partnerships, private philanthropy, and fund-raising. Each of the previously introduced organizations is revisited from this perspective. The chapter also critically considers what constraints may be imposed by these funding models. For example, if state funding is essential to the organization's work, do certain politically sensitive topics become taboo? What limits to scale are encountered when an organization relies heavily on donor funding?

### **6. Reinventing Distribution**

The publishing industry typically markets its books through for-profit retailers, but this strategy is expensive. FirstBook and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library drive down costs by relying heavily on community distribution and postal delivery. The distribution challenge is even greater in developing countries. Room to Read has packed books to mountain villages on the backs of yaks. Pratham Books has experimented with distribution schemes through schools, post offices, and the railroad network, even riding on trucks delivering soap products to rural stores... before finally embracing digital distribution as its central strategy.

## **PART II: THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL PUBLISHING**

### **7. The Digital Publishing Revolution**

As evidenced by the practices of WorldReader, Pratham Books, and many other social publishers, Internet technologies are opening up exciting new possibilities to reach geographically dispersed niche audiences. This chapter explores why digital publishing is such a good fit for social publishers, and where their digital innovations may be heading. It also critically considers the extent to which digital models are truly appropriate for reaching low-income readers, particularly in developing countries, and how libraries must adapt.

### **8. Copyright and Creativity**

This chapter begins with the stories of Benetech and Hathi Trust, and the copyright-related legal battles these organizations had to fight in order to bring books to the blind. Other social publishers, such as Pratham Books and the African Storybook Project, are following in the footsteps of Open Access scholarly journals (OA) and open educational resources (OER), by embracing Creative Commons licenses. Should social publishers embrace alternative approaches to copyright? How might copyright law be adapted to encourage both for-profit and not-for-profit publishing?

### **9. The Changing Face of Authorship**

From StoryWeaver to BookDash, social publishers are increasingly experimenting with alternative models of content production, including web-based peer production, open translation, and versioning enabled by Creative Commons licenses. These newer approaches to book production challenge our traditional conceptions of authorship. What are the consequences, both good and bad, of this shift? Is there room within the social publishing model to support the livelihoods of professional authors? Does open authorship result in enhanced or diminished quality?

### **PART III: CONCLUDING THEMES**

#### **10. Social Publishing as Social Movement**

If not profit, what exactly is motivating these authors and publishers to produce books for the masses? This chapter critically evaluates the recent scholarly literature on “intrinsic motivations” for creative production. It also adds a new perspective: participants in the social publishing movement want to make the world a better place. This point is developed through extensive use of the interviewees’ own words. Does something new and unique happen when the individual human drive to create finds expression as part of a broader social movement?

#### **11. Mission Driven Innovation**

An additional insight of this research is that social mission can be a powerful driver of innovation. To reach readers at “the bottom of the pyramid,” social publishers have had to develop radically different business models for content production, marketing, and distribution, addressing challenges the mainstream publishing industry had long failed to solve. This concluding chapter crystallizes this central point and suggests the broader potential of social sector entrepreneurship as a source of business model innovation.

#### **12. New Business Opportunities**

Social publishers are typically not-for-profit entities. Yet a number of profitable business models might find synergy with social publishing. These models might include: free content meets e-readers, print distribution by street vendors, or social enterprises combining both financial profit and social impact. This chapter explores the potential of for-profit publishers and distributors to leverage social publishing’s innovations to reach previously untapped markets. What lessons can for-profit publishers learn from the innovations of social publishers? How can open and proprietary models of publishing complement each other?

#### **Additional Material**

In addition to the table of contents and index, other additional materials could be highly appropriate, such as a list of discussion questions for book groups, and suggestions for how to use the book to support courses in a variety of disciplines. I would generate a list of discussion questions appropriate to general readers and book clubs. I would also ask colleagues in various other departments to help me develop teaching suggestions keyed to their fields. The book might also offer suggestions for how readers can contribute to the social publishing cause through

volunteering time or donating money. This material could go in the front or the back of the book, as the publisher thinks best.

## **AUDIENCE**

My interest in social publishing emerges from key themes that have shaped my scholarship within intellectual property law.

The primary reason for developing this topic as a book project, rather than as a series of law review articles, is its strong interdisciplinary and popular appeal. I have found colleagues in management, information science, and political science to be quite intrigued by the phenomenon of social publishing. The topic is of particular interest to readers interested in international development, social innovation, and literacy, as well as to readers from professions such as publishing, education, and librarianship. This book should also appeal to a broad audience of lay readers, within the genre of “books about books.”

With these diverse audiences in mind, I envision this book as an academic-trade crossover. I intend to make full use of intellectually fascinating connections to relevant scholarly literatures and theories, written in a clear and approachable style and tone. The resulting book should be enriching for scholars from many disciplines, while also accessible to undergraduates. I have also selected a diverse range of American and international case studies to ensure the relevance and appeal of the work for a global audience.

## **CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE**

This book will be the first significant work on the phenomenon of social publishing, apart from a few accounts focusing on single organizations. As such, my book is the first to approach this sector in a systematic way, offering a framework for understanding the potential and challenges of this approach to addressing the problem that I have termed “book hunger.” The descriptive aspect of the book will be of great interest to readers of the literatures on social innovation, literacy, and language policy. The book also makes theoretical contributions to three literatures from within my own discipline of intellectual property law:

First, this work fits neatly into the literature on “intellectual production without intellectual property,” often shorthanded as “IP without IP.” A recent trend in my field is to highlight attention to places where creative production of the sort typically motivated by IP rights is in fact occurring due to alternative incentives. Existing studies have been drawn largely from the computer software context and industries where intellectual property has always been marginal, such as comedy, magic, and cuisine. In contrast, my book’s focus on authorship and publishing tackles an industry conventionally understood as fundamentally driven by copyright

incentives. To many copyright scholars, it is quite surprising that alternative approaches might play a significant role in motivating authorship and publishing, and there is great curiosity to better understand these non-financial motivations.

Second, the concluding focus on mission-driven innovation touches on an area of particular interest to patent scholars. Courts have recently moved to limit patent protection for business methods, and scholars debate whether this will prove to be good or bad for innovation. While my book does not resolve that debate, it offers the additional theoretical insight that business innovation can be driven not only by profit motivations, but also by non-profit motivations. In fact, my case study of social publishing counter-intuitively suggests that in some contexts, the absence of a profit motive may facilitate greater innovation. A focus on maximizing impact rather than profit can drive organizations to take on greater risks, aim at longer-term goals, and adopt new practices that are disruptive to the existing way of doing business.

Third, my study of Pratham Books' collaborative StoryWeaver platform will utilize the methodological framework for the case study of "knowledge commons." This approach was pioneered by Nobel Prize-winning political scientist Elinor Ostrom for various forms of community-managed property, such as land and water resources. More recently, it has been adapted to the setting of information resources by legal scholars Michael Madison and Brett Frischmann. This research thus meets a current, well-defined need within the commons literature for case studies applying and refining this methodological framework to generate broader insights about knowledge commons governance.

## **PRODUCTION**

I expect the final book to run 200-300 pages. Apart from the cover, no artwork is planned or required.

I plan to complete work on the manuscript by October 2017. From January 2016 until August 2017 I will be on leave from teaching responsibilities at Indiana University while a visiting scholar at Stanford Law School. During these 18 months, I intend to devote roughly half of my time to work on this book.

As a deep believer in the value of peer review and interdisciplinary scholarship, I will continue to solicit feedback from colleagues in many disciplines, as well as professionals and thought-leaders who are active in the field of social publishing and others whom I envision as part of the readership for this book. I expect that my research setting at Stanford University, Silicon Valley, and the larger Bay Area will prove a particularly fruitful ground for this effort.

I am very open to suggestions for improving the title to enhance the book's marketability. My initially suggested title foregrounds "book hunger" as this is an easier concept to immediately grasp than "social publishing" or "mission-driven



innovation.” I am rather wedded to the terms “social publishing” and “mission-driven innovation” and definitely want to use them prominently in the book, but I might be convinced to drop one or both of them from the subtitle.

## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Lea Shaver is an Associate Professor of Law at the Indiana University McKinney School of Law. Her scholarly work focuses on the intersection of intellectual property law and human rights, especially cultural rights. Her work ties together both empirical and normative perspectives to understand how things are really working on the ground and to build a vision of more just alternatives. A frequent hallmark of her scholarship is the use of social scientific case studies, informed by her masters-level study of social sciences at the University of Chicago before taking a JD degree from Yale Law School. Professor Shaver spent three years researching and teaching at Yale Law School as a postdoctoral fellow, and is an affiliated faculty member of the Yale Information Society Project.

Professor Shaver is an internationally recognized expert on intellectual property and human rights. Her scholarship on “the right to science and culture” has been repeatedly and extensively relied upon in reports to the UN Human Rights Council. She has served as an expert consultant to the United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, and has appeared as an expert presenter at United Nations Headquarters in Geneva multiple times. In 2014-2015 alone, she was invited to speak at Yale, New York University, Berkeley, Oxford, the University of Strasbourg, and Hebrew University, among other venues.

Professor Shaver has published more than ten articles and essays, as well as editing three books in the Yale Information Society Project Access to Knowledge Series. As of June 2015, she ranks in the top 3% worldwide of all authors posting to the Social Sciences Research Network (SSRN) by downloads. Her articles have been published in top-ranked law reviews, including the *Wisconsin Law Journal*, the *Washington University Law Review*, and the *Washington and Lee Law Review*. Professor Shaver also publishes in interdisciplinary journals such as the *European Human Rights Journal* and the *Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics*. Her work has influenced other scholarship both domestically and internationally, in disciplines as diverse as media studies and business management.

This book is her third major project on the topic of book hunger.

Her first article in this vein, *Copyright and Inequality*, brought together normative and empirical accounts of copyright law with broader questions of distributive justice. In it, she argues that copyright scholarship has paid insufficient attention to the question of how well copyright law is actually working, particularly for potential readers with less discretionary income and speakers of marginalized languages. By recognizing that copyright’s incentive system creates both winners

and losers, she argues, scholars can begin to think about ways to adapt copyright law to better serve all of society.

Her most recent article, *The Right to Read*, is forthcoming from the *Columbia International Law Review*. This article ties the concerns about equitable access to reading material that were identified in *Copyright and Inequality* to international human rights norms. The work provides a doctrinal framework for understanding reading as a universal human rights encompassing three aspects: liberty to read (freedom from censorship), capacity to read (education for literacy), and availability of reading material that is affordable, and in a language that the reader can understand.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Thank you for your time in reviewing this proposal. I deeply appreciate your feedback and suggestions, at (+01) 203-535-2560 or [lbshaver@iu.edu](mailto:lbshaver@iu.edu).