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## **University press publishing consortium for Africa: lessons from academic libraries/ Kwasi Darko-Ampem**

### **Abstract**

This paper presents the results of a case study of the policies and practices of six African university presses. Based on the findings, it posits the formation of a consortium of African university presses. It borrows heavily from consortia formation in the library world.

### **1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

The modern university press was essentially developed in the English-speaking world, first at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in England and, centuries later, in the United States and the nations of the British Commonwealth. Beginning with Oxford in 1478, university press publishing has come into its own in the past two centuries, particularly in the United States where at least one hundred university presses now operate as an Association of American University Presses. The AAUP, which was established in 1937 by twelve presses had 111 members (including six international non-American) in 1994 but now boasts of 125 members (Meyer, 1995:358; AAUP<sup>1</sup>).

The establishment of university presses in Africa, Asia and Latin America started in the early 1900s; in fact India's oldest university press in Calcutta was founded in 1908. The university press is a relatively new institution in Africa, as indeed is university education.

With the exception of universities established in Cairo (970 in Egypt), Fourah Bay (1827 in Sierra Leone), Liberia (1862), and Omdurman (1912 in Sudan), most African universities were founded around independence in the mid-1960s. In the former British colonies, apart from the early beginning at Fourah Bay in 1827, there were no universities till 1948, and no university presses till Ibadan established a nucleus of one in 1952

Within the range of activities associated with the traditional concept of a university, the university press plays the role of publisher of the results of teaching and research. In a report on his own university for the 1917-18 academic year, President Butler of Columbia University stated that:

A university has three functions to perform. It is to conserve knowledge; to advance knowledge; and to disseminate knowledge. It falls short of the full realization of its aim unless, having provided for the conservation and advancement of knowledge, it makes provision for its dissemination as well  
(cited in Irele, 1993:74).

The purpose of the university press is to provide an outlet for the publication of research by faculty members of its own and other universities, and extend the instructional function of the parent institution by publishing and disseminating knowledge and scholarship as widely and as economically as possible to both scholars and educated laymen. It publishes learned books of small sales potential and limited possibility of financial returns that commercial publishers cannot profitably undertake, and gains favourable publicity and prestige for the university of which it is part.

Scholarly publishing, usually the main business of a university press, is concerned with those publications which report research findings, comment on academic matters, or in general are aimed at an audience of intellectuals. Ganu (1999:113) defined scholarly publishing by function, saying it involves:

The publication of original works of research that may come in the form of books and journal articles that contribute to knowledge; the publication of works that seek to reinterpret established fields of study or knowledge; and the publication of textbooks for use in the universities.

Put otherwise by Hawes (cited in Brice, 1974:221), who equated the scholarly press to the university press:

Most typically, the university press book is written by a scholar to communicate information and ideas in his/her professional field. It conveys new knowledge or new interpretations, pre-eminently the results of his/her own research. Its audience includes anyone who needs to know what the scholar has discovered. But it will typically seem difficult to understand or unimportant to any one without some background in the author's subject.

Far-sighted leaders such as Daniel Coit Gilman and William Rainey Harper, respectively the first presidents of the Johns Hopkins University and the University of Chicago, perceived that teaching and research were not enough but that the findings of the investigations must be made available both to others engaged in similar pursuits and to an interested public. Since most commercial publishers were loath to publish books comprehensible only to the highly educated reader, the solution lay with the university press.

This paper presents the results of a case study of the policies and practices of six African university presses. Based on the findings, it posits the formation of a consortium as a means of banding together to cut costs in all their operations. Lessons from consortia formation are borrowed from the library world where cooperation has been known to have begun in the early 1950s and reached a peak in the 1990s. There are six sections including the introduction: knowledge creation and higher education, results of the case study, library consortia, publishing consortia, and the model for an African universities consortium.

## 2. KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Knowledge accumulation and application have become major factors in economic development and are increasingly at the core of a country's competitive advantage in the global economy. The role of tertiary education in the construction of knowledge economies and democratic societies is more influential than ever. Indeed tertiary education is central to the creation of the intellectual capacity on which knowledge production and utilization depend and to the promotion of life-long learning practices necessary to update individual knowledge and skills. (World Bank Executive Summary, p xvii).

While universities do not have the monopoly on either the creation or dissemination of knowledge, they are especially, in the Third World, the key institutions in this process. With very few exceptions, universities stand at the centre of the scientific and intellectual process in many nations, especially those of the developing world (Altbach, 1978:489-490). It was with this view that the AAU 10th General Conference delegates called on African universities to give priority to effective and positive participation in the global creation, exchange and application of knowledge. This places urgent demand for the development of mechanisms of the publication and dissemination of high-level knowledge in Africa (and developing countries) on scholarly publishers, particularly university presses.

Scholarly publishing used to be the 'core business' of the university press to the exclusion of all other types of publishing. However increased financial stringency and cut backs in library funding have seen the university press adopt survival tactics and strategies including publishing trade books. In North America, Jones (1998) showed that environmental influences including falling direct sales to libraries and falling university

subsidies since 1980 have forced many university presses to find means for attaining or maintaining self-sufficiency. One of the survival strategies was expansion into more profitable areas outside scholarly monograph publishing, that of publishing trade books.

### **3. THE CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

The literature affirms that the slow development of Africa's publishing industry has been largely attributed to the continent's stunted economy (Altbach, 1998; Makotsi, 2000; Williams, 1993; Zell, 1995). Makotsi (2000:17) observed that 'where the economy of particular countries has improved, publishing has often been strengthened alongside other sectors.' Citing the case of Zambia in 1987, Williams (1993:78) echoed this point by noting that:

The Zambian economy has, unfortunately continued in its decline. The National Book Development Council has never become functional and the state of publishing in the country—a decade or so later—is undoubtedly now at a much lower ebb than it was in 1977. The depressed state of the national economy is a major factor contributing to the dismal state of publishing in Zambia in the mid eighties.

In his article on periodical subscription in Ghanaian university libraries Arkaifie (1997) indicated how academic journal subscription is inextricably linked to the economic fortunes of the country. Taking one of the three premier universities, he pointed out that while in 1975 it had a subscription list of some 1400 titles, in 1987 its list was about 450, thanks to a Government rescue project under the Educational Sector Adjustment Credit

with funding from the World Bank. Set against these odds is the fact that indigenous publishing does not have roots in Africa, and circumstances during the colonial era and its aftermath did not favour it (Altbach, 1996).

In the specific case of Ghana, the GUP was established in 1962 after the acceptance of the recommendations of the Report of the Commission on University Education in Ghana 1960-1961. The recommendations noted that:

We were impressed with the importance, for the development of university education in Ghana, of the production of new literature, both textbooks and works of scholarship, to consolidate recent advances in African studies, to make available the results of scientific research, and to re-interpret established fields of study. The setting up of a University Press would be a means of encouraging local writers and accelerating the production of books. It should also be possible, through the University Press, to subsidize important publications which cannot be produced on economic basis. (Cited in Ganu, p. 115).

Its objective was to publish scholarly works from the universities and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. Challenges that persist till today are shortage of assessors (because university lecturers find the honorarium paid by the GUP too meagre); seasoned freelance proofreaders; and funding which was identified as the greatest constraint. Ganu (1999:118) reported that 'the government continues to subsidize scholarly publications by providing subvention to cover staff salaries and a limited range of operational expenses.'

By the mid-1970s, there were close to thirty academic journals published mostly by the East African Literature Bureau and East African Publishing House (Chakava, 1995). The Kenya Literature Bureau replaced the EALB in 1979, two years after the break up of the East African Community in 1977. Nearly all these journals stopped in 1977 when the bureau

folded up and the local publishing industry started experiencing problems. Of the four public universities in Kenya, Nairobi, Moi, Kenyatta, and Egerton, only Nairobi has a university press. It was set up in 1984 with a sizable grant from the British American Tobacco (BAT). Up to 1991 it had published only one title; a sign that all was not well within its management. The Press was revitalized and had produced nearly twenty new titles in the early 1990s. From the response to the questionnaire, however, the press has not been able to sustain any one of these titles.

Tertiary and higher educational institutions in Nigeria experience acute book and journal shortages and scarcity, both at the individual student and at the library acquisition levels. The Book Sector Study in 1990 (Nwankwo, 1995:400) pointed out that 'production costs have increased by 700 percent in the last five years, but prices have increased by only 450 percent over the same period'. In the view of Bankole (1993), a combination of factors, including the economy, political instability and downright interference in the administration of the universities by government agencies such as the Ministry of Education and the National Universities Commission do not, in his view, create the right atmosphere for scholarship.

For the six-year period, 1987 to 1992, funding declined from 2.26 % of the total national budget to 1.45%. Paradoxically student population increased from 147,799 to 290,610 during the same period (Adesanoye, 1995a:78). Not unexpectedly, the campus presses could only receive scant attention from university administrators who are responsible for allocating the funds. Adesanoye thus identified funding as the major problem facing university publishers, conceding that African scholarly presses will continue



to receive less and less funding and called for cooperation among scholarly publishers in Africa.

The Ibadan University Press was established in 1952 and it became a full-fledged publishing house in 1955. Many of the fairly old universities including Ahmadu Bello, Jos, Lagos, Maiduguri, Obafemi Awolowo (formerly Ife), Nigeria, and Port-Harcourt have established their own presses. The leading press houses in terms of title output are Ibadan, Lagos and Ife (both established in 1980), and Maiduguri (established in 1988) (Ike, 1998). In South Africa, the leading university presses are Witwaterstrand, Natal, the University of South Africa (Unisa), and Cape Town. Witwaterstrand, the oldest and largest university press in Africa was established in 1922<sup>2</sup> and Unisa Press has been publishing since 1957<sup>3</sup>. The University of Cape town Press was established in 1993. The Press is now owned by a commercial publisher, Juta & Co, a 'unique combination of academic and commercial interest [which] represents a consolidation of academic excellence and integrity with sound business and commercial direction and resourcing'.<sup>4</sup>

Tertiary education in Zimbabwe is about seventy-five years old having started with the Polytechnics of Bulawayo and Harare which were both founded in 1927. The University of Zimbabwe does not have an official university press, but it established a publications office in 1972 and since the mid-1980s has published between three and five titles annually under the imprint of University of Zimbabwe Publications<sup>5</sup>.

The presses covered in the study were the Ghana Universities Press (Accra), University of Zimbabwe Press (Harare), University of South Africa Press (Pretoria), University of Cape Town Press (Cape Town), University of Zambia Press (Lusaka), and University Press of Nairobi (Nairobi). The selected presses are from countries that have

the most vibrant publishing industries in the sub-region (Zell, 1992; Teferra, 1998; Altbach, 1998). Furthermore, out of the ten African country-members of the International Publishers Association represented by their national publishers associations, all but one of the five countries covered in the study are listed together with Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda (IPA, 1998). The University of Zambia Press came in as a last minute substitute for the presses in Nigeria which responded to the Preliminary questions only.

### **Founding dates**

The study showed that the presses were founded between 1957 and 1993, evidence that university publishing in Africa is a recent phenomenon that started after African countries had won political independence from colonial rule. Outside South Africa, university publishing in Sub-Saharan Africa actually started in 1955 with the university of Ibadan, Nigeria. In general AUPs were founded to provide publishing avenues for researchers of the newly independent African states.

#### *Press policies/publishing agenda*

Two presses' stated their mission as the provision of quality publications that contribute to the development of Southern Africa and empower the region's people...'continually strive to maintain our position as the region's leading publisher of academic and scholarly works---books for empowerment'. Another mission statement read: 'by publishing outstanding research work, scholarly journals and textbooks of high academic merit ... and to market and distribute these products'. Three presses without written mission or vision statement responded in various terms that they are committed to

publishing high quality, relevant and competitively priced publications; revitalizing research; exhibiting high standards of book publishing; boosting morale by ending dependence on foreign books; and maintaining a reputable imprint through quality publications. All six presses publish substantially in the Social Science and Humanities, even though one press has an impressive list on Art and Architecture.

#### *Kinds of books they publish*

The presses publish research monographs, undergraduate texts, school textbooks, professional books, trade books, reference works and research journals. The main publishing categories are undergraduate textbooks and research monographs.

#### *Annual sales figures*

The presses are able to sell between 20-65% of their production. The least in terms of the proportion sold just a fifth of its production, however together with the rest it said the trend in sales has increased over the years. The press with a 40% average annual sales said that sale figures, which increased during the period 1986-1990, have decreased over the ten-year period starting from 1991 till 2000.

#### *Assessment over 15 yrs, 1986-2000*

1. Not all the presses in the study have been successful at selling the books they publish, because selling below 60% of the books published may not recover production costs.
2. Most of the presses do not appear to have a clearly defined subject focus. This may be interpreted to mean their lists are not focused, a factor that could partially explain the difficulty they face in marketing their books.
3. The lack of cooperation among university presses also could be a factor because without joint distribution strategies it might be difficult to market the books of one publisher in another country and vice versa.

### *Manuscript acquisition & editorial boards*

None of the presses has a formal written policy on manuscript acquisition. According to the survey, the size and composition of the editorial boards vary from 2-5 for one press, 6-9 for two presses, 10-13 for another, and over 14 for the remaining two. Membership is split between faculty only, faculty and non-university members, and faculty and other university staff.

### *Production*

All six identified the bookseller as the single most important distribution channel. Four stated that this channel brings in 70-90% of sales. For the majority (4 out of 6) of the presses, the most important publishing category is undergraduate textbooks.

### *Marketing and distribution*

Four out of the six presses gave direct sales as the most popular means of selling their works, followed by review copies which was cited as the second most important by three presses. The third place on their marketing plans is shared by scholarly journal adverts, and conferences and conventions.

### *What deficiencies exist in their operations?*

Lack of cooperation among the AUPs, low sales, unwritten policies, and non-specialized areas (no list building) were identified as deficiencies. Two presses did not have any form of cooperation with any press at all. The remaining four have partnerships with other presses but mainly with presses outside the continent, in particular Europe and America. Inter African press cooperation is very low on the agenda of most of the presses surveyed.

The mission and vision statements of the presses in the survey were silent on this aspect of 'determining a publishing agenda' and as a result their lists cover very broad subject areas including engineering and technology. This may be interpreted to mean their lists are not focused, a factor that could partially explain the difficulty they face in marketing their books. Unwritten policies and non-existing manuals on press procedures and operations may lead to loss of corporate knowledge should experienced staff leave the press or resign at short notice. Successful marketing in publishing is built around the principle of having a 'family' of books which can be promoted and sold across the board to a fairly coherent readership. Furthermore, publishing titles that do not have continent-wide appeal means they can only be sold within their country of origin. The lack of cooperation among university presses also could be a factor because without joint distribution strategies it might be difficult to market the books of one publisher in another country and vice versa.

*Model of an African university press in the 21st century?*

Views on an African model were divided between those who favoured AUPs remaining modelled after their European counterparts on the one hand, and on the other hand those for a unique African model. One director replied 'yes' to an African model, 'but on condition that we respond appropriately to our circumstances', while another proffered a joint partnership with a commercial publisher. The scholarly/commercial publisher relation makes economic sense since the latter takes care of funding—one of the most pressing needs of the scholarly publisher. The scholarly publisher brings into the relationship the high and stringent academic standards required of every scholarly press.

Comments from those who do not subscribe to a unique African model included: 'European models are okay and AUPs can do equally well based on these'; and 'No, basic business principles should determine decisions, that is quality publishing with profit-making in mind'. Two presses were for the idea, two opposed it, and two did not respond to the question. In the context of their views on an African model, cooperation among AUPs must be seen as fundamental to strengthening their programmes and even to their basic existence.

#### *Conclusions & recommendations*

Subject specialization must be emphasized, based on the publishing heritage or tradition, the evident strengths of the parent university, the sales potential of various fields of inquiry, or the scholarly interests of the editors. The existing internal structures of each press may be retained but the overall arrangement within the university set up requires modification into a charitable trust. As a trust each press will operate with much autonomy as enjoyed by a private company, but have administration vested in the 'Trustees' who will promote the objectives of the press rather than maximize profit. This structure may attract donor funding for the publication of non-profitable works.

In adopting an existing model, however, there is need to consider factors such as adequate staffing, equipment, investment capital, etc that are basic to any sustainable publishing industry. Serious thought should be given to publishing consortia. AUPs do not have press publishing areas or press lists, which define the subject areas in which each press concentrates its publishing. Apart from its implications on marketing, a well-defined list provides a reputation in a field, making it the first choice for prospective authors.

## **4. LIBRARY CONSORTIA**

### **4.1 What is a consortium?**

In the simplest terms, a library consortium defines activities engaged in jointly by a group of libraries for the purposes of improving services and/or cutting costs. Library literature has traced the gains in the formation of consortia among libraries as the potential for improving access to the joint collection of participating libraries, stretching limited resources, improving staff competencies, and addressing common needs arising from developments in information technology. Cooperation among libraries started mainly with inter-library lending, but the formation of consortia from the early 1980s reaching an all time high in the mid 1990s has been necessitated by economic reasons (Nfila & Darko-Ampem, 2002; Evans, 2002). Perhaps the real sign that library consortia had 'arrived' was the establishment of a group of some 50-plus organizations from the USA and other countries into the semiformal entity called the International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC). The organization has been meeting twice every years since 1997 in North America. The European ICOLC has been holding separate meeting once every year since 1999 (ICOLC, 2003).

Library resource sharing may be established by informal or formal agreement or by contract and may operate locally, nationally or internationally. The resources shared may be collections, bibliographic data, personnel, planning activities, etc. Library consortia or cooperative ventures have grown from a peripheral and limited position of resources sharing to an integrated system-wide resource-sharing. This has been made possible by developments in electronic access. Academic libraries now have an improved access to

catalogue information that reflects the holdings of many individual libraries. In addition, electronic access enables customers to initiate their own search of remote catalogues and make requests for information. Furthermore, most libraries have achieved a certain level of local systems and networking sophistication; the cost of printed resources, especially periodicals, continue to rise, and institutions are looking for ways to cut costs. These factors explain why consortia have become attractive.

#### **4.2 Reasons for consortia formation**

In the words of William Potter: "While the chief reason for academic libraries to form consortia has been to share existing physical resources, a new trend is becoming evident or at least much pronounced. Libraries are forming alliances for the purpose of identifying and addressing common needs arising from developments in information technology, especially the growing importance of the Internet and the World Wide Web". (cited in Kopp, 1998, p 11).

Allen & Hirshon (1998:36) indicated that "the most important development for academic libraries during the current decade has been the move from organizational self-sufficiency to a collaborative survival mode as personified by the growth of library consortia." They posited that what brings libraries together is a desire to engage in resource sharing or reduce some common costs. Based on their experiences, surveys and discussions with other consortia leaders, they believe that there are some key organizational imperatives that have been driving individual libraries and their consortia toward increased cooperation, especially in the 1990s. Among the factors they cite



specifically in the case of academic libraries are: reduction in funding, emerging changes in the publishing industry, the rapid growth of information technology, and emphasis on improving the quality of services.

In their view, beginning from the mid-to-late 1980s and accelerating in the 1990s, new library consortia developed primarily for three reasons:

- To leverage resources by sharing existing collections or resources through virtual union catalogs,
- To reduce the cost of member library operations through group purchase price for information products, and
- To bring pressure to bear on information providers, especially publishers, about the need to reduce the rate of rise in the cost of information.

In his article on trends in academic library consortia, Potter (1997:417) identifies two main reasons for the formation of consortia. He cited the sharing of existing physical resources as the chief reason and the purpose of identifying and addressing common needs arising from developments in information technology as the other. Specifically, he mentioned the growing importance of the Internet and the World Wide Web with the possibility of offering a variety of electronic resources across the Internet. Many of the established systems are also working to offer electronic resources, grafting them onto existing programmes. The newer consortia also address the need for sharing physical resources. However, these newer consortia are focused more on electronic resources. They recognize that electronic resources will be increasingly important and that there are benefits in banding together to offer them, using the leverage of a group and the advantage of a common funding source.

The benefits of cooperation are summed up by Evans (2002) to include:

The potential for improving access; by making available a greater range of materials, or better depth in a subject area; limited resources may be stretched; sharing resources may lead to gains such as staff training and specialization; actively advertising its presence and services through directing clients to appropriate sources of information; improvement in the working relationships among cooperating libraries; the opportunity to share problems and solutions, which in turn, improves each participant's capabilities.

#### **4.3 Types of consortia**

During the last three decades, libraries have developed a variety of organizational models to support the different kinds of resource-sharing programmes that have evolved. Designing an organizational infrastructure appropriate for the participants and the resources being shared can further the success of any kind of library cooperation. At one end of the spectrum are loosely affiliated 'buying clubs' where libraries come together primarily to share a discounted rate on electronic (or other) resources. At the other end of the spectrum are consortia that are tightly integrated organizations sharing a variety of resources, which require long-term commitment and collaborative decision-making at all staff levels.

Although consortia may come together to reduce common costs the new consortia of the 1990s were not simply 'buying clubs'. The most successful develop an institutional strategic alliance in which a heightened level of resources sharing binds the member institutions together. There is no one model for these but a broad continuum from highly decentralized organizations to highly centralized ones. The categories include loosely knit

federations, multi-type/multi-state networks, tightly knit federations, and centrally funded statewide consortia (Allen & Hirshon, 1998). Each model is premised upon different values, objectives, and political realities of its membership. Consortia can also evolve from one model to another as their members become more comfortable with each other and develop collective agenda.

The consortium of large North East Research Libraries (NERL) has among its objectives; to jointly license substantial electronic resources such as full text journals, databases, and large literary works at advantageous terms and rates. Foskett (1993) and Carr (1998), cited in Nfila & Darko-Ampem, indicated that in 1982 libraries in the United Kingdom formed a Consortium of University Research Libraries (CURL) to share computerized cataloguing or bibliographic information. The libraries in this consortium included major libraries at the Universities of London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Oxford, Cambridge, Leeds, and Manchester. Although most of these libraries were already computerised they had a problem of sharing catalogue information. The problem was caused by lack of common cataloguing standards, different levels of automation coupled with incompatibility in hardware and software and lack of co-ordinated policies. The University Grants Committee, later the Higher Education Funding Council, then provided funding and established the Joint Academic Network (JANET) to link computer centres of all the UK universities to allow bibliographic access to records of one library by another.

Financial constraints and a shift in the missions of higher education institutions, which emphasize research, are among the major reasons for the formation of library consortia. Kohl (1997) admits that these constraints in turn affect academic libraries, which are already constrained in their mission to support teaching, learning and research. He

states that the OhioLINK is a highly integrated consortium of higher institutions whose main focus is sharing of electronic access. Other consortia activities are the physical delivery of materials; electronic delivery of journal articles; and integrated collection development. Kohl's research (1994) on OhioLINK reveals that the consortium arose as a measure to address budget constraints and sky-rocketing of serials prices as well as the problem of space that had affected Ohio academic libraries. Based on the recommendations of the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR), the State upheld the Committee's decision for a co-operative storage of materials and to use electronic technology to interconnect academic libraries.

The OhioLINK system was designed to link local systems to a common and central system. Through this system, the Ohio academic libraries share a union catalogue holdings information for participating academic libraries, Gopher Internet access and commercial or information databases. In addition to these services OhioLINK provides customer-initiated circulation services where customers can search and initiate their own requests for materials not available locally from remote databases. Materials are usually delivered within 48 hours through a contracted 24-hour delivery service. For this consortium to fully function, OhioLINK has a central funding system where subsidy is provided for automation on local campuses. Further, a governance structure in the form of a governing board has been set in place to decide on policy and expenditure issues as well as implementing decisions of the Board.

Payne (1998:13) described one of the most tightly integrated consortia in the United States, the Washington Research Library Consortium. The shared budget covers core services in the areas of cooperative collection development; a library automation system with an online union

catalog and multiple electronic resources; offsite book storage facility and book delivery service; and a separately staffed service organization. There are optional supplemental services such as additional mounted databases beyond those provided by the core budget.

#### **4.3 Issues in co-operation**

Evans (2002) has categorized issues in any cooperative effort into six: institutional; legal political and administrative, technological, physical, people; and knowledge-based. In any cooperative effort, the library's level of funding will not be sufficient to buy as much as was purchased before, while taking on new cooperative obligations. Hence some subject areas will have to be given up or sharply reduced. When the potential is combined with co-operative arrangements that go beyond traditional ILL (interlibrary loans), there are true gains for everyone. OPACs connected to the Internet allow staff and users to check the holdings of the participating libraries. Thus matters of self-sufficiency, collection size and status, and traditions like special access rules and other library operating practices, and compatibility of library procedures would have to be examined during the formative stages of the cooperative

Legal, political and administrative issues like control and the amount of influence each member has, will have to be determined at the outset. Other issues that need careful thought and attention include technological, physical, people, and adjustments to changing needs. For instance new technologies are costly and may require additional funding, geographic and transportation issues also create problems although modern technology is making distance less of a problem. Perhaps the greatest barrier to any co-operative venture

is people: there are psychological barriers that planners of a cooperative programme must overcome.

Change is almost always threatening, therefore passive resistance, as well as inertia and indifference can be serious problems at both the planning and implementation stages. As with selling any change, planners must be honest and forthright about possible modifications in the workload, for instance. Another major difficulty with cooperative plans is the speed with which adjustments can be made to changing institutional needs. Despite this litany of issues and challenges, it is becoming more and more the practice that cooperative s get set as a matter of economic necessity and nothing else.

## **5. PUBLISHING CONSORTIA**

Perhaps publishers could learn from the library world where consortia formation has sought to solve a lot of problems using the economies of scale. Members of AAUP form only a loose association of presses each of which is autonomous and on its own. What is being proposed is a closely-knit association of presses into consortia along the lines of library consortia. The adoption of the consortial model would hopefully create the required critical mass of resources in terms of personnel, equipment, and funding required to make the participating presses viable. Distribution bottlenecks would be straightened through joint efforts and the markets for the published works could be widened.

A living example of a pan-African publishing initiative is the Children's Science Publishing in Africa (CHISCI) consortium of African publishers from nine countries established to co-publish science books for children. The consortium includes eight presses from Zambia, Uganda, Kenya, Namibia, Tanzania, Botswana, Ghana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe.

The project is based in Nairobi Kenya and plans to develop co-editions with UK-based Belitha Press. It aims at increasing print runs to make prices affordable to African parents.

The African Network of Scientific and Technological Institutions, (ANSTI) is a body within Unesco that promotes collaboration among African institutions engaged in university level training and research in science and technology. The network is engaged in the publication of university level textbooks and has established the ANSTI/UNESCO engineering science series. Examples of the eleven titles belonging to the series are *Fluid mechanics*, *Strength of materials*, *Fundamentals of electrical engineering*, *Engineering mechanics*, *Engineering thermodynamics*. These textbooks are usually multi-authored and are written by African experts. *Fluid mechanics*<sup>6</sup> '...is a broad-based textbook for undergraduate Chemical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Civil Engineering students. Wherever possible, the author has chosen examples relevant to the African technological and environmental scene'.

The Science for Africa/Kawi project publishes culturally relevant and popular science books focusing on renewable energy. The project is being implemented in conjunction with the African Publishers Network (APNET). The African Writers Series<sup>7</sup> was founded in 1962 with Chinua Achebe as Editorial Adviser. For the first twenty years, until the Nigerian foreign exchanges closed in April 1982, it sold eighty per cent of copies in Africa. The 'Orange Series', as it was nicknamed, was a delight for people who wanted to learn about Africa through the imaginations of writers. Together with the Unesco *General History of Africa* textbook, these three projects are very bright spots in African coordinated efforts at publishing to satisfy the book needs on the continent. They show one

thing, that is, with political will, proper funding and astute coordination the book situation in Africa could improve.

The Consortium for African Scholarly Publishing (CASP) established around the mid 1990s "was to facilitate cooperation between African scholarly publishers." It was to form "a new database, the CASP Inventory of Scholarly Publishers in Africa, which will aid marketing, distribution and co-publications of African scholarly titles". CASP [was to work] "with scholarly presses and specialists to set up a series of workshops on specialist aspects of publishing<sup>8</sup>." The African Centre for Technology Studies, based in Nairobi, Kenya, was the Secretariat of the CASP, "a network of groups interested in improving and promoting scholarly publishing in Africa."

This brilliant initiative might have failed because of low commitment, logistical problems and lack of coordination. With a bit of hindsight, a second attempt at a consortium should succeed when there is a determined effort spearheaded by a pan-African body such as APNET (African Publishing Network). It used to publish *Outlook*, an issue of [CASP \(Consortium for African Scholarly Publishing\) News Digest](#).

## **6. PROPOSED MODEL: AFRICAN CONSORTIUM OF UNIVERSITY PRESSES (A-CUP)**

What is being proposed is a closely-knit association of presses into consortia along the lines of library consortia. Examples of press consortia are found in the idea of the Ghana universities press (GUP) and the University Press of New England (UPNE) in the USA. As one of the presses covered in the study, the GUP is in fact a consortium as it was established in 1962 to serve the three premier public universities and the country's scientific research institutes. Founded in 1970, UPNE is a unique publishing consortium at



Dartmouth College, the host institution. It is an award-winning university press supported by a consortium of five schools: Brandeis University, Dartmouth College, Middlebury College, the University of New Hampshire, and Tufts University. The UPNE has earned a reputation for excellence in scholarly, instructional, reference, literary and artistic, and general-interest books. Many of these are published cooperatively with one of the member institutions and carry a joint imprint. The press also distributes the titles of seven other presses as well as selected titles of other publishers including the Library of Congress. (UPNE, 2001)

Together with the Unesco *General History of Africa* textbook there are two other pan-African cooperative schemes whose programmes have continent-wide appeal. These are the Children's Science Publishing in Africa (CHISCI), a consortium of eight presses from nine African countries that co-publishes science books for children, and the ANSTI/UNESCO engineering science series that publishes undergraduate textbooks for African students.

The forty African publishers who attended the 1995 Bellagio co-sponsored seminar on co-publishing held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia agreed in principle that co-publishing is good and of particular benefit if it takes place among African publishers. It was noted then, almost ten years ago, that there was only very limited collaboration among African publishers in different countries. This shortcoming, according to the seminar participants, should be remedied because co-publishing has the potential of solving problems of small markets, lack of infrastructure, and distribution across national borders in Africa. But this situation has not changed much, if at all, as this survey shows. Called networking by Jones (1998), co-publishing, joining a consortium,

and selling or buying publishing rights, is practiced increasingly by all categories of US university presses.

Taking history as an example, James Currey (Currey, 1999:223) 'has just completed its most ambitious co-publishing project, the eight paperback volumes of the abridged *Unesco General History of Africa*'. The work was produced under the editorship of African historians, including A. Adu Boahen, BA Ogot, JE Ade Ajayi, J Ki-Zerbo, and Ali A. Mazrui. Such large-scale cooperation is not beyond the means of other subject experts on the continent. Citing the overall low print runs of publications as an evidence, Bgoya's (1999) underscored the need for increased cooperation among universities by offering common courses, a point made by Currey (1999) when he said university books can be developed and used throughout the continent of Africa.

The proposed model named A-CUP would be a continent-wide body based at the AAU, in Accra, or APNET in Harare (now moved to Abidjan) and having sub-regional 'nodes' spread throughout the continent. Existing AUPs would form the basic building blocks of the A-CUP. It should have representations from the West, Central/Eastern, Southern, and Northern sub-regions (beyond sub-Sahara) to benefit from the rich publishing experience of a country like Egypt. The proposed model is structured at the micro and macro levels to take care of the AUP as a unit within a university and as belonging to a network of publishers on the continent. The premise for this model at the **micro level** is four-fold:

- **Specialization**, which should see the presses rely on outsourcing and using freelance editors, illustrators, and designers, literary agents, focused press lists, and project management skills. Each press should carefully select and develop its publishing around specific subject areas based on its strength but bearing in mind the publishing

lists of other presses in the network. Areas of subject specialization may be selected on the basis of the publishing heritage or tradition, the evident strengths of the parent university, the sales potential of various fields of inquiry, and the scholarly interests of the editors. Since most AUPs publish in the arts and humanities, special efforts should be made to designate specific presses as centers for the publishing of science and technology. This will be contingent on the prowess of the coordinating agency.

- **Cooperation**, in the form of sharing resources and expertise, clearinghouse to register business needs and ideas, and co-publication to reduce local development and production costs and widen the dissemination of books in Africa. These activities should cover adaptations, translations, co-publishing, co-production, co-distribution, reciprocal distribution, rights sales, bulk purchase of raw materials, capital investment, and long-term joint ventures. Co-publishing arrangements could cover the publication of book series using the relatively small academic community of experts in Africa.
- **ICTs** including electronic mail and facsimile could be at the centre of the press infrastructure for the exchange of information and the transfer documents. The introduction of e-publishing and print-on-demand technologies could be explored and fast-tracked.
- In terms of **structure** each press could operate as a Trust enjoying much autonomy as a private company, but registered as a non-profit organization, and possibly get donor funding for publishing non-profitable works.

At the **macro level**, the success of the model should not be isolated from the economies of African countries, the general infrastructure, and educational policies to sustain it. In that respect, appropriate steps should be taken on:

- ***Setting up sub-regional university presses*** Walter Bgoya (1999) cited the investigation into the setting up of an SADC university press for Southern Africa and the little chance of books published in one country finding markets in the sub-region, except where there is a common curriculum. Cooperation and regional integration could be hastened through sub regional bodies like the Ecowas, SADC, etc and by relying on continent-wide institutions, such as the AU, AAU, and ADB. This would essentially break trade barriers between African states, and improve on the distribution of cultural products, including books.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

University publishing in Africa is barely fifty years old (1955-2002) compared to its introduction in the US at Cornell University in 1869, and its origins in the UK with Oxford in 1478. Within this period, almost every African country has established at least one university press, which gives indication of the importance attached to this kind of publishing by African governments. What needs to be done is the consolidation of the presses to provide the essential link between research and publication in the bid to find solutions to the many problems facing the continent. There are real challenges on the road to sustaining the presses but these must be seen as opportunities, not threats.

APNET will continue to play a leading role in this endeavour but whether or not AUPs will survive in the next 10-15 years will depend largely on their resolve to take bold

initiatives based on cooperation and the adoption of new technologies. It would require the persistence of publishing personnel. A self-conscious book industry (of publishers, binders, printers and sellers) which understands the broad ramifications of their policies, to effectively organize and communicate with government and the public, and provide effective leadership in book development.

Consortium publishing seems to be a sensible arrangement to reduce the financial burden of each individual press or institution and at the same time provide a sustainable source of funding the publication programmes of each institution. It may not be out of order for each member press or institution to commit a fixed percentage of its budget towards the operations of a consortium. In the case of academic libraries the convention has been an annual expenditure of 5-6% of the total university budget. Hence this figure could also be set aside for publishing the research output of each institution.

Additionally, it could be made mandatory for that part of each research project be set aside for the publication of the research results. This publishing component could be paid to the press to publish results of the research. With consortial arrangements, the problems of small market sizes, low promotion budgets, distribution bottlenecks, etc could be tackled in a concerted manner, based on the economies of scale. The issue of trans-border trade would also receive attention with serious consideration of technology, ie POD to cut down transportation charges and reduce foreign exchange transactions delays. At the apex of this cooperative programme should be a well articulated coordination scheme.

The creation of a viable consortium requires adequate funding, commitment, and shrewd coordination, together with a set of operating standards. Earlier attempts at cooperation might have failed for lack of these requirements. The options open to AUPs are

mergers, consortia formation, or total collapse. Unless the current pressures on the presses for self-sufficiency are removed, press directors have little choice but to forge alliances that would keep them in business.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>AAUP; HomePage of Association of American University Presses at: <http://www.aaupnet.org/news/glance.html> [Accessed 04 April 2004]

<sup>2</sup>University of the Witwaterstrand at [www.wits.ac.za/depts/wcs/resources.html](http://www.wits.ac.za/depts/wcs/resources.html) [Accessed 13 April 2002];

<sup>3</sup>Unisa Press has been publishing since 1957 (University of South Africa) at: [www.unisa.ac.za/dept/press/](http://www.unisa.ac.za/dept/press/) [Accessed 13 April 2002]

<sup>4</sup>For the first time in its history, the University of Cape Town Press, a JUTA subsidiary, managed by JUTA Academic, was able to make an extraordinary 55% turnaround in its operating profits. (Juta Annual Report, 2002)

<sup>5</sup>University of Zimbabwe Press web site : <http://www.uz.ac.zw/publications/> [Accessed 09 March 2002]

<sup>6</sup>From the blurb of Fluid mechanics by Olu Ogboja: <http://www.anst.org/publications> [21 July 2003]

<sup>7</sup>James Currey, Editor 1967-1984, African Writers Series. James Currey Publishers are leading academic publishers on Africa and the Caribbean, specializing in archaeology, history, politics, development studies, economics, anthropology, gender studies, literary criticism, theatre and film studies.  
<http://www.jamescurrey.co.uk/jcurrey/aboutus.asp?TAG=&CID=jcurrey> [Accessed 12 April 2004]

<sup>8</sup>ACTS <http://www.acts.or.ke/> [Accessed 12 April 2004]

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