

A CONFERENCE ON BOOK DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

3-5 October 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya

Concept Note

Introduction and Background

1. The book and education sectors are strategic to the acquisition of critical knowledge, competences/skills and qualifications for the world of work. Of the three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic), the capacity to read is the most critical competency to acquire since it determines to a large degree success in the other two competencies. It also opens up a world of learning opportunities in schools and in other realms of life such as training in both non-formal and informal settings. It has now been established that 1/3 of what we learn is acquired informally provided that we are able to read and access information. Books are also a significant instrument for preserving and imparting information and knowledge. Unfortunately, Africa's book and information output, when compared to those of other continents, is paltry, and does not meet its consumer needs. It is therefore not surprising that the world's lowest literacy rate among young people in sub-Saharan Africa. Textbooks and reading materials are still rare in rural areas in most African countries. Even when they are available they are inaccessible to most people who need them because the books and materials are generally not in the local languages. Lifelong learning, one of the key concepts of the Triennale, is therefore impeded. Without the opportunity to learn people do not feel empowered to participate fully in economic and social activities that can transform their lives and pull them out of poverty. Indeed the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report notes that "workers who have received little formal education can carry out only simple manual work and find it much more difficult to adapt to more advanced production processes and techniques. Lack of basic education can therefore become a constraint on business development".

2. The book industry is strategic to skills acquisition and developmental efforts because high quality education depends on the availability and quality of books and learning materials. In Africa, books remain the primary source of study precisely because most of the continent is still far from access to electronic formats such as e-books and other applications which have become household word in the developed countries. As books and education are intrinsically intertwined, it is reasonable to assert that books are indispensable for quality education across the globe but particularly in Africa. The conference is intended to provide ideas for dialogue at the Triennale, and get decision makers to focus attention on book development, a major challenge to the quality of education in African countries.

Context and Rationale

3. The theme of the 2012 Triennale, which is scheduled to take place in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, is: *Promoting critical knowledge, skills and qualifications for sustainable development in Africa: How to design and implement an effective response by education and training system*. The theme is a continuity of the Maputo Biennale held in 2008, and also in recognition of the real challenges which face African countries in the acquisition of critical knowledge and skills. One of the palpable challenges is the lack of a vibrant indigenous book industry and a gradually dying culture of reading in Africa. This is precisely because books are in short supply. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO (1997) noted that in spite of the great importance of books, they are still not available to all those who need them. Due to underdevelopment and poverty (and a range of further exacerbating factors), many developing countries are still unable to provide all necessary schoolbooks for every individual pupil. In fact, in Africa, severe scarcity of books and learning materials remains the rule, rather than the exception.

4. The genesis of the challenge can be attributed to the fact that the education and book sectors are generally managed by two separate sectors whose interests are sometimes in conflict, and for the most part, there is no consensus on how the two sectors ought to regard each other and work harmoniously for a common purpose. This is because the book industry is largely managed by the private sector which is oriented towards profit while the education sector is managed by governments, which is not profit-oriented. Governments, through their ministries of education, generally want to achieve quality and equity throughout the education sectors. Unfortunately, there are no clear guidelines on how the two major stakeholders can work with each other for their mutual benefits and optimum results for the education system.

5. In addition, very few countries in Africa have embraced the call by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to set up National Book Development Councils (NCBDs). UNESCO argues that once set up the councils will provide the much needed regulatory mechanisms to maintain harmony and make coordination of the book chain more efficient and effective. There is need therefore, for a forum which will bring together various interest groups in the book and education sectors so that strategies can be put in place, informed by thorough discussions that will hopefully lead to consensus on the way forward on contentious issues that have continued to plague the two sectors, and the need to setting up of NCBDs. Bringing together policy-makers, and all the key actors in the book sector in a policy dialogue for the strategic repositioning of the continent to take control of a vital sector of development could lead to the creation of an enabling environment for a reading culture to take root in Africa.

Program

6. Recognizing the pivotal role of the book industry in the acquisition of critical skills particularly for life-long learning and the world of work, the ADEA Working Group on Books and Learning Materials (WGBLM), seeks to host a 3-day international conference in Nairobi, Kenya on 3-5 October 2011 to bring together 60 participants consisting of a wide range of stakeholders in the African book and publishing sector, namely, representatives of Ministries of

Education, Culture and Justice, development partners, authors, publishers, printers, booksellers (distributors), library and Book Development Council (BDC) representatives. The conference is intimately linked to the Triennale and will provide a forum for stakeholders to ‘dialogue’ on issues relating to the role of the book chain in sustainable development and the various roles and responsibilities that the chain implies.

7. The participants at the conference will: (i) examine and discuss the role of the book chain, particularly, authors, publishers, printers, booksellers, distributors, librarians, archivists and readers in making textbooks and other learning materials available to all in Africa; (ii) examine and discuss the respective roles of the government and the private sector publishers, and seek a clear definition of their mandates for future engagement; (iii) call on major continental and multilateral actors in the educational and book sectors (African Union, African Development Bank, UNESCO and the World Bank) to provide the much needed impetus to drive home the need for meaningful support to book development through setting up of regulatory frameworks in the form of Book Development Councils. The conference will be structured in such a way that the various interests are catered for; and finally, (iv) to provide a policy and strategic framework for creating a conducive environment for the development of a book sector capable of facilitating and sustaining reading and learning in Africa.

8. Most importantly, the conference will provide an opportunity for government and the private sector to explore some of the issues that beset the industry (and its development) and subsequently develop clear mandates for future engagements. The ‘think tanks’ in these two areas will hopefully forge a common course for meaningfully developing the book industry in Africa in a concerted manner so that progress is achieved in rooting a reading culture that will enhance education and training in Africa.

Expected Outcomes

9. Critical analysis will be undertaken of the challenges facing book development in Africa and how it affects education and therefore national development, and appropriate recommendations will be made to governments, relevant institutions and organizations on how to address the challenges. The conference will also propose a common strategy not only for achieving purposive development of the book sector, but also for partnership between the public and private sectors. The outcomes of the conference are expected to include the following: (i) action plans for the continued support of ADEA WGBLM to African countries in the formulation and review of the book sector policies; (ii) action plans for strengthening partnerships between governments and members of the African publishers’ network (APNET) and Pan-African Booksellers Association (PABA); and (iii) action plans for accelerating the publishing of books and reading materials, in national mother tongues, in collaboration with the Academy of African Languages, a specialized agency of the African Union. Finally, a paper based on the outcomes at the conference will be prepared as an input into the Triennale for policy dialogue and decision making.