

Educational Textbook Procurement in Developing Countries:

How to get the best textbooks and create a national book culture

Every citizen has the right to education and culture. Their books must reflect their values and culture and must be relevant to their living circumstances. Only skilled local authors can address such needs. And only a publishing industry based on a multitude of local, autonomous, entrepreneurial publishers can develop the content that gives a nation a distinctive voice, to preserve and develop its own national identity.

Educational publishing is a key sector. Around the world, a healthy, vibrant and dynamic local publishing industry is unthinkable without an equally healthy, vibrant and dynamic educational publishing sector. Its health forms the economic basis for publishing as a whole.

Throughout the developing world, local publishing is often threatened by misguided policies such as the following:

- Governments commission a single publication for adoption in their entire country. A local publishing industry cannot develop on the basis of very few, very large tenders with no sustainable business in between. Business needs long term development prospects. Skills and experience can only be built up over time;
- The terms of government textbook tenders often include copyright assignment and/or single fee payments, again preventing longer-term reliable income streams for authors and publishers;
- Single burst business means a regular, sustainable distribution infrastructure cannot develop. Ad-hoc business partners come in for quick gain, not to develop a long-term business. Ad-hoc business partners create high costs because of high default rates, low skills base and no interest in skills and service development;
- Educational writing is a skill that must be acquired and developed over time. Without a long-term business horizon publishers cannot invest in training local writers;
- With rampant piracy it is difficult for local publishing houses to access bank credits, as copyright is not valued as a security asset.

Pursuing short-term cost savings creates large long-term cultural losses by destroying the basis for local publishing.

The following is a list of key policy principles aimed at young and developing markets. Such measures must be implemented, in some cases gradually over time and to the extent that local circumstances allow, in order to create a long-term business environment that allows local writers, publishers, distributors and bookshops to develop skills and to invest with confidence, and form the basis of a vibrant, innovative and successful publishing industry.

1. National Educational Book Policy

A policy decision must be taken at the highest level to develop and support a national educational publishing industry as a development objective. This is not a one-off process but

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iterative, requiring monitoring, impact assessment and progress tracking in continuous dialogue with all stakeholders.

2. Governments Set Educational Objectives

Educational authorities must refrain from publishing and printing, and focus instead on the development of an education curriculum. Any changes in the curriculum must be published and communicated to ALL publishers in a timely manner to allow them to make the necessary changes to their editorial content.

3. An Independent Authority for Official Recognition

An independent authority led by acknowledged experts, including independent teachers and education professors, should examine whether a book complies with the existing curriculum.

4. Transparent and Fair Processes

The evaluation process for official recognition must be open, transparent and based on clearly defined criteria. There should be no restriction on the number of books that can be accredited for a given course. If books are rejected, then the reasons for the rejection must be given to the publisher. Ideally, an iterative process allows publishers to make improvements until their books meet the required standards.

5. Equal Opportunities for All Publishers

Foreign owned publishing houses are an important component of the local publishing industry mix, as they may raise standards and bring important skills that were hitherto unavailable. All must have the same opportunity to have their books approved for use in public schools.

6. Devolution of Adoption

The decision about which book to adopt for a specific classroom should be taken at the most devolved level possible, ideally at school level or lower (at the teacher level).

7. Devolution of Funding

Ideally, funding for the purchase of books should be ring-fenced and given to schools or parents.

8. Use of Existing Book Infrastructure

Schoolbooks should be sold and distributed through local bookshops, or other commercial distribution methods where applicable, in order to guarantee that books reach pupils at the right times, and to provide a stable distribution infrastructure for all kinds of books.

9. No Copyright Assignment of Books

There must be no forced assignment of copyright to the government or mere one-off payments for the author or publisher when a book is adopted. Agreement with governments should allow authors and publishers to develop a regular long-term income stream that depends on the success of their books and learning materials.

10. Addressing the Mass Copying of Schoolbooks

Where piracy or mass copying takes income away from authors and book publishers it causes serious long-term harm. Necessary copying in schools should be addressed through collective licensing. Piracy of school books must be vigorously fought.