

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY MR. WALTER BGOYA TO THE ZIMBABWE  
INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR INDABA, HARARE, 27 JULY 2015.**

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***Growing the Knowledge Economy through Research, Writing, Publishing and Reading.\****

Chairman of the Zimbabwe International Book Fair

Executive Director of the ZIBF Board

Representative of the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe

Representatives of Development Partners

Distinguished Participants in the *Indaba*

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

I wish to start by thanking the organizers of this year's Zimbabwe International Book Fair for inviting me to attend and to deliver the keynote address on the theme of the Book Fair "***Growing the Knowledge Economy through Research, Writing, Publishing and Reading***".

I also take this opportunity to salute the Zimbabwe book community: the publishers, the booksellers, the librarians, the authors and other book people who have kept the ZIBF going in the more than a decade of a severe economic, political and social environment. It is evidence of the resilience of the Zimbabwean book industry and of the commitment of its members to keep the light of the book shining and the banner of the industry high. In my travels and meetings with other African publishers, despite their participation in other book fairs such as the European ones (Frankfurt, London, Bologna), and the African ones, Lagos, Nairobi, Cape Town, there lingers great nostalgia for the heydays of the ZIBF in the 80s and nineties. When I have asked them why such nostalgia, invariably the answer has been ZIBF's Africanness. The spirit of sharing, engaging debates and exchanges at the *Indabas*; the expressions of shared interests and common aspirations for a vibrant African book industry; boundless creativity of African writers, editors, book illustrators, designers, booksellers and librarians. ZIBF was a place for publishers and other players in the book chain to dream of a future with writers and avid young African readers taking our countries and our continent into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with confidence and conviction of a good place in the world of books and literature. I look forward to experiencing that magic again. I also salute our foreign partners who supported in the past and continue to support the ZIBF. As I have not visited Harare since two good friends and colleagues, David Martin and Dr. Nathan Shamuyarira passed away, I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to them and to salute them for

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\* This is a slightly longer edited version which includes the section on EBM which was delivered extempore.

being among the founders and great supporters of the ZIBF and indigenous publishing in Zimbabwe and Africa in general.

**Mr. Chairman**

When reflecting on the theme of this year's book fair and how I should order my thoughts about it for this address, I decided to take the liberty to reorder the wording of the theme from "***Growing the Knowledge Economy through Research, Writing, Publishing and Reading***" to "**Growing the knowledge economy through writing, publishing, reading and research**" to be better able to communicate my thoughts on it. Writing, publishing and reading in that order are the foundations of a literate society, and being a literate society is next to becoming a knowledge society; ultimately able to build a knowledge economy. Research, however, is at the very heart of the knowledge economy. In our countries with few exceptions, even when research findings of immediate benefit are published, the publications are put away to gather dust on shelves or in cardboard boxes piled on the floor. Eventually they are destroyed either when moving offices, or when clearing an office in order to partition it and create an office for someone's nephew or cousin. Furthermore, even with special campaigns to popularize research findings, cultural beliefs and taboos tend to triumph over science. Take the case of HIV/ AIDS. Decades of education that it is caused by a sexually transmitted virus notwithstanding, there are still individuals and communities that believe it to be a result of witchcraft, and even pride themselves in engaging in unsafe sex. There are people in my country Tanzania, who believe that killing or maiming an albino to extract a body part is a highly profitable venture for which they are ready to cruelly and savagely kill or dismember albinos.

**Mr. Chairman**

There is a saying credited to second hand book dealers that "a book you have not read is a new book". I want to make an analogy in the same vein which may appear to go against the import of the theme of our *indaba*. Knowledge that is available but unused is analogous to a book that one has not read. If knowledge is to be the driving force of a country's economy and society, it must first and foremost be available to the society at large, through good and relevant education. Education is the tried and tested pathway for any country to evolve from economic backwardness to prosperity. Education imbues society with the dynamism necessary to keep it moving forward. It goes back to education from pre-school, through primary, secondary to universities and other institutions of higher learning.

Educationists consider parents or guardians in the home environment to be the most important agents in the process of educating the young. A reading habit, we are constantly reminded by educational psychologists, is developed by exposing children to books at the

earliest stage of their lives. The child growing up with books in the home develops a love of books that the one growing without does not. The child that is born of educated parents in a healthy home and environment, who is well nourished, who receives all the necessary vaccinations and is protected from debilitating malaria attacks, has an almost guaranteed path to good health, education and wealth. The child born in conditions of extreme poverty so familiar in our rural areas and urban slums is not likely to prosper even if he is lucky to survive beyond the first five years. Nutrition specialists warn of the retarding effects of malnutrition on brain development, and hence on ability of children to learn and to meet all likely mental and physical challenges. For a long time positive correlation has been established between children with parents who have attained secondary school education, especially mothers, and better performance in education.

**Mr. Chairman**

We are very behind in adopting and using the knowledge that already exists about how to improve our agriculture so that we can be self sufficient in food. Knowledge exists on how to reduce infant and maternal mortality rates. Knowledge exists about the social and economic costs of unequal access to quality education and quality health care. The loss of produce and of income due to non-existing or weak transport infrastructure to connect producers to their markets is known to be one of many reasons for peasant poverty.

Without doubt, the revolution in communication technology, especially penetration of mobile telephones has positively impacted the lives of millions upon millions of African people of all walks of life. Farmers living away from cities are able to source fertiliser from distant suppliers and monitor prices of their produce locally and even internationally. Small and medium size enterprises are able to import raw materials and transfer payments easily and cheaply. But even leaving economic benefits aside, the ability of people to communicate with their relatives from wherever they are in the world is a huge integrative advantage. The benefits of these technological developments are incontestable. I am only suggesting that our involvement as consumers and beneficiaries of this revolution will not make our economies anymore knowledge economies, than they are industrial economies because of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century European industrial revolution. That revolution facilitated colonisation and deepened How Europe Underdeveloped Africa as the late historian Walter Rodney wrote in his book I published in 1973.

My contention is that priority should be given to using existing knowledge and resources to solve existing problems, which are, at the same time, obstacles in the way to acquiring and developing new knowledge for further progress. In all African countries the vast majority of the people (80% or more) are engaged in subsistence farming. It should be self evident that

all the benefits of ICT notwithstanding, what is required in order to improve their lives are traditional strategies of land reform, mechanisation, irrigation and hence irrigation engineering, access to financial loans, stability of markets for their produce and so on. No pep talk on ICT will replace construction of roads and railways, to haul cheaply and efficiently their produce to factories where their raw cotton will be turned into cloth for internal consumption and export. The same transport infrastructure is required to move imported heavy machinery and construction equipment from the coast to the interior and no ICT can replace that part of 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial economics. Briefly there is no alternative to creating a manufacturing industry in which the abundance of natural resources in our countries can be transformed into useful products through industrialisation, which will also create jobs for the millions of restless African youth. Knowledge economy is the most representative character of advanced countries in which the value of products created by innovation in ICT and digital technology surpasses the value of physical resources.

The speed at which technology is developing is extremely fast, but it is in developed and developing countries with the highest levels of science education where it is happening, in one sense challenging the idea that this is an entirely new phenomenon. It is tantalising to think that every country can jump to creating a knowledge economy because its brightest young entrepreneurs can participate in creating “apps”, innovate and invent solutions to some IT problems. It is not surprising, therefore, that government leaders who have failed to provide sound education are shouting themselves hoarse about using IT to improve education by providing tablets to replace books, even knowing that the average African population that has access to power is only 24 %. And even if the power problem were to be solved there are other political social and cultural issues that mitigate against universalising education. Problems preventing girls/women from education (early marriages, school pregnancies) cannot be solved through IT innovations. No ICT can stop corruption in all areas of national economic and political life, a cancer in the fabric of African nations.

### **Research and publishing**

Research and publishing are key to disseminating knowledge by making it available to larger audiences, creating opportunity for its enhancement with yet new research and so on in a continuum of knowledge creation. But research is only possible with adequate funding for proper remuneration of scholars and researchers, acquisition of state of the art equipment that is constantly updated. But above all else researchers must be left to work without interference or dictation. In turn the scholars must be serious in their work, and be ready to remain in their countries as opposed to migrating to the rich countries of the West. I would like to refer you to a book, **Scholarly publishing in Africa: Opportunities and Impediments**, edited by Solani Ngoben and published by the Africa Institute of South Africa

in 2010, and the Summer of 2013 issue of the journal, **Research in African Literatures (Invisibility in African Cultures)** in which retired CEO of the African Books Collective (ABC) Mary Jay and myself wrote on *African Publishing from independence to the present day*. In the first book the role of research in knowledge generation, research publishing, and the impact of ICT on publishing in Africa were examined. Issues of funding, peer reviewing, and professional editorial processes as well as training of publishing staff were covered. In the journal article we looked at developments in the publishing industry in Africa from independence in the sixties, to the present. We pointed out the successes and challenges, and proudly showcased the success of the African Books Collective, an independent wholly African owned book marketing and distribution company based in Oxford. Starting as donor funded, ABC is now fully self-financing. The point that African publishers have been making for a long time about the negative role of multinational publishing companies was finally vindicated when two of those companies, Oxford University Press and Macmillan were exposed by the World Bank for corrupt practices in East Africa and barred from World Bank tenders for a number of years.

### **Writing, publishing and copyright issues**

One of many troubling issues in writing and publishing is copyright and violations of copyright. However, there are also abuses of copyright, with powerful states dictating terms by which works by their citizens are protected beyond the limits generally agreed upon through principal international conventions. Far from encouraging creativity, the basic argument for copyright protection, such practice has become a fetter to creativity. Protected works are themselves based in myriad ways on the cumulative knowledge gained by humankind over time. They should, therefore, be free for exploitation by other creators for the same reason, after the fifty years of current Berne Convention practice.

Access to copyright works is also hindered by high cost of published books and journals particularly for researchers and scholars in poor countries. Open access materials are a step in the right direction but that is only a fraction of the copyrighted material. Individual African researchers are not the only ones who cannot afford to buy them; even university libraries and research institutions cannot afford more than a few. The uneven creation of and access to knowledge is not a figment of imagination. Most science books from the UK and US cost upwards of \$150 with others going well above \$500. Even prices of on-line books and journals are not that inexpensive for African researchers. A sister company of our publishing house is a bookshop that imports books, and even with generous discounts from UK and US publishers, prices plus shipping costs make the books prohibitively expensive for students, scholars, researchers and libraries. Books published by well known publishing houses specialising in African Studies are not affordable by Africans, making African studies

an exclusive preserve of western scholars even though the research is done in Africa with Africans providing the research material from which the books are written. To add to the woes, African governments apply VAT on books produced locally unless, as in Tanzania until recently, they are approved Primary and Secondary school textbooks. Tanzania, which did not apply VAT on imported books, has recently (2015) introduced it at 18% VAT – the highest in the world.

There are reasons for foreign books being very expensive. In developed economies, research areas are so many and so diverse that interested scholars and researchers in any given field may not justify higher print runs of any one title out of the thousands that are published in the same field or subject. The average number of copies of non-fiction books sold in the US, according to book publishing industry reports and blogs, stands at 250. Researchers in specialised fields can afford to pay individually or through their research centres the high prices demanded by books and journal publishers. So, while foreign researchers can access every African publication through collections of the Library of Congress, the British Library and libraries of specialized institutions (Rhodes House in Oxford, for example) the same is not possible for African researchers.

African national copyright organisations appear to be fixated only on protection of their authors, but ignore areas such as exploitation of out of copyright books (public domain) that are still appropriate for use in schools, polytechnics, universities and research institutions. By not paying attention to these other aspects of copyright they do not assist those who know little about these matters to exploit freely material that they may be in need of and which is in the public domain. UNESCO's Universal Copyright Convention (e.g. compulsory licensing provisions) which is favorable to developing countries could have been strengthened and taken advantage of had our countries through their copyright agencies not been reacting knee-jerk like eager to sign the less favourable Berne Convention.

### **Language of research and dissemination**

I shall only make cursory remarks on this point because, unfortunately, it tends to derail general discussion when it is raised. Those who think that only foreign languages are suitable languages for intellectual work are not prepared to entertain the idea and possibility of research being carried out in Africa in languages other than English, French and Portuguese. It does not matter that examples of the Russians, Japanese, Chinese and other non-English speaking nations, which have made great advances in high tech, some of them smaller than the average size African country, are there to prove that English is only a language like others. Where research findings in African countries only exist in foreign languages, the only conclusion possible is that wilfully or not African policy makers are not

bothered that only those who speak English, French or Portuguese are to be the main if not only beneficiaries of the results of research. As competence in English, French, and Portuguese among the African populations in the former colonies is very low, talk of a knowledge economy with the foreign languages driving research and ICT becomes somewhat phantasmagoric.

### **Reading**

Reading books is becoming a dying intellectual and leisure activity in Africa. Students do not read books and consider book reading a waste of time. If they were reading on their kindles and iPads and so on, I would accept that I am hopelessly addicted to the smell of ink on the printed pages and the joy of leafing through a book in anticipation of reading it. But the truth is that reading on smart phones is mostly of frivolous matter, endless exchanges of selfies, whatsapp, tweets and Facebook messages. We have a bookshop at one of our universities with about 20,000 students, but after three years we may have to shut it down because students do not buy books and think bookshops are boring places.

Is it possible to talk of a knowledge economy when university students do not read and literally hate books? When I raise this question I am told that it is not only in Tanzania, and that even in universities in advanced countries this happens. Even if this were to be true, it would not be of any comfort. Students in universities in western countries may not be reading as much as formerly. But those who read constitute a sufficiently large cohort that forms the critical mass necessary to ensure that production and advancement of knowledge continue to prosper. For our societies, absence of reading has become a serious crisis of our nations' intellectual life. This is why I started out arguing for concentrating on the basics; building good schools, building and supplying libraries with books and computers, developing relevant and stable curricula, training teachers and remunerating them well; restoring to them the respect they enjoyed in the past.

### **My Espresso Book Machine (EBM)**

Our experience with our Espresso Book Machine (EBM) illustrates some of the challenges of high technological transfer from an advanced country to one of the least developed countries and offers some lessons worth considering as we discuss possibilities and necessary conditions for a knowledge economy to develop.

From when I first heard about the idea of a print on demand machine (POD) back in 1999 I decided to follow its evolution to when it would be available and also feasible for publishers such as us. The reasons for our wanting to purchase the EBM, developed by On Demand Books in New York, were those that make it attractive: revolutionise book publishing by

reversing the order of the value chain from printing / publishing and selling (with high risk of costly unsold inventory), to selling and printing / publishing (with zero inventory) and lower outlay of cash investment for printing. After a long time of researching the feasibility of the EBM in Tanzania, and building financial ability to purchase one we finally acquired one in the first quarter of 2014. To install it and train our operator an On Demand Books engineer was part of the purchase agreement, all costs of flying him from New York to Dar and other expenses being met by us.

The EBM is comprised of two main parts: the high speed, high-resolution photocopier (Xerox) and the EBM for the cover, binding and trimming. The Xerox machine was supplied by a local representative of Xerox. Prior to installing the machine an expensive UPS and stabilizer was purchased to protect it from the regular electric surges and sudden outages. Despite these measures, the machine had not been in operation for long, when according to the suppliers of the Xerox machine, there had been a fault in the earthing of the wiring and causing a big surge that burned out the motherboard of the photocopier.

A replacement photocopier was installed but as it was not calibrated by the ODB engineer, to work with the EBM, it took days and several skype call sessions to New York before it could work. The same was repeated when the replacement photocopier was removed and the original reinstalled.

There were other issues; the consumption of toner cartridges by the cover colour printer is very high and the cartridges are so expensive that it is more economical to outsource the cover and manually feed it than to print it in-house. Furthermore, the paper for the text and for the cover board are only available in the US, and local substitutes though adequate do not reflect the machine's best quality.

Every time there is a problem, our operator must place a skype call to New York and even when Internet connectivity is good, there are other problems, not the least being the differences in pronunciation and accents between our operator and New York engineer that make conversation unnecessarily long and often exasperating. Behind all this is the financial implication of the investment: a hefty burden bearing in mind the high interest rates on money in Tanzania (as in other African countries) and losses due to capacity under-utilisation of the print on demand facility, the third in Africa after the Alexandrina Library in Alexandria in Egypt and Wits University in South Africa.



## **Conclusion**

It is easy to latch on to ideas that promise to offer quick solutions to age-old problems. No doubt, the ICT revolution has opened up access to the most extensive assembly of information ever and that is available to anyone if the infrastructure of connectivity is in place and working and if the powers that be do not block access to some sites. By application of accounting and management software packages, small and medium size companies can operate more efficiently and increase their profitability, as they control costs better and increase productivity. In the publishing industry ICT and digital revolutions have facilitated a level of competitiveness for African publishers that was not possible before. But even with further development of the IT revolution, without building the infrastructure for production of agricultural and industrial goods, transforming our abundant raw materials into consumer and investment goods, in the long term there will be no national development of the kind that has transformed economies in other parts of the world, and raised them from economic backwardness to prosperity. It is not the other way round.