

European Support for the Development of Publishing Sectors in Emerging and Developing Countries

EU/ACP partnerships and the book industry: favoring cooperation instead of predatory behavior

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Issues at stake

A workshop was specifically dedicated to book industry professionals of the countries of Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Ocean (ACP) and the European Union. This was a place for them to engage in a debate about potential network development, existing best practices, the best means to compliment its structure and the EU/ACP changes, as well as the role of international cooperation in this dynamic. Such a series of open questions should lead to certain elementary components of their answers. We expected propositions concerning the substantial re-enforcement of the network and on the possibilities for local, regional, and international circulation of work and cultural products. We imagined that EU professionals and countries of the ACP would agree to promote a dynamic development of the sector and to respond to the regulatory needs and financing of operators. We also hoped that the role and responsibility of political decision-makers at the local, national, and regional level, and more precisely the role of international financial backers, of which the EU is a key actor, would be debated.

Unfortunately, the first echoes we have received of this initiative – otherwise laudable – seemed to point in the same direction: poor preparation, a selection of participants that lacks real representation and paralyzes the emergence of strong consensus, final writing of the declaration by Commission staff, etc.

This apparently failed meeting should not obscure the reality of the EU responsibility. Across the policies of public development assistance, the states of the Union have means of promoting solidarity with ACP countries, though these are sometimes poorly used or riddled with contestable conditionality. Public Assistance from the North should not ignore the importance of culture in the development of a country, a region, or a continent. It is therefore useful to remember the propositions that work towards healthy cooperation, unlike those which reinforce the sort of predatory business modeling that often characterizes the work of the North towards the South – publishing is unfortunately not the exception that proves this rule. It is necessary above all else to defend and promote the principle of respectful co-production of identity and the uniqueness of everyone.

Proposals

- The European Union needs to encourage member states to condition financial aid to ACP countries with the development of the culture and education sectors, with a view towards favoring the sustainable emergence of a local book chain.
- The European Union needs to encourage member states to abandon their support for the physical export of books towards ACP countries. In fact, it is difficult to advocate “free and undistorted” commercial competition by authorizing European states to subsidize the export of their books towards ACP countries. In no case should these exports benefit from the “citizen tax” since they essentially enrich the editorial sectors of large financial and media groups who do not need state aid. Moreover, the ACP countries do not have the means to subsidize the

export of books produced on their territories. Thus, the imbalance plays against the emergence of local book chains.

- On the other hand, the Union could encourage member states to favour a discontinuation of rights or assistance in translation, whether these are North-South or South-North. If the physical export of books is harmful, the cessation of rights and translation integrates local actors in the production and marketing process. These supports therefore need to be preserved and reinforced.
- Under the framework of an EU/ACP policy aimed at reinforcing cooperation, it would be fitting to favour the transfer of professional knowledge, for example by supporting an on site training programme, allowing stakeholders from the North to train professionals from the ACP countries.



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