

Richard M. Dougherty

## The State of Professional Publishing in Non-Industrialized Nations

IFLA has had a longstanding commitment to encourage and support professional publishing among its Members. The Federation has given special priority to assisting libraries and library organizations in the developing countries. This special emphasis is reflected in the projects and studies proposed by the Divisions, Sections and Round Tables in the draft *Medium-Term Programme, 1981–1985* as compiled by IFLA's Professional Board.<sup>1</sup>

A commitment to supporting and improving professional publications is the very essence of the IFLA Round Table of Editors of Library Journals. The Round Table's recent activities have focused on the needs of editors of publications from developing countries, in accordance with IFLA's special interest. In particular, the Round Table has attempted to gain a better understanding of the specific problems experienced by editors in countries categorized as non-industrialized nations. Two recent Round Table presentations highlighted problems reported in Africa and Southeast Asia. At the Copenhagen meeting Kwame Nyarko presented a stark picture of obstacles which are routinely encountered by editors in the West African nations of Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Liberia,<sup>2</sup> and at Manila, Lim Huck Tee's paper chronicled similar problems in a quite different area of the world.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, only a few editors from the non-industrialized countries were able to attend these IFLA meetings.

With the exception of the information provided by the Nyarko and Lim Huck Tee papers, the Round Table has had little against which to gauge the current state of professional publishing in non-industrialized nations. This paucity of information has frustrated the Round Table in planning programmes specially focused to aid editors from these nations. In order to collect more information, the author agreed to conduct a survey of editors of professional journals from countries categorized as non-industrialized under the existing IFLA membership criteria.

### *Methodology*

The second edition of Josephine Fang's *International Guide to Library, Archival, and Information Science Associations*<sup>4</sup> was consulted to identify titles and names and addresses of editors. Not unexpectedly the publishing programmes and sponsoring bodies varied from country to country. In some instances a journal is published by the national association; in others this responsibility is assumed by either the national library or a governmental information agency. The Fang Directory didn't list any professional publications for numerous countries: consequently, when no publication was listed by Fang, a questionnaire was sent either to the national library or to the information agency.

The response rate to the questionnaire was disappointing, but sufficient information was gathered to permit the author to derive some tentative observations. The response rate for the 62 journals listed by Fang was 18 (29%). Two respondents, however, indicated that the journal cited by Fang was no longer published. Of the 49 national libraries or professional associations contacted, six supplied information about journals not cited by Fang while six indicated that their agency did not

presently issue a professional publication. Thus the total response rate was 30 questionnaires returned out of the 111 questionnaires distributed 27%). Of course, it is not possible to calculate a response rate in a typical manner since the surveyor did not know how many of the non-responding agencies actually published journals. While the response rate might appear unduly low, it is possible that it still constitutes a representative sample. Nonetheless, because of the apparent low response rate no attempt was made to draw any statistical inferences from the data.

### *Results*

The objective of the survey was to gather information about the duties and responsibilities of editors and to determine what problems they most frequently encounter in executing their responsibilities. The questionnaire also requested descriptive data about their journals to establish a range of variables and to set a context for an enumeration of editorial problems and responsibilities; for example, the year publication began, frequency of publication, number of pages per year, current subscription rate, actual number of issues published each year, and currency of publication schedule.

Seventy-five percent of the titles began publication since 1970. Almost half of the titles are published quarterly. Only two titles are issued monthly. The average subscription price reported is approximately \$ 10 in US dollars. Five of the publications are reportedly distributed free of charge to association members.

Based on the responses, it appears that about half of the publications are published on schedule, but this means that about half of the titles are not current. When delays occur, editors indicated the duration ranges from two to four months but in a few instances the delays noted ranged between one and four years.

Nyarko and Lim Huck Tee both reported that securing stable funding was a serious problem. Oftentimes success might hinge on an editor's ability to raise money for printing and distribution. This survey sought information about current sources of financial support. Editors were queried on whether income was derived from subscriptions, display advertising, government subsidies, subsidies provided by professional associations, foundation grants, donations, gifts or from other sources.

Based on the responses it appears most publications are at least partially dependent upon subscription revenues. Some respondents were confused by the term "subsidy by a professional association" since this question was occasionally left blank with a comment appended later in the questionnaire pointing out that the journal did receive support from its professional association. The overall distribution of responses suggests that most journals are supported not from a single source but from a variety of sources.

The survey also sought information on the status and duties of the editor. Those who responded indicate they serve in a voluntary capacity; no editor reported receiving payment of either a stipend or an honorarium.

The duties performed by editors embrace a wide variety of editorial tasks. Among the most frequently cited are the following: selecting printers (62%), proofreading manuscripts (77%), marking and preparing copy for printers (86%), preparing typescript or camera-ready copy for printers (48%), mailing and distributing printed journals (57%), and soliciting funds (33%). Comments some respondents appended brought to light other duties which included compilation of bibliographies, design of covers and graphics, bookkeeping, writing reviews, and obtaining governmental publishing permits.

One problem cited by both Nyarko and Lim Huck Tee was the difficulty experienced by editors in securing manuscripts suitable for publication. Although some editors confirmed Nyarko and Lim Huck Tee's findings, seven (32%) editors noted they have no problems in obtaining manuscripts. However, a few editors cited difficulties in securing manuscripts from practicing professionals, explaining that in some instances professionals had to be persuaded before they would contribute manuscripts for publication.

Eight editors indicate they rewrite manuscripts whereas eleven noted they do not engage in editing activities. Only one editor singled out rewriting as a problem. It appears most editors regularly engage in some form of textual editing, but it was not possible to discern from the data how extensive is this activity.

Both Nyarko and Lim Huck Tee reported that production was included often as a responsibility of an editor; this survey also solicited information about production-related activities. Half of the respondents (10) reported satisfaction with their current printing arrangements while half expressed some form of dissatisfaction. A few editors cited the general poor quality of current printing equipment; whereas others cited very specific problems such as a scarcity of selenium plates or a scarcity of trained typists to prepare adequate copy for printing.

Paper and other printing materials are often cited as being in short supply. Eight respondents specifically cited shortages of materials, and several editors cited the growing expense of paper. In general, shortages of quality paper seem to be related to local economic conditions within a particular country.

Since the principal purpose of this survey was to gather information to facilitate programme development of the IFLA Editors' Round Table, the most important information solicited dealt with the special problems of individual editors. This question elicited an intriguing range of responses. Some respondents simply repeated problems cited earlier in the questionnaire, such as high printing costs and expensive paper, but a few editors provided informative insights on the difficulties they experience as editors. One editor characterizes the situation as follows:

"The main problem is the work is very time-consuming for a volunteer position which I hold in addition to a full-time job as university lecturer. The work is increased by the inadequacy of support staff. Often we must depend upon voluntary labour provided by university workers when time is available. There is a shortage of competent typists, meaning that the draft must be carefully checked and often re-typed. Obtaining relevant materials of good quality for publication is difficult because of the lack of people in the field. Those practicing teachers/librarians have no library training and limited education. There is no school of library studies in this part of the country. Those professional librarians in the area are university or public librarians with major interests outside the area of school and children's librarianship. This means time must be devoted to obtaining manuscripts, I must write many of the reports and reviews of bibliographies, or I must spend time directing students in the department of education school librarianship course to write such materials." Though this editor was referring to a specific locale, the environment and problems cited seem typical of other locales. This candid assessment clearly illustrated the range of problems a volunteer editor may encounter in a non-industrialized country.

Several editors commented on several aspects of editing manuscripts. In general, authors seem to appreciate the efforts of editors to review and revise their work, but

one editor also pointed out that authors whose manuscripts are rejected occasionally react negatively. This editor felt such criticisms constituted a serious problem and capsulized his feelings as follows:

“One is often faced with the dilemma of not accepting material for various reasons . . . The authors of rejected material normally take offense and it becomes difficult to convince them [that] standards have to be maintained at a certain level (international), but budding authors feel frustrated whenever they fall short of an established standard.”

Finally, special attention was paid to the spiralling cost of materials. Such reactions should not be dismissed, particularly in countries where the profession is in an early stage of development. One wants to encourage and assist neophyte authors not discourage them; but at the same time editorial standards are also necessary. As already noted the cost of materials, specifically papers, stencils, ink, and printed covers is a matter of continuing concern. And for some editors, material costs may be an overriding factor. One editor reported that his national association possessed only limited resources, and that any increases in material costs and postage rates actually posed a threat to the continued existence of his association's journal.

### *Conclusions*

The editor's responses produced no startling surprises. In general the problems cited paralleled those reported by Nyarko and Lim Huck Tee. The severity of problems seems to vary from country to country depending upon a variety of local factors. Among the most important factors are: the number of practicing professionals; the current state of development within the professional association; the size, influence and resources of the national library; the national wealth of a country or its commitment to libraries in particular and education in general.

Obtaining a sufficient number of publishable manuscripts seems to be a general problem. This was not unexpected, since the membership of a national professional association may number fewer than 100 members. For example, the Malawi Library Association publishes the *MALA Bulletin* although according to the Fang Directory the association's membership consists of only 70 individuals and 10 institutions. Not surprisingly the editor of the *MALA Bulletin*, D.D. Najir, reports that his journal suffers from a lack of regular contributions.

The shortage of manuscripts may be compounded further by the lack of appropriate incentives for professionals to publish. The author can only speculate as to the causes, but among the most likely factors are the professional status of librarians within a country, and the lack of a close correlation between a person's publication record and the opportunities for professional advancement and salary increases. Lim Huck Tee also reported that some authors prefer to submit their manuscripts to journals published in industrialized nations rather than submitting them to local journals because publication in established journals carries with it more prestige for the author.<sup>5</sup> It seems clear many editors are forced to solicit manuscripts from a pool of potential authors that is insufficient or barely marginal to support a professional journal of acceptable quality.

### *Roles for IFLA*

The long range objective of the survey was to seek ways in which the Editors Round Table might assist editors of journals from non-industrialized nations.

Judging by the variety of problems identified it is likely the Round Table can provide useful assistance in several ways.

The Editors Round Table would be providing immediate assistance if it were to (1) sponsor workshops such as the program planned for the 1982 Montreal Meeting; (2) compile a checklist enumerating the resources required to begin a new journal or newsletter; and (3) compile a list of experienced editors who might provide assistance to new editors or to those who have recently assumed editorial positions.

While the Round Table can provide short-term assistance, only IFLA itself is capable of attacking the central problem of inadequate financing for journals. IFLA clearly recognizes the central role professional associations play in the development of a nation's libraries. And since one of the most important roles an association plays is to communicate with its members and this can occur only if effective media exist, namely professional journals and newsletters.

IFLA and Unesco appear to be the only organizations capable of sponsoring direct assistance. The major challenge, assuming IFLA and Unesco are interested in stimulating growth of national and regional associations, is to agree upon a workable plan. Seed money, though commonly the mechanism used by international agencies to stimulate development, will not prove effective unless professional associations are willing and able to provide financial support once the seed money has been exhausted. The data collected in this survey, though preliminary, suggests that unless certain conditions exist, it is highly unlikely publishing ventures will survive much beyond the initial issues. IFLA could assist associations by establishing a set of guidelines that must be satisfied by an association before it would be eligible for financial support. The guidelines might specify, for example, the minimal threshold of necessary subscribers to sustain publication, the level of long-term financial commitment required, the minimum production facilities, etc. If the Federation places a special emphasis on helping non-industrialized countries to strengthen their associations as a means to strengthening and vitalizing librarianship within the country, providing support to strengthen professional publishing programs appears to be a logical strategy for the Federation to pursue.

### References

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- <sup>2</sup> Kwame Nyarko. "Library Literature in English-Speaking West Africa; Its Achievements, Problems and Prospects." Presented at IFLA General Council, Copenhagen, August 1979.
- <sup>3</sup> Lim Huck Tee. "Problems of Publishing a Library Journal in a Developing Country: The Malaysian Experience." Presented at IFLA General Council, Manila, Philippines, August 1980.
- <sup>4</sup> Josephine R. Fang. *International Guide to Library, Archival, and Information Science Associations*. New York, R.R. Bowker, 1980.
- <sup>5</sup> Lim Huck Tee, p. 5.

### About the author:

*Richard M. Dougherty* is Secretary of the Round Table of Editors of Library Journals and Director of the University Library, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109, USA.