

Book donation programmes for Africa: Time for a Reappraisal? Two Perspectives

Part 1: **Hans M. Zell**: “Book Donation Programmes in English-speaking Africa” (in English)

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Extract from the editorial note of the print issue:

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to this bumper issue of ARD. Scolma is grateful to Hans Zell and Raphaël Thierry for choosing to publish their full length study of Book Donation Programmes in Africa in our pages. It is as they say “time for a reappraisal” and it is our hope that the ensuing debate will take place in the pages of ARD as well as online. I would therefore invite responses and feedback to this important and provocative study. Feedback from receiving libraries in Africa is particularly welcome.

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Summary:

Book aid is complex, problematic, and sometimes controversial, but the literature and research on book donation programmes for Africa is surprisingly scant. In particular there are only a very small number of papers or studies written by African librarians or other book professionals who have benefitted from, or have been involved in processing and distributing book donations. The websites of many book charities contain glowing reports and endorsements about their activities, but publicly accessible evaluations of book donation schemes are still rare, as are independent investigative studies. There are only a few case studies that have evaluated donation schemes in terms of a set of identified needs. It is therefore timely, I believe, for book donation programmes to come under some further scrutiny.

There have been calls just recently for new book donation practices and the need for a “Book Donation Charter ». While attempts to improve the effectiveness of book aid programmes are to be welcomed, are the recommendations for good practice actually being applied by the numerous book charities? And are the recommendations practical enough to stand a chance of being implemented? Most book donation organizations commonly state that they are weeding out, or will recycle inappropriate resources before they are shipped, and/or that they are adhering to collection development guidelines from the recipients. However, judging from continuing reported instances of inappropriate donations, are such guidelines really enforced in practice? Is there not in fact a need for more vigorous monitoring and evaluation of some of these donation programmes?

This investigation attempts to shed more light on current book donation practices, and provides an overview and profiles of the work of the principal book aid organizations active in the English-speaking parts of sub-Saharan Africa; describing how they differ in their approach and strategies, donation philosophy, selection policies, their methods of shipping and local distribution, the quantities of books they are shipping annually, as well as their processes of monitoring and evaluation.

A total of 12 of the leading book donation organizations in the UK, the Netherlands, the USA, and in South Africa are individually profiled. (Organizations in Belgium and in France, operating in the francophone countries of Africa, are analysed by [Raphaël Thierry in part II of](#)

[this study](#).) A number of small-scale book donation and library support projects are reviewed separately, as are digital donations in the form of e-reading devices preloaded with e-books. The article aims to provide a balanced account, presenting a variety of viewpoints about both the benefits and the potential negative consequences of book aid. In particular, the study seeks to find out how many African-published books are included in current donation schemes. As part of a review of the recent literature on the topic, I examine the ongoing debate between the proponents of book donation schemes, and those who disapprove of the programmes; who maintain that they are not meeting the needs of the recipients and the target countries for the most part, and have an adverse impact on the local publishing industries and the book trade. The article also questions why large scale book donation programmes should continue to be necessary today, after millions of books have been shipped and donated to African libraries, schools and other recipients every year over the last three decades or more. It examines the status and role of chronically under-resourced African libraries and, in the absence of adequate government support, their continuing dependence on book donation programmes and other external assistance. A concluding section summarizes the findings of this study and makes a number of recommendations, in particular as they relate to the inclusion of African-published books in donation programmes. Profiles of the major book charities, a web directory of book assistance organizations worldwide that are active in Africa, and a select bibliography of articles and studies on book donation programmes are included as appendices.

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Pre-print versions available on *Academia.edu* :

Part 1 by Hans Zell : “Book Donation Programmes in English-speaking Africa”:

https://www.academia.edu/13165497/Book_Donation_Programmes_for_Africa_Time_for_a_Reappraisal_Part_I

Part 2 by Raphaël Thierry: “le don de livre, mais à quel prix, et en échange de quoi? (un panorama du don de livre en Afrique francophone)”:

https://www.academia.edu/13166294/Le_don_de_livre_mais_%C3%A0_quel_prix_et_en_%C3%A9change_de_quoi_Book_donation_programmes_for_Africa_part_2