

# University Report

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## UNIVERSITY REPORT

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NARRATOR -  
JOHN JONES:

Well to-day we're going to discuss some of the problems of setting up a University Press in Africa - a problem with which the University of Khartoum in the Sudan has been grappling in a modest way since 1965. In Africa, the printing, publishing and distribution of books is organised, if organised at all, in a somewhat erratic manner - the monopoly and commercial interests of foreign publishers compounded by the laws of copyright do not facilitate thriving indigenous publishing enterprises. Most universities have printing facilities of one kind or the other on or off campus. And then, of course, there is the Ibadan University Press. But the Khartoum University Press will very soon be the only university press to invest on a large scale in printing, publishing and distribution of books. The Director of the Khartoum University Press is Dr Mohammed Ibrahim Shoush and he's here with me now in the University Report studios to discuss some of the issues involved in setting up the Press. Dr Shoush, now obviously the first question that one is bound to ask is why is the University going to invest what surely is going to amount to colossal sums of money in setting up a university press when in the Sudan there isn't any tradition of a press at all and you have to start from scratch?

DR SHOUSH:

Well, in my opinion, the question of a university press is extremely important. I think that the University of Khartoum in particular has got enough faculties for all the disciplines and it could now afford to move into this question of publishing. Publishing is one of the three main things which, as you know, constitute a university - publishing, teaching and research.

And I think while progress has been maintained in the fields of research and teaching publishing has not even come near to this although it is very important even for education itself that there should be some published material of a local nature for teaching. So I think it is important there should be publishing in a country and in under-developed countries - the Sudan and other African countries - there is no publishing concern in the country itself and that's why although these methods could have been taken by other commercial publishing houses unfortunately the university was forced if they want to have anything published properly - to establish their own printing house.

JOHN JONES: So your position is that the immediate investment of colossal sums of money will justify itself in the long run.

DR SHOUH: Well, I think so. I very much think so. I think the university press is not only going to serve the university's needs - which are colossal and very important - for the teaching and research as I have just mentioned - but I also think that for a country in which there is no publishing the university can justify the colossal money spent on it by the fact that it can encourage indigenous writers as a university publishing house or produce works of high quality in production, in standard, and also for the Sudan itself, as a country in Africa and in the Middle East, it can become a cultural bridge by producing books which are, through translation, through training centres in the technique of publishing and printing, for African countries, for the Arab countries. So in the long run the money paid for this scheme, I think, is amply justified.

JOHN JONES: There seems to be a slight contradiction here because the university itself is wholly financed by the Government and the Government itself - the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance have a system whereby each publishes its own books for the schools and so on and so forth. Now surely the

Government is going to come back to you and say "We really don't see any need why you should set yourselves up as a separate unit. We can do all the publishing." What would your answer be to that?

DR SHOUSH:

Yes. This is what may happen and, in fact, is happening at the moment and although the University is financed by the Government we have always kept and maintained the autonomy of the university. In fact, the University of Khartoum is the most autonomous university probably in the whole of Africa and I think that although we are financed by the Government indirectly I don't think there is any danger of us falling in with the dictates of the Government. I don't think we'd be dictated to by the Government. Of course, the Ministry will continue to produce books but we have - I personally have - always been against the question of state publishing. I think it's very dangerous for any country. I think it makes it very difficult in view of the fact that the market is already limited. And if the Government takes over the one market - which is school books - that means there will be no publishing concern in any country. And this in turn will mean that the indigenous culture cannot be encouraged, the writers and authors of a developing country will not find a job. That is in addition, of course, to the hundreds of other educational hazards that could happen by leaving such a decision in the hands of the Government. Of course, at the moment, governments are forced to do this because there are no publishing houses. But they should think this temporary, not permanent.

JOHN JONES:

How, in fact, would you like to see the University Press financed because I take it from what you've said already that it's certainly not a satisfactory way of financing the university at the moment?

DR SHOUSH: In my opinion, of course the University Press will not only work on publishing. It will deal with other things which are not strictly within the confines of a publishing house. We also run a printing press. We run the University Bookshop. This we need not. In other countries - developed countries - where they have got a very good printing industry, very good book salesmanship working properly it's all right. In countries like the Sudan it is very difficult. So what we do is this. We will have a printing press which ultimately will bring money commercially together with the bookshop. Of course, this will add a great strain to our administration, but we hope that having the bookshop, having the printing press will help us financially. Another way, of course, of financing this instead of putting all the strain on the Government and on the University would be this. I feel that certain books should be published or sponsored by certain ministries, certain foundations, certain rich individuals - books say on Health and Child Care can be financed by the Ministry of Health or rich doctors, books on Commerce and so on can be financed by certain banks, by certain foundations and so on.

JOHN JONES: Until now, that is since 1965 I think, you have not actually published books and put them on the market. You've only been engaged on small printing within the University and so on. This year though you're going into actual publication of books, aren't you? Now how is the choice of books going to be governed?

DR SHOUSH: The University has not approved yet the statutory position of the University Press. The University Press has been established on the same lines, it is hoped, as the Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press. In both cases it's run by a syndicate or a Press Board and this board usually takes a governing decision in which every book has to go through the board and the board is usually appointed by the Senate of the University or by the Council of the University. I, as Director of the Press, will also be the Secretary of this Board. In my case, or in the case of Khartoum University Press itself, we are going to separate the

decisions on editorial matters from governing matters. I think this is essential because usually boards like that are constituted in legal jargon - there will be a representative from each Faculty but this does not mean that a representative from a certain particular faculty appointed to the board will be specialised in the field that we want so we have an editorial whereby people are chosen not because they represent anything except their standing in the country - specialists in Commerce, History - people who have made their mark as authors, writers and so on - and we hope that these people will work as consultant editors and take the decision as to what is to be done leaving the board of the Press to deal with matters of policy.

JOHN JONES: Another thing, of course, that a University Press positively cannot do without is authors. Now how are you going to be able to guarantee to your new authors, to your up and coming young authors, a wide international market so that it will be profitable for them to have their books published by your press - otherwise they're going to look outside?

DR SHOUSH: This is indeed a most important problem. The most important problem in under-developed countries - and the Sudan is one of them - is the distribution question. In fact, it's not that we don't have authors, or that we don't have printing presses - we can print. The problem is that authors don't get their books out with the distribution media, publicity, as you find in England so I think what we are going to do is strengthen this and this will be our main contribution to Khartoum University Press will be creating this network. We are, of course, going to concentrate mainly on distribution at the beginning in Africa and the Arab world and here, of course, we have to get into all the schools, we have to make our mailing lists, compile them very wide sections, explain how books are selected and so on. In fact, this is what Khartoum University Press is doing - our biggest department is the distribution department,

and, in fact, the Head of the Distribution Department is the most senior member of the staff of the Press.

JOHN JONES: So, in fact, the University Press could give a great boost to the production of indigenous writings.

DR SHOUSH: This is exactly what we are hoping. And when I say "we" I don't only mean the local Sudanese writers. I meant that we should open the way and encourage African writers as well as writers from other countries less developed than say Egypt or the Lebanon where, of course, they have their own industry. We would like to encourage writers from these other countries to become writers for the Khartoum University Press.

JOHN JONES: Now, of course, the purpose of a university press is to serve scholarship generally and also to produce educational books for local use and so on and so forth. But are you also going to invest in the publication of works of scholarship external to Africa from Europe and so on?

DR SHOUSH: Yes. You mean in subsidised publications from outside.

JOHN JONES: Yes, indeed.

DR SHOUSH: I think that is what is going to happen when we create the kind of relationship between our University Press and other presses in the world. In fact, this is one of the things that I hope to do in my mission in England - to contact many publishers here who will be of use to us in this kind of joint publication. Of course the question of subsidising scholarly work is a very difficult thing and it needs a lot of money. No country in Africa can really do it very much, and that's why I think this one of the lines where co-operation is needed. The problem with us is that the local market is very small - the number of people who can read is very small, that means the market is small - that means the books will be too expensive for anybody to buy.

And this will make things even worse for us. So I think this is where co-operation is needed between African countries. We are now publishing at the moment - on the educational side - a book on Agriculture for African students. And we hope that such work will be a kind of nucleus of that co-operation that we are seeking - that we will have co-operation on scholarly works for Africans in general.

JOHN JONES: Now perhaps we could look at just one more question before we close this discussion. Are you, in fact, interested in courting other governments in Africa and other universities in Africa so as to encourage them to use your press for their own purposes as well?

DR SHOUSH: Oh yes. We hope so. We do hope that people will look at Khartoum University Press as a media for many things. We hope that there will be a market for the sort of books that we produce. We hope also that we will become a venue for their authors, for their writers, for their academic works which can be subsidised by us. We hope that we can be a training centre for them. We can only be this if they accept Khartoum University Press or see that it can afford and has the facilities to carry out these things. The whole thing, of course, works both ways. If they come to us, of course, they encourage it to grow and Khartoum University Press will be strong enough to encourage more if things work out in this way. So we hope that the Distribution Manager, the Chief Editor, will do quite a lot by going around other African Universities and African institutions of higher education, and government departments and so on and talk to them about the facilities that Khartoum University can give and what they can give in return to Khartoum University Press.

NARRATOR - JOHN JONES: Dr Shoush, thank you very much indeed. The first publication list for books under the imprint of the Khartoum University Press will be out later this year.

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