



SNAPSHOT

In-country book printing has far-reaching benefits



Photos: Gemini Kamteme, courtesy of the local printer in Blantyre

(Right) Rosina Chimombo, a book binder employed as a result of the project

Bottom: books were printed in Blantyre

“It was a big challenge. We had never done this before despite having the capacity in terms of appropriate machines and technology, but we pulled it off.”

Explained the Sales and Marketing Manager of the local printer in Blantyre



Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development
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Challenge

FOR MANY YEARS development agencies working in Malawi have had to contract the production of huge consignments of their publications such as school text and exercise books to out-country printers such as South Africa, India and Malaysia. The result had been failure to meet deadlines, pretest the printed materials and challenges in monitoring to check on standards. This was also to the detriment of the local printing industry that could not re-invest in its capacity and contribute to the local economy and the beneficiaries who never received the books in time. Foreign printers grabbed all the contracts even where locals had the requisite capacity.

Initiative

USAID under the Read Malawi Program by the University of Texas at San Antonio, contracted a local printer to produce 877, 833 school children textbooks and learning materials; kit and pack over 5,250,000 textbooks and learning materials produced by another printer in South Africa; and deliver the 6,137,833 books to schools and government warehouses across the country. The capacity building of all the printing houses in Malawi before the selection and awarding of contract to a local printer was instrumental to execution of this task involving 180 titles. This was to probably be the biggest project ever to be entrusted to a local printer. Although officials from Texas were in full control in meeting required standards and meeting deadline, the printing process was closely monitored by the Malawi Institute of Education based about 90 kilometres from the printer.

The printer had to hire new hands – 60 workers of whom 10 percent were women – to make sure that issues of gender are considered as learnt during capacity building training. . These workers were responsible for binding and packaging.

“It was a big challenge. We had never done this before despite having the capacity in terms of appropriate machines and technology, but we pulled it off,” the Sales and Marketing manager explained.

Results

The in-country printing has opened eyes and built confidence in the local industry that they can manage printing large numbers of books of high quality and deliver them on time. The company is reinvesting in state-of-the-art printing machines in readiness for similar jobs. The in-country printing also created jobs and the classic example is one of the women book binders employed as a result of the project – 30 year-old Rosina Chimombo.

“I have been able to take care of my three children,” she says. Most of her colleagues have had to be laid off at the end of the 1.5 years contract.

By printing locally, it was easy for implementing partners in Zomba to monitor, pre-test the books and ensure the ultimate quality. Because the local printer knows his country, he was able to deliver the books on time to right sites where a foreign printer would have problems. Now the local printer is geared for more challenging jobs now that he has gained experience and built on digital technology and human resource.