

Chapter 95

Emerging Issues in Open Access Initiatives in Africa

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ABSTRACT

Access to scholarly publications in the 21st century has been greatly enhanced with the emergence of open access initiatives the world over. This new trend has contributed immensely to the development of a global scholarly communication system. This chapter investigates various facets of the Open Access (OA) movement and its growth in Africa. It highlights different roles played by organizations, libraries, publishers, and researchers in the development of OA. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the benefits and challenges of OA to various stakeholders. It concludes with recommendations on how to improve open access in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Access to scholarly publications in the 21st century has been greatly enhanced with the emergence of open access initiatives the world over. This new trend has contributed immensely to the development of global scholarly communication system. The developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) especially the Internet and World Wide Web (WWW) in 1990s have facilitated dynamic scholarly collaboration in the production, dissemination and exchange of knowledge.

The academic community, before the advent of Internet, relied heavily on research articles in printed format, which are mostly published by commercial based outlets and made available to individuals, libraries and institutions that can afford the subscription fees (Vij, 2012). Scholars especially in developing countries, where libraries are hardly funded experience difficulties in getting access to recent information both in print and electronic format. Even, libraries in developed world struggle to purchase all scientific publications that are central to their objectives. This situation affects the quality of research output

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as a result of access restriction. According to Ivwighreghweta and Onoriode (2012) restricted access to knowledge restricts the development of science and has severe effects on generality of the people in any society.

The evolution of ICT has facilitated information generation, dissemination and sharing among scholars. Now, Internet has become a bridge that links scholars to vast collection of information resources. It continues to make changes in every aspect of human endeavour, and reshapes scholarly communication in many ways. This development has also given rise to various movements aimed at enabling free and open access to information irrespective of users' economic, social, and geographical background. One of such initiatives that drive this concept is the open access movement.

Open access movement is a new trend that promotes free, seamless, online digital access to scholarly publications. This model of scholarly publication has changed the landscape of communication especially in the developing nations. However, the problem of digital divide in the developing nations constitute technical barrier to open access publication.

The African countries being developing nations have variety of issues battling with their accessibility of scholarly publications. What can be done to address this issue? The open access movement strongly believes it has an answer to this critical question. Therefore, this chapter tends to examine trends in open access movements, its dramatic growth, benefits, and challenges in Africa. The noble objective of open access will not be realized, if scholars in developing countries merely constitute "active consumers" and "passive contributors" (Jain, 2012).

BACKGROUND

The revolution of Open Access since early 1990s has liberated libraries and Information Centers all over the world. The era of open access is dawn-

ing and it could not come a moment later. Open Access to information is an innovative mode of scholarly communication within the digital environment aimed at achieving universal access to knowledge. Many attempts toward defining the concept of open access have been advanced by scholars, according to Zuccala et al. (2008) the term open access has been given a variety of definitions while its meaning is still evolving. Series of meetings have been organized by OA stakeholders at various locations to harmonize different forms of definitions.

In 2002, Budapest Open Access Initiative defined OA as "free availability on the public Internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the Internet itself."

In another dimension, Bethesda meeting of April 2003 identified two conditions which OA definition must meet:

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