

“African Higher Education Research Online (AHERO): A model for building sustainable academic research”

Abstract

One mechanism for improving human welfare in developing countries is to expand the amount of essential information that is in the public domain...to expand the knowledge commons¹ . The aim of this paper is to highlight open access platforms which offer a sustainable **information environment** for researchers in developing countries. These nations are increasingly investing in improving their communication infrastructure, bandwidth and technology policies to facilitate this process. With the growing knowledge economy, academic research is seen as a critical element of sustainable national development. Adequate access to scientific knowledge enables national research institutes in Africa to find solutions for challenges faced by the developing world.

Unfortunately, scientists and research institutions in Africa can very rarely afford the high costs of knowledge resources. Important information is locked away behind copyright licenses and exorbitant journal subscription fees. The result is an information crisis in which no institution can afford access to a full range of journals. Information flows are blocked by the intellectual hegemony and gate keeping functions of the predominantly Western journals which determine whose articles are to be published. Poor bibliographic control and weak systems of dissemination that lead to poor circulation of research findings further restrict the flow of knowledge; this hinders progress, especially in Africa’s least developed countries.

In the face of these chronic problems, many now see great promise and relief in the opportunity to break out of the mould of traditional publication. **Open access** publishing offers universal benefits such as free, permanent online availability of research papers and articles. Research from the South is more visible; publicly funded research achieves more efficient distribution and authors’ texts potentially achieve greater impact. Such expansion of knowledge enables developing countries access to crucial information needed to solve challenges.

To this end the paper will introduce an innovative project which grew out of the desire to facilitate the communication of African research literature that is largely inaccessible and undetectable. The [AHERO \(African Higher Education Research Online\)](#) website provides a simple but effective interface for visitors to access full text resources in a niche research area that deals with the practice

¹ Juma, Calestous, Improving human welfare: The crucial role of open access *Science Editor*, 29(5): 163-165, 2006

and development of African higher education. These may be conference papers, research reports, book chapters or journal articles. The functionality of the website will be demonstrated in order to show that authors may deposit papers onto the AHERO site directly from their offices. Our presentation will include a report of methods used to populate the archive, how AHERO deals with copyright and the progress that has been made thus far as well as our achievements. Lastly, the paper will present the results of our user and author evaluation survey after two years of operation.