Is Open Access only for rich countries?

Policy recommendations from a series of global Open Access Dialogues undertaken in late 2012 and early 2013
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It is not unusual for analysis of research systems in the developing world to provide startlingly low figures for the participation of developing countries in world research. For example, the Times of India last October cited a report that claimed that India produced only 3.5% of the world's research – a shocking statistic, the newspaper commented. The commonly accepted figure for Africa's contribution is even worse, at 0.3%. In reality, these figures do not reflect at all the size and shape of the national research systems in these countries nor their productivity. Rather, they are a measure of how many journal articles are published in journals in the global North and particularly in journals in the Thomson Reuters ISI indices.

 The developing world has been badly served by the scholarly publishing system inherited from the 20th century. The commercialization and consolidation of scholarly publishing over the last 60 years has progressively put the publication of the bulk of the world's research in the hands of a small number of giant corporations, in an environment characterized by very high and continuously escalating subscription charges, putting access to the world's research out of the reach of most developing countries. If Harvard complains, as it did recently, that it cannot afford the subscriptions to the major journals, then what could be said for universities in Africa or India?

To add to this, the impact of the dominant systems for measuring the quality and impact of global research have a perverse effect in the developing world, consigning its research to the periphery and categorizing it as of 'local' interest rather than being 'global', or 'international' in its importance.

Global Open Access Policy
Global Open access policy moved forward decisively from late 2011 to early 2013, with UNESCO's launch of its Open Access to Scientific Information Programme[1] and the World Bank's launch of its Open Knowledge Platform[2]. At national and regional levels, the Finch Group Report in the United Kingdom[3], the White House Memorandum on Access to Federally Funded Research[4] in the USA and the announcement of the open access provisions of the Horizon 2020 Framework for Research and Innovation[5] in the European Union all marked a global move to entrench open access to publicly funded research. These policies commit political weight and financial support to policy implementation, based on an understanding of the contribution that OA can make to innovation and thus to social and economic development across the world.
In the face of these developments, the developing countries, which currently tend to have fragmented OA and research communication policies, face the risk of falling even further behind in finding their place in global and locally relevant research production.

What these events have added to the policy debate about open access over the last year is not only the recognition of the need for government-level logistical and financial support for open research communication, but also a widening of the mandate for open access. Early formulations of open access policy focused on opening up 'the peer reviewed journal literature', as the founding document on Open Access, the Budapest Open Access initiative, defined it in 2002[6]. The principle was that these publications should be freely available to readers, to read, to download and data-mine.. It is this approach that largely informs the UNESCO's Policy Guidelines for the Development and Promotion of Open Access (2012)[7]. The World Bank policy, on the other hand, takes a broader view of open access, applying a Creative Commons

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1   See http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/access-to-knowledge/open-access-to-scientific-information/
2   See https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/
3   The Finch Report http://www.researchinfonet.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Finch-Group-report-executive-summary-FINAL-VERSION.pdf
4   The White House Open Access Memorandum https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/response/increasing-public-access-results-scientific-research
5   http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-12-790_en.htm
6   http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/openaccess/read
7   http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/policy-guidelines-for-the-development-and-promotion-of-open-access/

CC-BY licence to the work that it commissions, thus allowing for reuse and repurposing of content in order to reach the widest possible audience and have the maximum development impact[8].

Open Access Dialogues

A number of policy issues emerged from the Open Access Dialogues (OAD), facilitated by Eve Gray, The African Commons Project and the Centre for Internet and Society, Bangalore, India, in late 2012 and early 2013 with participants from South Africa, India and Latin America. The overriding policy outcome was an expressed desire to expand the concept of open access to include other kinds of openness, such as open education and open development and to expand beyond journal articles in leveraging the benefits of openness in developing countries, as well as involving outside-university knowledge producers and distributors in the OA agenda. Over-reliance on the ISI Impact Factor was also a key aspect of the present OA system that came in for criticism, leading to demands for the formulation of research reward systems that are better aligned with national and institutional research strategies and development of alternative metrics for evaluating research success.

The discussion took place on the UNESCO/WSIS Knowledge Communities discussion forum, where a total of 19 discussants, excluding the core team, took part. Additionally, the OAD Facebook page was 'liked' by 116 people (as of 1 March 2013), with the most common age group being 25-34 and the gender bias being towards female users at 60%. Two (one hour-long) Twitter discussions were also organised, which attracted 83 unique users in total, who shared 530 tweets using the #developOA hashtag.

Strategic Issues and Policy Recommendations

Beyond the Impact Factor

The ISI Impact Factor (IF) remains the dominant measure for research evaluation and determining academic rewards and promotions in the Anglophone world and beyond. The discussants identified the extreme preference for publication in ('closed') journals with high Impact Factors (IF) as a central obstacle to effective research communication aligned with national and regional goals. Of particular concern was the role this system has had in aligning developing country research activities with academic interests in the universities of the global North, and thus diverting developed country research away from local challenges and opportunities. This model also renders invisible much of the research that is actually produced that addresses local/national/regional concerns. Another concern was bibliographic malpractices including bias against citing works from developing country scholars and work published in non-'prestigious' journals. Strong arguments were made for the use of article-level metrics as opposed to journal-level impact measurement. Studies were suggested to argue that article-level impact increases with OA journals.

Policy recommendations:
  ⮹ Replacing reliance on bibliometrics and journal-level citation indexes with article-level metrics and emerging alternative metrics that take into consideration the circulation and usage of knowledge beyond higher education institutes.
  ⮹ Developing education policies and guidelines to evaluate research and researchers in their specific contexts of relevance and impact, and aligning academic rewards with national, regional and local development strategies.

Uneven geographies and the need for sustainable models

Attention was drawn to the unfortunate lack of awareness about the nature and potential of OA across developing countries, even in scholarly communities. Simultaneously, the discussants highlighted several success stories of OA journals in developing countries, though mostly from science disciplines. Thus the developing world experiences an uneven geography of OA awareness and adoption, where the OA agenda is being pursued successfully by specific scholarly communities but not translating into widespread support across the higher academia landscape nor into coherent national policy development

 The role played by the global commercial businesses of scholarly works in impeding the Open Access agenda in developing countries was mentioned by most of the commentators. Simultaneously, the complicity of developing country academics in reinforcing the culture of 'prestigious' journals published by global publishers was also criticized. The increasing embracing of Author Processing Charges (APC), the discussants feared, will further entrench this uneven geography of OA adoption and research visibility. This issue is crucial since it is generating a sense of cynicism about OA as yet another incarnation of commercial exploitation of scholarship that advantages the rich countries. The use of fee waivers was criticised for being

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http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:23164491~pagePK:64257043~piPK:437376~theSitePK:4607,00.html

only an exceptional measure that serves to reinforce exclusion of researchers outside of or new to the dominant scholarly publishing system. There is a need, it was argued, to develop a sustainable business model that is functional in making knowledge circulate in ways that are useful to society, and not solely driven by profit-making needs of publishers.

Policy recommendations:
- Promoting a bottom-up strategy for OA adoption in the developing world by focusing on capacity and community building exercises. This could involve scholarly colleagues and advocates gathered around thematic and/or disciplinary forums, facilitated by institutional and governmental recognition and support.
- Linking the issue of OA to academic works to the structural problems in developing country academics, adopting a wide-ranging and systematic approach to research capacitation. There is a need to promote OA through curriculum development, knowledge dissemination, training and advocacy, engaging actors ranging from senior administrators to young scholars.
- Addressing and involving non-university circuits of learning, of both institutional (primary and secondary education) and non-institutional (informal learning groups around MOOC courses) varieties, and also non-governmental organisations working on education in particular, and development in general.

A broader vision for Open Access
A number of discussants argued for a broader mandate for OA than the traditional journal focus. There were two aspects to this recommendation: firstly, OA should align with other forms of 'open' agendas, such as open science, open education and open development, and secondly, OA policies should support distribution and re-usage of a wider range of research outputs. Thus the scope of OA needs to be broadened to focus on the needs of potential consumers of research findings rather than only on the scholar-to-scholar discourse that journals constitute. This wider agenda could include research data, multimedia, 'grey literature' such as research and briefing papers, and policy papers. In the context of developing countries, it was argued that 'translations' of research for communities outside academia were important, especially 'recognizing the importance of publishing in a format that most appropriately meets the information and knowledge needs of those who can use the research to improve society's development', as a leading public health academic argued in the OA dialogue.

This broader vision of OA challenges the conventional hierarchy of basic research over applied research, proposing that OA can provide a communicative continuum between scholar-to-scholar discourse, teaching and learning needs, and the mobilization of research for development.

Policy recommendations:
Build on the present governmental acceptance of the OA agenda by strategically using it as an entry point to promote the broader 'open' agenda, including open sharing of research data, bibliographic data, policy papers etc.
- Recognize, support and reward OA initiatives and systems that facilitate sharing of a wide range of academic outputs, from journals, books and other scholarly publications to development-focused research outputs targeted at communities outside of higher academia.
- Financial and logistical support for the creation and maintenance of websites, repositories, archives and other (offline/outreach) initiatives aimed at hosting and sharing a wide-range of academic outputs, including data and multimedia, and mandating licences that allow for re-use of scholarly materials (such as CC-BY), for development and educational needs.
- A comprehensive (national and international) institutional policy approach, ensuring a central role for research communication in universities and research institutes and for integrated administrative, technology and skills infrastructure to support these roles.