

## **Strategic issues emerging from the comments of Indian participants**

### **Open Access Debates**

The African Commons Project, the Centre for Internet and Society, Bangalore and Institute of Development Studies, Sussex

Hosted at WSIS Knowledge Communities Discussion Forum

#### **1. Lacking OA awareness, even among scholarly communities**

Many, if not all, commentators emphasised the unfortunate lack of awareness about the notion and possibilities of Open Access across India, including among the scholarly and/or higher education related communities. Often the notion of Open Access is quite familiar, especially among scholars, but without a clear understanding of its benefits and how to make one's scholarly works openly accessible.

#### **2. Uneven geography of OA success stories**

The above point must be read along with strong success stories emerging from Indian OA journals, mostly from science disciplines. A recent study <<http://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/103/07/0757.pdf>> reveals that 970 Indian OA journals are included in the 'Journals Citation Report 2011' (science), and the Impact Factors of these journals are on the rise. This indicates towards a very uneven geography of OA awareness and adoption in India, with the OA agenda being pursued successfully by specific scholarly communities but not translating into widespread support across the higher academia landscape.

#### **3. Global businesses of scholarly works and complicity of Indian researchers**

The role of global businesses of scholarly works in impeding the Open Access agenda in the India was mentioned by most of the commentators. The publication, and especially distribution, of publicly funded research is dominated by global publication houses.

Additionally, the complicity of Indian researchers in reinforcing the culture of exclusive and 'prestigious' journals published by global publishers is also well understood and criticised.

#### **4. Citation Indexes as necessary evil**

While the discussants argued against an over-emphasis on Impact Factors in judging a quality and success of journals, especially for IF being biased against new journals, and thus against newly started OA journals. At the same time, measurement of citations remains a crucial way of understanding readership and impact of scholarly works. There was a strong recommendation of article-level metrics as opposed to journal-level ones. Studies were suggested to argue that article-level impact increases with OA journals. Another concern is bibliographic malpractices, including biases against citing works from Indian (or, developing world) scholars and against citing works published in non-'prestigious' journals.

## 5. Open Access must not only be about access to journals

A strongly expressed opinion was that the OA agenda must move beyond journal publications. The journal-centric approach emphasises the supply side of knowledge but fails to appreciate the demand of knowledge, especially in a country like India where primary and secondary education remain vital challenges. Further, even within higher academic circles, OA agenda must expand into other forms of scholarly works beyond journal essays, such as primary data and other research materials, especially since all such forms are also produced by public funds. Open Access to 'gray literature' (produced by private and non-profit research organisations) is also crucial, as much policy-making tends to be shaped by such works.

## 6. Open Access and the consumers of knowledge

The commentators emphasised the nature of OA to knowledge as a public good. The OA agenda must address the consumers of knowledge outside the university system, and especially across socio-economic classes. While open university education and participation in MOOC-models of learning are on the rise in India, there is a threat that this digital-centric approach reinforced existing digital divides in access to knowledge.

## Policy Suggestions

1. **'Mainstreaming' the OA agenda:** Instead of locating OA as a separate agenda, it will be useful to 'mainstream' it within larger development/research related funding initiatives by making OA publications of research outcomes a necessary grants condition .
2. **OA as the entry point to a broader 'open' agenda:** The OA agenda can build upon its existing institutional and governmental acceptance and implementation to promote a broader 'open' agenda, including open sharing of research data, open formats for and sharing of bibliographic data etc.
3. **Moving the OA discussion and knowledge organisation beyond higher education communities:** Addressing non-university circuits of learning, of both institutional (primary and secondary education) and non-institutional (informal learning groups around MOOC courses) varieties, is a crucial challenge for the OA agenda in the developing world. Another crucial community of potential OA supporters would be the non-governmental and non-profit organisations working in the field of education in particular, and development in general.
4. **Removing policy biases against Open Access journals in academic administration:** Combined global and local efforts remains important to reshape national academic administration policies to stop discrimination against OA publication of scholarly works, such as higher academic benefit for publication in closed 'prestigious' journals.
5. **Encouraging and supporting scholarly communities (often with a disciplinary and/or thematic common ground) to undertake OA knowledge production:** Promoting the OA agenda must also adopt a bottom-up strategy in the developing world, and this would require capacity and community building exercises involving local and global scholarly colleagues and enthusiasts gathered around thematic and/or disciplinary foci, as well as institutional and governmental recognition and support.