

# Equity in OA Workshop Report commissioned by

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# Equity in OA Workshop 1: Report

This first workshop in the Equity in OA series took place on 7 March 2023, with publishers, librarians, funders, and other stakeholders. Participants came from a wide range of countries: Bangladesh, China, Finland, Germany, India, Japan, Malawi, Morocco, Norway, Rwanda, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania, the UK, the USA, and Zambia.

Participants discussed why equity is important, current challenges to global equity, examples of good practice, and priorities for increasing equity in OA.

## Why Equity is Important

We began by asking participants why equity is important to them. There were many eloquent contributions focusing on fairness, addressing inequalities within countries as well as between countries, celebrating and promoting a diversity of languages in scholarly communications, and mission alignment.

- A publisher's perspective: *"For me, equity is a concern for authors, because if some authors are excluded, then it will distort the way a subject evolves."*
- A librarian's perspective: *"It is a matter of fairness and opportunity. One of our new aspirational statements is that our institution will be a place that cultivates a diverse, equitable and inclusive environment. It is a matter of value when I think about it in terms of library spending. Spending that fosters an equitable outcome has more value than spending that doesn't. I would really like to see the journal spending at my university be able to go towards OA that is globally equitable for authors and readers. 90% of our spending is going towards paywalls of one kind or another today, which is a huge problem."*
- A funder's perspective: *"It will be a real missed opportunity if we switch from one inequitable model, which is the subscription model, which stops many, many people from being able to read content, to one where we stop people from publishing. Because the dominant model, which has been implemented thus far by publishers, has been one based on article processing charges. So, I hope we don't say just flip from one model, which was equitable to another model, which is inequitable, albeit to a slightly different audience."*
- A publisher's perspective: *"We do want to treat people fairly. That's how we'd approach all aspects of our business and equity is exactly the same. I think it is backed up by research: diversity of approaches and diversity of research does produce better science. And we're here to publish science and disseminate science. And I think better outcomes come from equitable solutions."*
- A librarian's perspective: *"Even at our universities here where there has been a full host of publishing agreements, the amount of money to pay is not equally distributed for all the researchers in the global north. Inequities exist even within well-resourced countries or institutions."*
- A publisher's perspective: *"It is a global obligation of the research communities to ensure the availability of high-quality research knowledge in different languages, given the language diversity we have in Europe, let alone globally. Both for the authors to be able to publish on locally relevant issues in the local languages, as well as for the citizens and policymakers and professionals to have access to research in those languages that they read and write in everyday life."*

- A librarian's perspective: *"Affordability of OA is a barrier. Even countries with very high research outputs cannot afford to participate in all OA pricing models."*

## The APC model

There was a clear sense that some models of open access are seen as far more equitable than others. Particularly problematic for many funders and libraries and some publishers was the APC model. These stakeholders preferred APC-free approaches such as national publishing platforms or the Subscribe to Open business model.

The APC model was identified as a barrier not just for researchers in developing countries, but for non-funded researchers. One publisher participant noted that more than 50% of requests for APC waivers or discounts they receive come from researchers in middle or high-income economies. APC-based publishing could create a two-track academic system for HSS and STEM research, for authors who are working professionals, or for authors without government funding.

It was argued that APCs are inherently inequitable and to make them equitable would require an over-complicated system which would not be a desirable solution. APCs were designed to address a very specific problem, and there had been lots of unintended consequences. "The people who were looking at this originally were not thinking on that global scale, and not thinking about what it meant for people to be able to participate, to be able to value knowledge coming from different communities, and from different cultures and different subject disciplines". One participant noted that in their country they could find no sympathy from institutions or the government to support APCs: in a country with a low GDP, the focus certainly is not going to be on supporting APCs. When countries are fighting to provide essentials, funding for APCs comes very low on the priority list.

The waivers and discounts currently offered are appreciated, but there are significant concerns. It One participant described waivers as being like hand-me-downs: "why should very good research output from the global south be at the mercy of [publisher's unilateral decisions about] waivers in order to be published and read by the entire global community? Waivers and charity is not a good thing because it is intrinsically condescending." Another participant, also from a country where researchers are eligible for APC waivers, noted that waivers reinforce the APC model and undermine solidarity: "The APC model is always there. And we often appreciate the fact that some publishers, many publishers, are offering a discount or whatever. Who is paying that discounted price or the 100% that I'm enjoying coming from a developing country, somebody else?"

A question was raised about Purchasing Power Parity (PPP): would more equitable pricing lead to more equity? The response suggested that this could be a short-term improvement, but the risk was that a small improvement on a fundamentally inequitable approach could be viewed as good enough.

One participant suggested that if we consider a world where APCs do not exist opportunities for more equitable/sustainable business and sharing models would become more real and are actionable.

## Subscribe to Open (S2O)

This model was viewed as a more equitable solution. One publisher participant spoke of their experience in deploying this model, noting that it had enabled more access and more publishing

worldwide, and citations had increased. This had freed the publisher to work on other equity issues, for example to ensure that editorial groups are reflective of the authors.

However, it was also recognised that this model can feel perilous to publishers. One publisher participant explained, “lots of librarians have said to me that they are prepared to pay more if it helps global equity. But from a business point of view, it feels a little bit precarious to assume that some of your customers are going to be prepared to pay more to help others. What happens if they change their mind?”

There were also questions of who is paying. As one participant from the global south put it, “By talking about giving equal access to the global South, are we creating an inequitable situation for the Global North? Where is the math? I cannot calculate. So, we have to think of both ways. When we are creating an equitable world are we creating inequity for some other part of the world?”

## Diamond<sup>1</sup> Publishing Platforms

Two topics emerged in this part of the conversation: the desirability of having journals that publish open access without charging any fees **AND ALSO** the power of having centrally funded platforms to facilitate their cost-effective publishing. This winning combination of models is proving successful in many places across the world including Africa, Bangladesh, Brazil, Croatia, Finland, Japan, and Mexico.

Around the world there is very wide deployment of the diamond open access model<sup>2</sup>. Participants shared their experiences. In Bangladesh 90% of journals are diamond open access. In Norway, diamond is making a difference for authors in humanities or social sciences that have no funding for open access. In Japan, the government funded JSTAGE platform hosts over 2000 diamond open access journals, including research published in the Japanese language, and ensuring these journals are widely discoverable and professionally managed.

These diamond publishing platforms need to be professionally run and need solid funding behind them. Too often they struggle to subsist and to attain a high technical level of open access, and there is a need to develop collective more sustainable funding models for open infrastructure of all kinds and perhaps especially for these diamond publishing platforms.

Participants ranked funding for diamond publishing platforms in each country as a high priority for achieving global equity.

## Other challenges in achieving global OA equity

Participants identified equity challenges that stemmed beyond the funding models used for open access.

One concern, broader than the scope for this workshop series yet valid and important, is about the article itself. One participant pointed out that “the very **format of the article** privileges English-

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<sup>1</sup> Although we are using the term ‘diamond’ in this report, one participant rightly pointed out that we need a better name than one that refers to something that poor people cannot afford.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.coalition-s.org/diamond-open-access/>

speaking folks, not just because of the language, but because it is the same form as a high school essay which is not a format that is universally taught.” Another participant said that as part of a transition to open science “we must stop having everything be about articles. Articles will always be important for some things, but they are not the answer for everything.”

The **lack of government and funder policies** was also cited as a barrier to open access publishing in some countries and some parts of the world, for example throughout Africa. It is difficult to persuade researchers of the value of open access if there is no top-down policy or funding to drive it. Funders and policy makers hold the purse strings, so it is important to help them understand the benefits of publishing open access in order to fund infrastructure and incentivize the researchers.

In many areas of the world, **open-access journals are wrongly perceived as having less credibility than subscription journals**. Researchers opt to publish in paywalled journals because these are seen as higher quality. Faculty pay attention to metrics, and there is a need for more clear metrics and training to demonstrate to them the value and impact of open access. This was a particular area that participants identified as a potentially useful area for OASPA to become more active. Training was needed both for researchers and also for librarians who can then in turn reach out to researchers on their campuses. OASPA might be able to bring together some case studies like the University of Utrecht which has moved away from journals and their impact metrics when looking at promotions.

What are the steps that OASPA can take to overcome these challenges?

The discussion dealt with small and incremental changes to current systems and more radical alternatives. Small step-changes in practice can help but are not of themselves a solution.

In addition to ideas already mentioned above, suggestions included:

- campaigns to challenge misperceptions that open access publishing is of lower quality.
- develop principles for equitable open access publishing.
- diamond platforms and funding across all disciplines and countries
- guidelines and principles for an entirely fresh new approach to funding publication for all
- improvements to waivers
- increasing diversity in those asked to edit or publish journals.
- pricing to reflect purchasing power parity between countries and between different types of institutions/researchers within those countries.

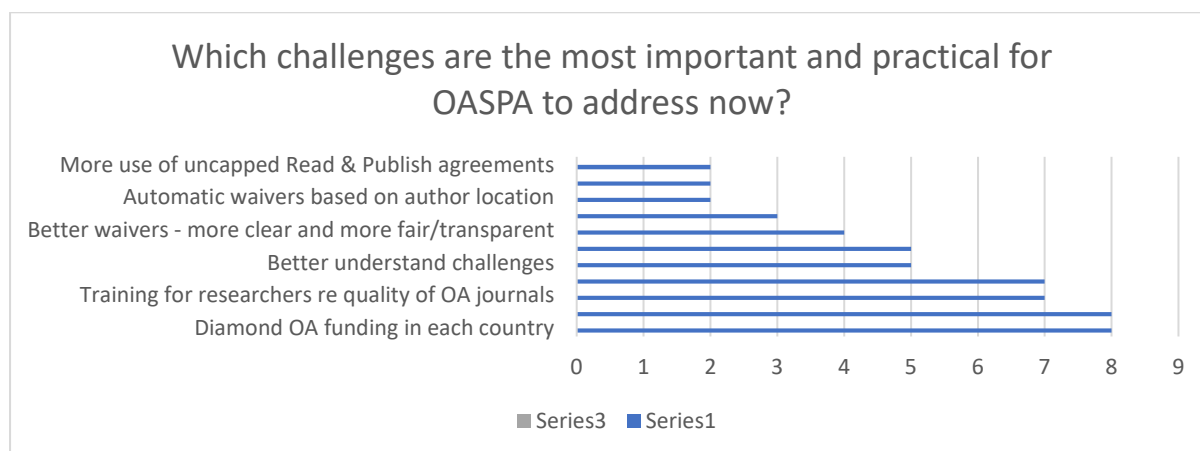
Examples of good practice to showcase include:

- Open access arrangements between EIFL and publishers which enable APC-free publishing by authors in developing and transitional economy countries.
- PLOS community action and equity models



- Subscribe to Open agreements.

A final comment *"I hope the workshop series focus stays on concrete actions that we can take together"*.



## Participants

The following people participated in this workshop. Please note that this does not mean they agree with all the points made in the workshop.

Thomas Bello (KCN, Malawi)  
Curtis Brundy (Iowa State University, USA)  
Rod Cookson (IWA Publishing, UK)  
Maria Coteria (Figshare, UK)  
Lorraine Estelle (Information Power, UK)  
Richard Fisher (Royal Historical Society, UK)  
Ed Gerstner (Springer Nature, UK)  
Sara Girard (AIP Publishing, USA)  
Kazuhiro Hayashi (National Institute of Science & Technology Policy, Japan)  
Claudia Heidrich (Royal Society of Chemistry, UK)  
Imane Hilal (ESI, Morocco)  
Haseeb Md. Irfanullah (INASP Advisor & Associate, Bangladesh)  
Amanda James (Emory University, USA)  
Christine Wamunyima Kanyengo (University of Zambia, Zambia)  
Robert Kiley (cOAlition S, UK)  
Nils Lahlum (Scandinavian University Press, Norway)  
Malavika Legge (OASPA, UK)  
Devika Madalli (Indian Statistical Unit, India)  
Blessing Mawire (Information Power, South Africa)  
Claire Moulton (The Company of Biologists, UK)  
Grace Msoffe (University of Dodoma, Tanzania)  
Niamh O'Connor (PLOS, Germany)  
Frances Pinter (CEU Press Advisory Board, Hungary)  
Janne Polonen (Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, Finland)  
Agnes Ponsati (CSIC, Spain)  
Simon Rallinson (Pluto Journals, UK)  
Cathi Siegel (American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, USA)  
Berthilde Uwamwezi (University of Rwanda, Rwanda)  
Abeni Wickham (SciFree, Sweden)  
Alicia Wise (Information Power, UK)  
Tieming Zhang (Beijing Forestry Institute, China)

About OASPA (<https://oaspa.org/>)

Representing a diverse community of organisations engaged in open scholarship, OASPA works to encourage and enable open access as the predominant model of communication for scholarly outputs. We are committed to our mission of developing and

disseminating solutions that advance open access and ensuring a diverse, vibrant, and healthy open access community.



About Information Power (<https://www.informationpower.co.uk/>)

Information Power Ltd is a woman-owned microbusiness based in the UK. We have provided consultancy services in the research information space since 2006. We bring together bespoke teams of consultants with diverse, yet complementary, backgrounds and skills to provide support that spans the spectrum of challenges facing research funders, libraries, and publishers. Together we specialise in engagement on sensitive issues including business strategies and open access policy and practice.



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