

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2009

*Focus on access to online information and knowledge
– advancing human rights and democracy*



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)
AND HUMANIST INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (Hivos)

Global Information Society Watch 2009

Global Information Society Watch

2009

Global Information Society Watch 2009

Steering committee

Anriette Esterhuysen (APC)
Paul Maassen (Hivos)
Loe Schout (Hivos)

Coordinating committee

Monique Doppert (Hivos)
Karen Higgs (APC)
Natasha Primo (APC)

Project coordinator

Natasha Primo

Editor

Alan Finlay

Assistant editor

Lori Nordstrom

Publication production

Karen Higgs

Graphic design

MONOCROMO
info@monocromo.com.uy
Phone: +598 (2) 400 1685

Cover illustration

Matias Bervejillo

Translation coordinator

Analía Lavin

Proofreading

Valerie Dee, Lori Nordstrom

Financial partners

Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos)
Swedish International Cooperation Agency (Sida)
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Printed by

MONOCROMO

Printed in Uruguay

Edición hecha al amparo del Art. 79 de la Ley 13.349
Dep. Legal 350401

Global Information Society Watch

Published by APC and Hivos

2009

Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Licence <creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

Some rights reserved.

ISBN 92-95049-73-X

APC-200911-CIPP-R-EN-P-0065

*Dedicated to A.K. Mahan - an activist who valued
intellectual rigour and concrete outcomes.*

APC and Hivos would like to thank the Swedish International Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for their support for Global Information Society Watch 2009. SDC is contributing to building participation in Latin America and the Caribbean and Sida in Africa.



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

Knowledge rights

Eve Gray and Rebecca Kahn

The OpeningScholarship Project, Centre For Educational Technology, University of Cape Town
www.cet.uct.ac.za/OpeningScholarship

Overall, 2008-2009 has seen a remarkable forward momentum in the adoption of policies and interventions for access to knowledge at all levels – among international agencies, national governments and institutions in the developed and developing world.¹

Access to medical research

Some of the most important activity around access to knowledge in the last year has been seen in the public health sector, where an awareness of the importance of open access to taxpayer-funded research and the price paid in human lives as the result of high prices for proprietary systems has driven the push towards more open approaches to health information, particularly for developing countries.

In mid-2009, the World Health Organization (WHO), after a long debate, adopted the Global Strategy and Plan of Action on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property² which aims to “secure... an enhanced and sustainable basis for needs-driven, essential health research and development relevant to diseases that disproportionately affect developing countries, proposing clear objectives and priorities for research and development.” Among its provisions are the use of open-source software, open access to research publications and data, voluntary provision of access to drug leads,³ open licensing, and voluntary patent pools.

Towards the end of 2007, the United States (US) Congress voted for the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) to adopt an open access mandate for NIH-funded research. The NIH, which has a budget of USD 29.2 billion, is the world’s largest funder of non-classified research,⁴ and its research grants result in 80,000 peer-reviewed articles per year. Under the new model, material is embargoed for up to twelve months, but grantees are obliged to comply with the open access mandate when publishing research results,

submitting an electronic copy of the final manuscripts of their research papers into PubMed Central, a free digital archive of biomedical and life sciences journal literature.

This follows the model established in 2006 by the Wellcome Trust, the largest private biomedical research funder in the United Kingdom (UK).

Moves by national governments

In January of 2008, the European Research Council (ERC) became the first European Union (EU)-wide funding agency to adopt an open access mandate, which applies to data files as well as peer-reviewed articles. The ERC disburses about EUR 7.5 billion per year, or 15% of the EU research budget for its research programme called FP7 (2007-2013).⁵ This follows an increasing willingness of EU states to support access to knowledge policies, as witnessed by a vote of the 27 EU prime ministers.

Twelve other public funding agencies in Europe and Canada also adopted open access mandates in 2008. In Canada, Ireland, Australia, France and Hong Kong, to name but a few, there were moves towards policies for access to publicly funded research. Awareness and usage of open access mandates among private funders has also increased: Autism Speaks, the MacArthur Foundation and the Moore Foundation have all adopted open access as their publishing model.

These developments show an acceptance by the major research-funding agencies that taxpayers underwrite billions of dollars of public research each year, and the widespread sharing of the results is an essential component of investment in science. Faster and wider sharing of knowledge fuels the advancement of science and, accordingly, the return of health, economic and social benefits back to the public.⁶ While the twelve-month embargo applied by the NIH is less than perfect, and the no-embargo policy used by the Wellcome Trust and others would be more in the spirit of open access, the fact that essential information, like the NIH’s research, is being shared at all is an important step.

Universities

The most high-profile and influential response to access to research, which created a stir in the university world and triggered copycat responses, was from Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS), which adopted an open access mandate in February 2008, at a time when there were already twelve university-level open access mandates worldwide.

1 Peter Suber’s annual review of open access developments in his January edition of the Open Access Newsletter was invaluable in providing information for this overview. See: www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/01-02-09.htm

2 apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/A61/A61_R21-en.pdf

3 When new drugs are being designed or discovered, drug leads refer to the chemical compounds whose chemical structures are used as a starting point for chemical modifications in order to improve potency, selectivity or pharmacokinetic parameters. Lead compounds are often found in high-throughput screenings (“hits”) or are secondary metabolites from natural sources.

4 Non-classified, in this case, refers to research that can be shared, and is not embargoed.

5 The Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) bundles all research-related EU initiatives together under a common programme.

6 Terry, S. (2009) The public’s right to research, *Open Access Scholarly Information Sourcebook*, 8 June. www.openoasis.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=547&Itemid=265

Three months later, Harvard Law School voted unanimously for its own open access mandate. In response to the Harvard mandate, the School of Education at Stanford accepted a proposal for a mandate and voted it through immediately.

Since Harvard's announcement at the beginning of 2008, thirteen more universities, including Southampton, the University of Glasgow, the University of Helsinki and the University of Tasmania have also announced open access mandates, more than the number of all previous years combined.

In South Africa, the University of Pretoria announced in early 2009 that it had adopted a mandate, voted unanimously by its senate, for the open access deposit of publications by all academics in its institutional repository. This makes it the first African university to adopt such a mandate.

These events are evidence of the fact that leading universities all over the world are taking seriously the strategic opportunities offered by open access communications. Underpinning this is recognition for a wider communications mission than that offered by conventional scholarly publication, not least the potential for the university to deliver on its public mission and not just its scholarly reputation. As Catherine Candee, the executive director of Strategic Publishing and Broadcast Initiatives at the University of California, put it:

Publishing and communication enhance knowledge, not just scholar-to-scholar but scholar-to-student as well as to the public. In the digital realm, there is no reason to plan to enhance scholar-to-scholar communication without considering how to improve the knowledge... creation and scientific output of the university to the public. This is not just for the individual public interest and good – universities must aim to meet the challenges of modern society. How better than to ensure that we have an adequate publication and communication system?⁷

Scholarly publishing

Traditionally, scholarly publication has been dominated by a globalised commercial publishing industry that has consolidated control of research publishing in fewer and fewer hands outside of universities, and which has control over the dominant evaluation system for scholarly excellence.⁸

The value of most of the scientific researchers in the world is measured by the number of publications they publish in and how brilliant the publications are held to be as measured by citations – the number of times academic work

is cited by peers. Papers in top journals are more likely to be cited, and so scientific life becomes geared to chasing publication in elite journals with the highest impact factor, and high performances as measured by a complex array of journal metrics. The so-called Journal Impact Factor is calculated by dividing the number of citations a journal receives in any particular year by the number of articles deemed to be citable in the previous two.⁹

A knock-on consequence has been the consolidation of the dominance of research from the global North, as a result of the “core journal” principle that underpinned the creation of the ISI (Information Sciences Institute) citation index.¹⁰ This core journal principle meant that libraries were informed that they need only subscribe to a limited number of journals. Naturally these core journals were the ones that reflected the most powerful information communities – not the 80% of the world that the developing countries constitute. The prestige system (outlined above) which developed, naturally entrenched this bias even further. In this commercially dominated system, high subscription prices and closed copyright models have restricted access to this knowledge, particularly in the countries in the global South.

However, in reaction to this, scholarly publishing has also seen enormous growth in the adoption of open access in 2008: open access journals and repositories proliferated faster than in any previous year. The Directory of Open Access Journals grew by 812 peer-reviewed journals, or 27%, in 2008. In 2007, it added 1.4 titles per day, but in 2008 the rate jumped to 2.2 titles per day.

A striking event was the purchase of the open access journal publisher, Biomed Central, by Springer, an acknowledgement by a large commercial scholarly publisher of the viability of running a profitable open access journal enterprise.

Open access publishing is also enhancing the potential for regional South-South collaboration in open access journal development, which has taken a significant step forward with the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) in Brazil, a virtual library covering a selected collection of Latin American scientific journals, joining in a venture with the Academy of Science of South Africa. South African open access journals will be hosted on the SciELO platform using the meta-tagging system developed by SciELO to track regional and national citation levels.

For scholarly books, 2008 was the year that open access publishing moved to the mainstream: Amsterdam, Athabasca,

7 www.arl.org/sparc/meetings/ala08/index.shtml

8 Guédon, J.-C. (2007) Open Access and the Divide Between “Mainstream” and “Peripheral” Science, in Ferreira, S. and Targino, M. (eds.) *Como gerir e qualificar revistas científicas*. eprints.rclis.org/12156

9 Corbyn, Z. (2009) A threat to scientific communication, *Times Higher Education*, 13 August. www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=407705&c=1

10 Guédon (2007) op. cit.

Caltech, Columbia, the Universidad Católica Argentina, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Forum for Public Health in South Eastern Europe and the Institut français du Proche-Orient are just some of the presses to launch open access imprints. India's Goa1556 Press, launched in 2007, published its first open access books in 2008, along with a number of university press consortia across the world.

For a number of years, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Press in South Africa has been a very successful pioneer of open access dual stream book publishing and now sees its books downloaded in every country in the world. It is telling that a leading UK trade publisher, Bloomsbury, the publisher of the Harry Potter books, has now emulated this model with the launch of Bloomsbury Academic, a signal that access to knowledge is indeed going mainstream.

Finally, US President Barack Obama looks likely to support a more open approach to access to knowledge, after a powerful speech to the National Academies of Science¹¹ and with open access supporters in key agency positions, as well as in the new President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. The signs are good for a period of greater responsiveness to the rights of access to publicly funded knowledge in the world.

Backlash

There has been some backlash against the open access movement, especially in the US. In September 2008, US Congressman John Conyers, supported by the publishing lobby, introduced a bill to overturn the open access mandate at the NIH, and bar all other federal agencies from adopting similar policies. The Fair Copyright in Research Works Act suggests that the NIH policy violates copyright law. The bill died without a vote at the end of the last session of Congress, but is expected to be re-introduced in the new session. Among the friends of open access who weighed in against the bill were Rockefeller University Press, the AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition, seven major library associations, 46 law professors, and 33 US Nobel laureates in science. This was the third time since 2004 that 25 or more US Nobel laureates wrote a joint letter to Congress in support of the NIH policy.¹² ■

11 Revkin, A. (2009) Obama's Call to Create, Not Just Consume, *The New York Times*, 27 April. dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/04/27/obamas-call-to-create-not-just-consume

12 Suber, P. (2009) SPARC Open Access Newsletter (129), 2 January. www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/01-02-09.htm

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH (GISWatch) 2009 is the third in a series of yearly reports critically covering the state of the information society *from the perspectives of civil society organisations across the world.*

GISWatch has three interrelated goals:

- **Surveying** the state of the field of information and communications technology (ICT) policy at the local and global levels
- **Encouraging** critical debate
- **Strengthening** networking and advocacy for a just, inclusive information society.

Each year the report focuses on a particular theme. **GISWatch 2009** focuses on *access to online information and knowledge – advancing human rights and democracy*. It includes several thematic reports dealing with key issues in the field, as well as an institutional overview and a reflection on indicators that track access to information and knowledge. There is also an innovative section on visual mapping of global rights and political crises.

In addition, 48 country reports analyse the status of access to online information and knowledge in countries as diverse as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mexico, Switzerland and Kazakhstan, while six regional overviews offer a bird's eye perspective on regional trends.

GISWatch is a joint initiative of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos).

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH
2009 Report
www.GISWatch.org

