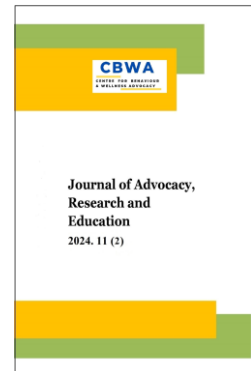




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## Editorial

### Funding Local Open Access Journals in Sub-Saharan Africa: Ethics and Strategies

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#### Abstract

Open access (OA) publishing is altering the scientific, academic, and industrial landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa by enhancing the visibility and accessibility of research. Nevertheless, the sustainability of local OA journals has been reported to be hindered by funding challenges. In this paper, I explored these issues and proposed strategic solutions to ensure the long-term viability of OA journals in the region amidst the current funding constraints. The paper briefly discusses OA publishing, ethical funding models, and strategies to ensure sustainable publishing in the global academic community.

**Keywords:** Open Access, Sub-Saharan Africa, Ethical Funding, Scholarly Publishing, Sustainability, Knowledge Dissemination.

#### 1. Introduction

The introduction of open access (OA) models, which promise to allow unrestricted dissemination of scholarly research in scientific and academic publishing, has undergone a profound revolution (Fuchs, Sandoval, 2013). This shift is particularly significant for Sub-Saharan Africa, a region historically marginalised in the global research community due to several challenges (Gurib-Fakim, Signé, 2022; Sarfo, 2019). Traditionally, access to scholarly resources in this region has been constrained by financial and infrastructural limitations, hindering the participation of African researchers in the global knowledge economy (Gurib-Fakim, Signé, 2022; Sarfo, 2019).

It is a worrying fact that African governments, over the years, have invested less in science and research than other regions (Gurib-Fakim, Signé, 2022). With this inadequate level of funding investment into local African journals, the critical role played by these journals and their sustainability in the global research space can not be felt (Gurib-Fakim, Signé, 2022; Sarfo, 2019; Sarfo, 2023). Thus, the growth of OA publishing in Sub-Saharan Africa with sustainable funding opportunities will offer unrestricted access to research outputs and provide a platform for African and global scholars to contribute to and benefit from global academic discourse. Thus, this paper

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explores the ethical considerations, challenges, and potential strategies for funding local OA journals in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## **2. OA Publishing and Related Costs in Africa**

Publishing OA in Sub-Saharan Africa has always faced challenges, although several journals in the region have made many strides (Sarfo, 2019; Sarfo, 2023). Despite the growing number of academic journals in the sub-region, many local scholars still opt to publish in international journals due to the prestige associated with being published in top-tier journals outside the continent (Alemna, 1996). Consequently, journals in Sub-Saharan Africa and even Africa compete to get quality papers to publish, and they may even collapse due to a lack of submissions (Sarfo, 2019; Tarkang, Bain, 2019).

In some cases, scholars submit to these foreign journals due to their swift review processes, higher publishing standards, and broader visibility through extensive abstracting and indexing services (Sarfo, 2019; Tarkang, Bain, 2019). As noted by Sarfo (2019), policies by some African universities regarding indexing and coverage of journals discourage African academics from publishing local journals compared to high-impact factor journals to gain promotions and enhance the university's global ranking (Clobridge, 2014; Sarfo, 2019).

Notwithstanding these challenges, journals in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially those that have adopted OA publishing models, are faced with serious funding issues. On the one hand, the OA model jettisons the financial barriers for readers. On the other hand, it provides new challenges for publishers with respect to financial and infrastructural demands. It has become evident over the years that local OA journals in Sub-Saharan Africa struggle with limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and the lack of robust governance structures, all of which threaten their sustainability and quality (Sarfo, 2019; Tarkang, Bain, 2019). In a region where most researchers live and work in economically challenged countries, the ethical dilemmas associated with reliance on Article Processing Charges (APCs) will exclude financially disadvantaged researchers from publishing their work. The need for sustainable and ethical funding models for local OA journals in Sub-Saharan Africa is more crucial than ever.

## **3. Ethics of Funding Local OA Journals**

### ***Equity in Knowledge Dissemination***

Equity should be the primary ethical ground for funding local OA journals in Sub-Saharan Africa. In history, African scholarship has been marginalised in global research databases, leading to underrepresentation in the global knowledge economy (Nwagwu, 2013; Sarfo, 2019). Therefore, OA journals ought to be supported in order to address this inequity. When equity is established in the publishing space, it will ensure that African researchers have platforms to publish their research work to both local and international audiences, first at home and then beyond. This democratisation of scientific and scholarly output will ensure academic inclusivity and integration (Chan et al., 2013).

### ***Avoiding Ethical Pitfalls in Funding Models***

In creating OA funding models, journals must be encouraged to opt for options that avoid ethical drawbacks. As noted in this paper, the benefits of OA are transparent when it comes to the reader, but the question about who should pay is often left to publishing houses to decide on. The biggest challenge is to determine what APCs are sufficient. In some cases, it is not clear whether APCs assigned to journals are due to their impact factor or are indeed the actual costs for processing. As observed by Sarfo (2019), APCs pose significant barriers for researchers from low-income countries to share their knowledge "freely" with the world. Thus, APCs can be an avenue to perpetuate inequalities, as only those with adequate financial resources can afford to publish their work.

## **4. Strategies for Sustainable Funding for OA Publishing in Sub-Saharan Africa**

### ***Government Support***

Africa as a continent has been noted to provide a relatively small research output of approximately 2 %, with about 0.1 % of all global patents (Gurib-Fakim, Signé, 2022). Additionally, African governments are said to invest less in science and research than other continents globally (Gurib-Fakim, Signé, 2022). In order to provide support, governments and institutions should

recognise the strategic importance of OA publishing by allocating dedicated funds to cover the running of local journals.

### ***Partnerships with Private Organisations***

Partnerships can offer a promising avenue for sustainable funding for local publishing houses and institutions. For example, OA journals can partner with technology companies to provide digital platforms and services at reduced costs, which will drastically reduce the burden of processing costs. Such partnerships with organisations can be an excellent avenue to receive diverse support that will go beyond financial support to include technical expertise and resources.

### ***Collaborative Funding Models***

Another stable financial foundation for OA journals in Sub-Saharan Africa can be achieved through collaborative funding models that involve multiple stakeholders. Through this model, journals can pool resources from several international funding agencies, regional organisations, governments, and local institutions (Morrison, Rahman, 2013). Thus, this model can develop and enhance a more integrated and supportive research ecosystem in the region.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, OA journals in Sub-Saharan Africa are clearly faced with financial constraints. However, achieving this goal requires a multifaceted appreciation of the challenges involved and the employing of strategic, sustainable funding models. To address these financial constraints, several ethical principles and opportunities have to be considered.

## **6. Declarations**

### ***Ethics approval and consent to participate***

Not applicable.

### ***Consent for publication***

Not applicable.

### ***Availability of data and materials***

Not applicable.

### ***Conflict of interest statement***

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