INASP-ALPSP seminar on scholarly publishing and the developing world

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Introduction

The International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) is a programme of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) and as its name implies is concerned with improving access to scientific publications for developing countries.

Pippa Smart, whose career includes stints at Blackwell Publishing, CAB International and Cambridge University Press (CUP), is now Head of Publications and Publishing Initiatives at INASP. In this role she works closely with publishers based in developing countries to build expertise and improve their links with publishers in the developed world. She also chairs the Professional Development Committee of ALPSP, and was thus a fitting choice as chair of this joint seminar. In her opening remarks she said that scholars in the developing world find themselves in a chicken-and-egg situation – they need an ICT infrastructure to access online information, but cannot justify the investment in ICT until they have access to the online publications, but they cannot access the publications until they have the ICT infrastructure in place. She spoke in particular about PERI, the Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information, an INASP initiative. Keith Silver discussed PERI in more detail in his paper that followed.

Different access models

Keith Silver is Strategic Sales Manager with Elsevier Science UK having previously been with Academic Press. He spoke about the three big initiatives – the Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI), a World Health Organization (WHO) project which Leo Voogt discussed further in the following paper: PERI, and electronic Information for Libraries (eIFL), a

project of the Open Society Institute (OSI) that covers mainly the countries of the former Soviet bloc. OSI's aim is 'facilitating open and democratic societies'. However, Keith pointed out that there are in all 361 different initiatives dealing with online access to primary research content, with an obvious danger of fragmentation of effort.

Before the web, provision of primary journals to developing countries was poor due to: shortage of funds, unreliable postal services, damage and theft in transit, instability of paper in tropical conditions, and high shipping costs. Some publishers gave discretionary discounts to developing countries, and the OSI operated a journal donation project within its operational areas. After the web, the problems become: limited web access mostly confined to major cities, and unreliable electricity supplies. But the situation is slowly improving and the potential is revolutionary.

Pioneering efforts to improve online access in developing countries include: Electronic Journals to Africa, through which Institute of Physics Publishing (IoPP) provides free electronic access to the whole of Africa (including areas such as South Africa where IoPP formerly had paid-for business; the BMJ, which provides free electronic access to everyone everywhere, a high-risk strategy that many other publishers could not afford; SciDevNet, an initiative of Nature and the Third World Academy of Sciences; and Academic Press's Ideal Charter, which gives reduced prices to low-income countries as defined by the World

Bank's criteria – price tiers are matched to levels of development.

Should third world countries have to pay at all? This is debatable; but any model needs to be sustainable, and aid donor countries may cut off funding at any time. INASP has to juggle its funding sources to maintain free access, an unstable situation. A model could include both free and charged-for tiers. There is widespread agreement on free access for the poorest countries, but the middle-ranking developing countries, such as Algeria, are more problematic. Publishers may have significant levels of paid-for business in such countries, and the Eastern European countries, for example, have a strong research tradition with clear subject priorities. Poor regions within large countries such as India also present difficulties for charging models. It is difficult for even the largest publishers to go it alone in this area – the situation is so complex that co-operative action is essential.

The Big Three There are key differences between the three main initiatives. These include geographical area covered, subjects covered, and style of approach. One key area is the support of local published journals in third world countries – HINARI provides this in the health field, and INASP does so in Africa, while another project, BIREME, is active in Latin America.

WHO's HINARI involves Blackwell, Springer, Kluwer, and the ex-Harcourt element of Elsevier, 1000 titles in all, with a GNP-based charging model that provides free access to 70 countries and reduced prices to another 30, to users in medical and other health-related fields.

INASP's PERI involves Blackwell, and ex-Academic again, with further full text from Cochrane and EBSCOHost, together with the British Library Document Supply Centre, SilverPlatter and African Journals Online (AJOL). PERI covers most disciplines, over 7500 journals, and provides free access to 70 countries and reduced process to another 54, to universities and research institutions as well as people involved in publishing local journals in the third world. (AJOL was discussed later on by John Haynes.)

OSI's eIFL involves the American Physical Society, Blackwell, CUP, IoPP, HighWire, ProQuest, EBSCO for the social sciences and humanities, and some Russian publishers. A total of 5500 journals through EBSCO and 2200 scientific journals are provided to 40 countries on the Soros network, which include Southern Africa, Nigeria, Mongolia, Guatemala and Haiti as well as its core area in Eastern Europe. Higher education and research libraries as well as parliamentary libraries and NGOs offering public access are eligible for eIFL assistance.

There is some overlap between the three, both in nations covered and in publishers participating, and some lack of co-ordination at local level on the ground. The aim of all should be sustainable access to the best research for the highest number of users, and to achieve this, clarity, comprehensiveness and co-ordination – the three Cs – are needed.

What is in it for the Commerial Publisher?

Leo Voogt, the Director of Library Relations for Elsevier Science but formerly the Director-General of IFLA, spoke next and gave more information on HINARI. It is a voluntary co-operation between publishers and WHO covering the biomedical area. Such multi-publisher co-operation is difficult, given competition laws, and really requires the involvement of an international organisation such as WHO or INASP. WHO authenticates the access rights of individual institutions (not entire countries) and the institutions agree to obey HINARI's rules, even in countries not signatory to the Berne Convention. The subsidy level (free or deeply discounted) depends on the GNP of the country.

There is no one simple reason why a publisher would get involved in such deals. Publishers recognise that they will lose some existing or potential paid subscriptions, but they also believe that reaching the widest possible audience will be in their long-term interest. Such arrangements are likely to be discipline-oriented; it is thus very unlikely that Elsevier would license the whole of ScienceDirect in this way. Involvement needs the wholehearted support of management at the highest level, including the sales and marketing functions. It indicates support for ethical aspects of entrepreneurship, it provides visibility for the publisher in the Third World, it enjoys the support of authors and editors because it increases the visibility of their publications, and it recommends the company to governments and international organisations.

What is in it for a not-for-profit primary and database publisher?

Sue Smith, Head of Publisher Relations and

Information Resources at CAB International (CABI), spoke next. CABI is owned by 40 countries mainly developing and mostly in the Commonwealth, but including China. It incorporates CABI Publishing, CABI Bioscience which conducts actual scientific research, and CABI Information for Development. CABI Publishing publishes about 60 books per year mostly for developing countries, some primary journals, and 40 secondary journals in print, cd-rom and internet versions, to a total of 180,000 records per year. Of the literature covered, 29% does not originate in Europe or North America. It is important to remember that 80% of the world's population have no easy access to telecommunications – there are more telephones on Manhattan Island than in the whole of Africa! Thus CABI needs to find out what users need and can use. One CABI Information for Development initiative provides telecentres to enable people to gain access to telecomms. centrally. Another provides current-awareness services to 1000 scientists in the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions. They also undertake training of local publishing staff and support for libraries. CABI works with partners, such as the Chinese Academy of Sciences in the production of English-language publications of material from Chinese scientists. A two-way flow is essential; as well as the provision of information services to the Third World, they also seek to promote local research and publication within developing countries.

The Reality of Publishing in Africa

John Haynes, Head of Business Development for Journals at IoPP, had acted as facilitator at a four-day INASP Online Journals Workshop in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 2001, in connection with AJOL. This workshop's aim was to assist African journals to publish online full text. Ten journals from seven countries, all in different subject areas, were represented, though none of them was from francophone Africa. Each journal was invited to send one editorial and one production person, but some were in fact one-person bands. Within the four days, each journal was to produce a strategic plan and an action plan for going online. On day one, an overview of electronic journal progress in the developed world was given. On day two, the participants sought to apply the lessons of day one to their own journals, but felt almost overwhelmed

by the issues. Nevertheless, they started to work towards strategic plans. Day three was given over to practical work in a computer lab, studying the technical aspects of going online. Finally, on day four, action plans were devised and then discussed within the group.

Africa has 800 million people but only 350 HEIs, fewer than one per half-million people. Hence the editors were very isolated – none of them had ever met another journal editor before or had any chance to discuss their problems with anyone. However, the concept of 'partnership' was not seen entirely positively, as it had a paternalistic ring. Communication links are poor but improving, and the internet and e-mail have had a beneficial effect. Generally, obsolete versions of software are in use, few scholars have PCs on their own desks, and printers are few. Information flows are not only north to south and south to north, but also south to south. Local, regional and international journals all have their place. Access denial means impact denial, and African scholars need visibility for their work – this is a major problem to be addressed. It is all about valuing scholarship in the third world. ALPSP sponsorship of third world journals helps a lot.

Challenges for African journals include production, distribution, cost control, resources, training, quality control, finding referees, and poor mail services. Sales and marketing have to face up to certain realities: university libraries in Africa are teaching, not research, oriented for the most part; Africanists are scattered all over the world: donor funding is available but this is not sustainable funding; visibility outside Africa is hard to obtain; the US dollar is the only generally accepted currency.

Since the workshop, all but one of the ten journals have gone or are actively going online –only one has given up trying. Two are using Minnesota State University as host, five Ingenta, one SABICENTRE, and one BIOME.

Panel discussion

The speakers joined in a panel discussion and took comments and questions from the floor. Pippa mentioned that, in addition to all the big initiatives, many publishers had their own individual plans to help developing countries acquire their journals. Leo said that devolving decision-making to WHO had helped publishers

avoid legal difficulties with anti-monopoly legislation. John said that publishers lacked individual contacts on the ground in many countries and therefore needed to work through international initiatives. Leo said that in his experience eIFL had run into problems owing to its own limited knowledge of publishers and libraries, but a speaker from the floor said that the same could definitely not be said of PERI, which is flexible and publisher-oriented.

Pippa asked if any clear messages had come through from authors and users. Keith said that in his experience authors are very keen on these initiatives, since they tap into the latent altruism of the research enterprise as well as increasing authors' visibility. A speaker asked how Elsevier markets its involvement in the initiatives to the first world author, editor and subscriber community. Leo and Keith replied that they were only just starting to do this, but one way was to put INASP or HINARI logos on to their journals' web pages, and another suggestion was made that editors should mention the involvement in their editorials.

Pippa asked what role societies could play – it is, after all, often the society publishers that run their own schemes, perhaps using the network of their members in the developing countries. John said that IoP membership is growing in the middle-developed countries. Another speaker commented that it is always difficult to get decisions out of societies' governance.

Finally, Pippa asked if the initiatives were sustainable. Keith felt that there has to be more co-operation between the different initiatives, and

John said that you must first do your homework to assess the users' needs – your project will succeed if it meets real needs. Leo felt that responsiveness and flexibility are the key virtues that will ensure survival. Sue felt that more use of satellite and wireless communications would help to overcome the deficiencies of telephone systems; she also noted that aid donors want to see real effects of their aid. Finally, it was noted that publishers have to be realistic about what the Third World can afford; they have to make their prices affordable in order for the projects to be sustainable.

Final comment

I attended this seminar with a research student, Jama'yah Zakaria, who intends to undertake her PhD on the topic of the prospects for online scholarly publishing by public-sector institutions in Malaysia. The topic of the seminar was almost too good to be true for her! But I learned a lot myself, too, and I commend INASP and ALPSP for their decision to cover this often-neglected subject. I am glad to say that it was well-attended, and in many cases quite senior representatives of publishing houses had come. It is to be hoped that good results flow from it.

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