

Article

Social Justice: The Golden Thread in the Openness Movement

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Abstract: The current publishing landscape perpetuates biases that continue to exclude those who have been previously marginalized, specifically from the Global South including Africa. Incorporating philanthropy as the only driving principle to openly share knowledge is insufficient to truly empower and be inclusive to those who have been relegated to the periphery of the scholarly communication ecosystem. Social justice principles have to underpin the foundation of this ecosystem, in tandem with philanthropy, to shed light on these exclusionary, systemic publishing practices and processes. This will entail first breaking down these unfair practices and then rebuilding the ecosystem by advancing equity, diversity and inclusion. This paper highlights the current gaps in the openness movement and demonstrates, through an exemplar of a publishing platform, how the publishing landscape can be transformed. The publishing platform employs a multi-tenant model that enables multiple institutions to publish and disseminate knowledge on one shared instance of the software. The continental platform and the tenant model that it utilizes address the technological and infrastructural barriers often experienced in the Global South and Africa, while simultaneously serving as a collective hub for hosting African scholarship. This case study methodology is used to investigate how the alternate publishing route recaptures the philanthropic pillars of the openness movement. The findings provide evidence for a return to the founding principles of the openness movement and, as importantly, demonstrates the impact of open access on student success.

Keywords: open access; openness movement; publishing bias; continental platform; publishing ecosystem



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1. Introduction

It is asserted that the OA movement was founded on philanthropic principles. This assertion is drawn from the declaration that scientists and scholars made with regard to openly publishing their research in scholarly journals to advance inquiry and knowledge growth. There was explicit commitment to removing financial barriers through making a copy of the research output freely available. This open sharing of research was constructed to promote the bidirectional flow of information from the rich to the poor and the poor to the rich. The Budapest Declaration [1] makes explicit reference to the acceleration of research and the sharing of the learning in support of the bidirectional flow of information. For the optimists, one could confidently assume and envisage a movement that would mature and dismantle more than just the financial barriers.

For many in Africa, the open-access movement was viewed as a savior bringing hope for the improved exchange of research output for the growth and development of the continent. However, that hope has not been adequately converted into actionable activities. The dashing of that hope is affirmed by authors such as Scherlen [2], who posits that “twenty years after the OA movement began, we are still far from a truly open access world of knowledge exchange”. Bruna (in Kwon [3]) adds that “one of the great ironies of open access is that you grant authors around the world the ability to finally read the scientific literature that was completely closed off to them, but it ends up excluding them from publishing in the same journals”. Sawahel [4] brings forward the perspective of Jaumont

and Moja who point out that “... geographic bias in academic research assessment is still occurring on a large scale, in itself, is an indicator of the struggles with unequal power relations between the North and South as far as knowledge production is concerned”. As much as the open-access movement may be revered by the Global North and major philanthropic organizations as a success, for the Global South it has not bridged the equity, justice and diversity divide. For Global South open-access advocates, the current trajectory of the movement illuminates the inherent biases within the current scholarly ecosystem.

The authors assert that the current open-access movement is underpinned by elements of exclusion, elitism, marginalization and knowledge colonialism and goes against social justice and philanthropic principles. The authors go further to share that the one-directional flow of information (Global North to Global South) and the current control mechanisms (of the publishing ecosystem) consolidate the knowledge imbalance. There is a desperate need to neutralize this significant power imbalance within the open-access movement—to recapture the philanthropic underpinnings of the movement—in order to restore social justice principles of OA to advance equity, inclusion and diversity. For the Global South and Africa, what need to be sought are interventions that uphold the founding philanthropic and social justice principles of the OA movement.

This paper has two focus areas, namely the ideological challenges and the intervention to address these challenges. The first part of the paper examines critical concepts that will scaffold the transition to information democracy and a reimaged OA movement driven by social justice principles. The second focus area is a solution etched by the University of Cape Town Libraries via a platform for the publication of books and journals. This platform is used as an exemplar for an alternative publishing mode with the concomitant diamond open-access model to bridge the equity, inclusion and diversity divides. The authors propose that the biases that currently plague the movement, both conscious and unconscious, need to be addressed. This includes, but is not limited to, both peer review and geographic biases. As much as the exemplar addresses the cost barrier to both authors and readers, there is significant evidence that shows the underpinning of social justice as a driver of equity, inclusion and diversity. The findings show that publications on the platform have unprecedented visibility and accessibility and the positive impact of that accessibility.

2. Examination of Relevant Concepts

The purpose of this paper is not to interrogate relevant core concepts but to enhance the reflections of the authors. Concepts such as social justice, diversity, equity and equality, and conscious and unconscious bias are the bedrock for the probe into an alternate publishing model that is core to this paper.

2.1. Social Justice

Matthew Robinson [5] views social justice as the promotion of a just society by challenging injustice. He further asserts that it advocates for a fair allocation of community resources: a community where people are not discriminated against, nor their welfare or well-being constrained. Social justice is generally associated with the notion of equality or equal opportunity in society. Rawls [6] adds that social justice promotes the protection of equal access to liberties, rights and opportunities, as well as taking care of the least advantaged members of society. Miller [7] (p. 11) brings into the discussion concerns with ways in which resources are allocated to the citizenry by social institutions—education is included as an essential resource.

The authors recognize that the concept of social justice is complex. Hence, they propose, for the purposes of this paper, the view that one of the significant fundamentals of social justice is the act of being fair and equitable and breaking down barriers to unfair practices and inequalities. They view this fundamental as the golden strand that will redefine the open-access movement, that is, the dismantling of structures that perpetuate exclusion and inequality. For the authors, social justice is a two-step process. Firstly, it is the

identification of structures that perpetuate inequality, exclusion and marginalization. Secondly, it is the seeking of alternate structures or remedies that contribute to the promotion of equity, inclusion and diversity.

2.2. Diversity

The concept of diversity is not as complex as that of social justice as it refers to respecting the differences in racial and ethnic, socioeconomic, geographic and academic/professional backgrounds. However, the process of diversifying is extremely complex; it is the context that directs the development of frameworks to address diversity. Within the current publishing ecosystem and open environment, there are myriad issues that need to be navigated to bring reality to the process—issues such as equity, equality, inclusion and bias [8].

2.3. Equity and Equality

The term “equity” refers to fairness and justice and is distinguished from equality, which is provision of the same or equal levels of opportunity for all. Equity involves recognizing that there is a need to provide levels of support and assistance depending on the need.

The authors assert that in the current uneven publishing ecosystem, equality consolidates marginalization, exclusion and disenfranchisement. In order to reach equality as an outcome, there is a need to confront the inequities within the research and publishing landscape, which manifest themselves as biases. The prevalence of bias will always be a barrier to the diversification of knowledge systems [8].

2.4. Inclusion

Inclusion is the process of improving the conditions for participation in the current publishing ecosystem. It is both a process and a goal. The authors posit that promoting inclusion requires tackling exclusion by removing barriers to participation. This inclusion demands deliberate steps to facilitate participation. The geographic bias, the biases that perpetuate the one-directional flow of knowledge, and the conscious and unconscious biases that disempower have to be removed for diversity to thrive [9].

The core elements of inclusion are empowerment and promotion. Inclusion processes require both addressing the drivers of exclusion, such as policies and procedures, as well as discriminatory attitudes and behaviors: the biases that detract from diversity. To advance inclusion, there is a need for the redistribution of power, status and control over resources.

To revert to Scherlen’s [2] comment that the OA movement has not progressed as expected, and using the Jaumont and Moja assertion on geographic bias, the authors posit that it is important to investigate the conscious/unconscious bias that contributes to a skewed publishing ecosystem. The authors go on to claim that addressing the issue of bias, via a viable alternative publishing model (without compromising on academic rigor), will see the Global South become an active partner in the bidirectional flow of scholarship (as per the Bethesda Declaration) [10].

2.5. Conscious and Unconscious Bias

There is very little debate that there are systemic inequalities embedded in the current publishing ecosystem, compounding the information divide and alienating the research voices from the Global South. The northernization of the publishing landscape exacerbates current knowledge hierarchies. The marginalization of research voices from the Global South is deep-seated in the current northernized publishing landscape. In terms of the current knowledge hierarchies, the Global North research will always be the outer layers of the onion with small chances of the deep inner layers (that is, the research content from the Global South) ever seeing the light of day. This assertion of layers of inequalities is highlighted by Kwasi Boahene (in Kokutse) [11], who points out that science still bears the imprint of colonialism. It is further shared that titles such as “Lancet, New England Journal of Medicine, The Journal of the American Medical Association, BMJ are meant to serve a

particular purpose and audience and, therefore, select researchers and research writings that fit that perspective . . . ". Unfortunately, such a practice does not promote diversity and inclusivity—in fact, it derails the openness movement.

The geographic and peer review bias has exacerbated the current one-directional flow of information, and this goes against the open-access grain. Diversity, equity and the inclusion of knowledge will remain a pipe dream as long as conscious and unconscious bias persist.

2.5.1. Bias in Publishing

For bias to have survived and thrived for as long as it has, there must be some very strong (voluntary or involuntary) driving forces. An inclusive publishing ecosystem is critical for a social-justice-driven open-access movement.

Peer Review Bias

Inefuku and Roh [12] (p.113) share that “if the editorial board, representing the master narrative, selects reviewers who from their perspective are qualified, the results are likely to reflect the same perspectives”. If the master narrative does not change, then bias will persist; the domino effect is a strangle on social justice, a strangle on the diversity of the knowledge ecosystem.

Another important obstacle to diversity, inclusion and equity is the bias inherent in an industry dominated by reviewers and editors from the Global North who may not be familiar with authors from the Global South. Often submissions from Africans have the best chance of being accepted for selective publication if they are co-authored by colleagues in the Global North, even if the work comes mostly or exclusively from the South [13–16].

Historically, peer review was used to solicit support from experts in the field to fill a scientific void and to support or validate findings. Over the years, commercial publishers have used peer review as a benchmark for excellence or to provide quality assurance, but this purpose is used strategically to support their brand, as it is the brand that earns them the profit. It has to be acknowledged that this leads to bias and ultimately subjectivity.

Geographic Bias

It is a commonly held view that science seeks to identify the truth, and as such, the truth should stand alone and not depend on the person who proclaims it. However, that view does not hold much water as there is a tendency to succumb to various stereotypes—one of which is geographic bias. These stereotypes support the presupposition that products originating from Global North countries are perceived as better than products from Global South countries [17].

The issue of geographic bias is captured by Skopec, Issa, Reed and Harris [18]. They highlight that the Global North–South research gap still exists, with most scientific contributions originating from North America, Australia and Europe. This region receives 77.6% of the world’s citations while the total contribution of the world’s citations from Africa, South America and Oceania is lower than 5%. These authors assert that the low citation count may be attributed to bias against Global South countries. The authors of this paper assert that if there are that many more publications by the Global North than the Global South, then by default there will be a greater citation count for the content that is published by the Global North.

As much as Skopec, Issa, Reed and Harris [18] (p. 12) continue to pronounce on geographic bias, they also point out a way forward. They state that “by drawing attention to the role geographic bias plays in the process of knowledge diffusion, prejudice against LIC [low-income countries] research, but also other forms of geographic bias, can be addressed and rooted out among the reviewers and editors of scientific publications, and among those who read, cite and consume those scientific publications. Indeed, academics, editors, and journal editorial boards all have important roles to play in addressing this issue”.

This geographic bias has become so engrained in the system that it has become a norm. Global South critics of geographic bias are showing signs of helplessness and fight fatigue. It is against this backdrop of helplessness and fight fatigue that UCT conceptualized, developed and rolled out the continental platform giving back to academics, editors, journal editorial boards and librarians control of one part of the publishing ecosystem.

3. Methods

The development of the continental platform was viewed, by the authors, as a needed intervention to address the challenges that have become the hallmark of commercial publishers. The research question that shaped the development of the intervention was *“does an alternative publishing platform, given the embedded bias in the current commercial publishing model, address the issue of improved visibility, discoverability and accessibility of African scholarship?”*. In addressing this question, the authors use the case study of the continental platform with the unit of analysis being monographs published by UCT Libraries. The case study methodology allows the authors the opportunity to evaluate the impact of a diamond open-access publishing model.

Sjoberg et al. [19] assert that a case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed as it brings out the details from the viewpoint of the researchers. This assertion is affirmed by Yin [20], who posits that the case study approach is useful to employ when there is a need to obtain in-depth appreciation of an issue, event or phenomenon of interest. The central tenet of a case study is the need to explore this event or phenomenon comprehensively. The phenomenon in this study is the conceptualization, development and roll-out of the continental platform. The authors drill down further through the investigation into a unit of analysis, that is, the impact of the monograph publications of UCT Libraries.

VanWynsberghe and Khan [21] bring into focus that the unit of analysis is a critical factor in a case study. They state that a case study is not exclusively about the case revealing itself as it is about the unit of analysis being discovered or constructed. This is an important development because it means that researchers cannot definitively state the unit of analysis at the outset of the research; it must come into focus as the research progresses. As outlined by VanWynsberghe and Khan [21], the unit of analysis became more apparent when the continental platform stabilized and the publications gained traction.

3.1. Other Initiatives Advancing the Dissemination of African Scholarship

Before engaging in discussion on the continental platform, the following is a discussion on other initiatives that try to tackle prevalent bias in the current publishing ecosystem. The first of those initiatives is AJOL and the second is AAS Open Research.

African Journals OnLine (AJOL) is a Non-Profit Organization that serves as a journal aggregator platform, aiming to promote and disseminate local knowledge from Africa. Its primary goal is to provide a platform for African researchers to showcase their work and contribute to the development of their respective fields. AJOL does not publish journals itself but hosts independent journals, of which approximately 53% are open-access and the rest are subscription-based.

One of the distinguishing features of AJOL is that it provides free access to journals for African countries classified as low-income by the World Bank. However, other African countries outside this classification are required to subscribe to gain access to the platform. By implication, two countries (Egypt and South Africa) that publish more than 50% of African scholarship must subscribe to access the content on the platform. It is important to note that AJOL does not have control over the subscription fees or access policies of individual journals hosted on its platform. Some journals on AJOL may charge Article Processing Charges (APCs), but this decision is made by the journal owners and is beyond the control of AJOL.

There is another initiative that attempts to improve the research output of Africa and its dissemination. AAS Open Research, which is on the F1000 platform, is an open-access

publishing platform for African researchers supported by the African Academy of Sciences. The content on this platform is freely available to the public. This enhances the visibility and accessibility of African research, allowing a broader audience to benefit from and build upon the findings. AAS Open Research aims to promote inclusivity and diversity in African research. The one drawback of this platform is that it has APCs associated with its publishing program. These charges are often viewed as a burden for researchers or institutions with limited funding, potentially limiting the ability to publish on the platform.

3.2. African Continental Platform

UCT Libraries started to offer a library as a publisher service in December 2016. From then to now (2023), this publishing service has grown in leaps and bounds culminating in the developing of this continental platform. The central philosophy governing the model is that there is no cost to the author or the reader (diamond open-access stream).

It is acknowledged that the continental platform (<https://lib.uct.ac.za/openaccess/services/continental-platform> (accessed on 14 June 2023)) is not the silver bullet but it aspires to disrupt the unjust knowledge hierarchies and break down the Global North dominated publishing ecosystem. The intention is to de-northernize the publishing ecosystem. The continental platform purports to infuse social justice principles into its open-access agenda. It also aligns itself to the principles of the Bethesda Declaration, that is, to advance the bidirectional flow of scholarship between the Global North and the Global South. The continental platform offers African scholars and researchers unhindered participation (limit bias) in the dissemination of scholarship.

3.2.1. Business Model

To reiterate, diamond open access refers to a business model where the costs of publication are covered by sources other than the readers, such as institutions, organizations, or funding agencies. This allows the published content to be freely accessible to readers without paywalls or subscription fees. In terms of the continental platform, library staff are trained to provide the publishing service. The authors are of the view that the changing role of the academic librarian would include new services such as “library as a publisher” service. Until this point in time in the growth of the platform, the issue of funding has not been addressed. However, given the current growth trajectory, the administrators will have to develop a funding strategy to support publishing costs such as language editing and copy editing.

The developers of the platform hold the view that accessibility is enhanced as the content is freely available to anyone with internet access. The authors acknowledge that internet access is a challenge in Africa, but that is beyond the scope of the University of Cape Town Libraries, the developers of the platform. Be that as it may, this model aims to promote the widest dissemination of knowledge and foster collaboration within and among the African academic community.

As much as there is the misnomer that “free is devoid of quality”, participants of the platform maintain rigorous quality control mechanisms to ensure the credibility and integrity of the published research. Peer review processes are typically employed to assess the scholarly merit of the content, ensuring that they meet certain standards of academic excellence.

3.2.2. African Continental Platform: Addressing Fundamentals

To bridge the prevailing skills shortage and poor information technology infrastructure in Africa, a continental platform was mooted for the publication of journals and books. It was noted that these were the greatest challenges in getting the platform jump-started. The assumption was that if the information technology challenge was addressed, there would be a much greater chance of adoption of the library as publisher service by academic libraries.

The University of Cape Town (UCT) Libraries, in collaboration with the university’s central Information and Communication Technology Services department, worked on

developing a proof of concept for the publication of books and journals. At the outset, it was recommended that the tenant model (to be expanded on later) be developed, that is, a group of libraries share common access with specific privileges to the software instance. In conceptualizing this model, each institution coming on board would retain its identity, that is, the look and feel will be prescribed by the institution. This was deemed important in growing a sense of pride in sharing the institution's scholarship.

Opportunities and Challenges of Publishing on the Platform

Participating in the platform presents opportunities as well as challenges. The authors would like to believe that the opportunities outweigh the challenges in addressing a historical issue with limited viable options.

It is the opinion of the authors that the greatest challenge is that of connectivity. Unfortunately, there is very little that the "project" can do to contribute to this challenge. There are other challenges that are within the scope of the "project". The second major challenge is convincing academics to publish on the platform. There are many academics who may not want to publish their scholarship on a diamond open-access platform as it is a novice option that has not been tested sufficiently. Further, it is not as established as the traditional publishers. The current criteria, in the main, require academics to publish in "international" journals as they are deemed to be more prestigious—this is in conflict with this model.

On the flip side, there are significant opportunities available when publishing on the continental platform. Firstly, there is only one instance of Open Journal Systems (OJS) and Open Monograph Press (OMP), which are products of the Public Knowledge Project (PKP), and this one instance performs all backups, storage and upgrades, including hosting the platform, which are completed centrally, for all institutions. These infrastructure responsibilities are taken care of by UCT. As the ICT infrastructure at this institution is advanced, together with the specialist IT skills, the continental platform is always available online. Further, UCT Libraries' scholarly communication and publishing provides capacity building and skills development to African institutions' editorial teams and library staff who support the scholarship that emanates from their own institutions. This training includes how to establish a scholarly African journal, using all the functions of the OJS workflows, including adding the researcher's ORCID¹, with future plans to have the African journals considered for indexing in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and thereafter Scopus and Web of Science. In addition, the tenant model of the continental platform allows the individual institutions to have their own scholarship showcased to the continent first and then the world. The unique branding of each institution's website provides the institutional pride in displaying the scholarly works that emanate from their researchers (see below the description of the tenant model).

As a publisher, UCT Libraries is a member of Crossref², with its own DOI prefixes. There are plans to become a sponsor for other African institutions to have their own institutional DOI prefixes for their scholarship. By becoming a sponsor, the annual membership fee is paid by UCT Libraries, which allows the institutions to also benefit from the Crossref service of having DOIs. The unique DOI prefixes given to each institution contribute to institutional prestige as they demonstrate that each institution is a publisher of knowledge. UCT Libraries continues to collaborate with DOAJ, Crossref and ORCID to enhance and grow African scholarship.

Tenant Model

The tenant model implemented in the continental platform at UCT Libraries is a concept derived from the field of information technology [22]. In this model, multiple tenants or institutions are served by a single instance of software, along with its underlying database and hardware. The library has extended this model by incorporating social justice principles, making it more inclusive and aligned with the goal of hosting African scholarship.

To understand the multi-tenant model, an analogy to real estate is often helpful. In this case, the tenants can be compared to individuals living in different apartments within a single building. They all share the same outer structure, security system and other communal facilities. However, each tenant has their own key and privacy within their respective apartments. This individuality allows for customization and personalization of the interior space while maintaining a sense of community within the larger building. The tenants may collaborate on improving the overall building and may also benefit from shared spaces such as a playground outside the building, which can be accessed by people beyond the apartment building itself [22].

By applying the multi-tenant model to the continental platform, UCT has not only established a well-structured IT framework but also infused it with social justice, inclusivity and equity. This adapted model serves as a central hub for hosting African scholarship, fostering communities of practice where like-minded individuals can come together to advance the sharing of knowledge. For example, a community might be developed to support the publication process by creating a standardized layout-editing template [22].

Moreover, the platform addresses various challenges faced in the dissemination of African scholarship. It tackles capacity issues by providing the necessary software manipulation capabilities for delivering services. Additionally, it aims to overcome the infrastructural challenges that have hindered the widespread access to African scholarship. Affordability and sustainability are also considered in the development of the platform, aiming to provide a viable solution to these issues [22].

In summary, the tenant model implemented in the continental platform at UCT Libraries allows multiple institutions and research communities to be served by a single software instance. This model, infused with social justice principles, facilitates the sharing of African scholarship and the formation of communities of practice. The platform aims to address capacity, infrastructure, affordability and sustainability, making it a potential solution for advancing the dissemination of African scholarship. The veracity of the platform is upheld by adhering to PKP's valuable technical publishing standards.

PKP's Valuable Technical Publishing Standards

The authors highlight the existence of a publishing ecosystem that promotes the open sharing of scholarship. This ecosystem involves various contributors and communities that collaborate to improve open-source software and enhance open publishing. Some of the contributors are Crossref, DSpace and ORCID, who engage in interactive sprint events (<https://pkp.sfu.ca/sprints/> (accessed on 14 June 2023)) organized by the Public Knowledge Project (PKP) to brainstorm tasks, establish priorities and work together on intermeshing processes to improve open publishing. The outcomes of these collaborative activities contribute to the development of important technical publishing standards. Although these standards are not mandatory, they serve as guidelines to ensure good publishing practices, interoperability, accessibility and sustainability in scholarly publishing. Such technical publishing standards are mentioned below:

- **OpenURL:** OpenURL is a standardized format used to represent metadata about scholarly resources, such as journal articles or books. PKP platforms often incorporate OpenURL to enable seamless linking between different resources, facilitating navigation between citations and full-text content.
- **Metadata Standards (e.g., Dublin Core):** Metadata standards provide a structured way to describe and organize scholarly content. Standards, such as Dublin Core, ensure consistency and interoperability across different systems, aiding in the discoverability, indexing and harvesting of publications.
- **Peer Review Standards:** PKP platforms incorporate features that support the peer review process, adhering to established peer review standards. These standards encompass guidelines for blind or double-blind peer review, reviewer confidentiality and transparency in the review process.

- Crossref and ORCID Integration: Crossref assigns DOIs (Digital Object Identifiers) to scholarly content, while ORCID provides unique identifiers for researchers. These integration services enhance the discoverability, attribution and interoperability of published works.
- Preservation Standards: PKP platforms often incorporate preservation features, integrating with digital preservation systems such as CLOCKSS or LOCKSS. These systems ensure the long-term preservation and accessibility of published content.
- COUNTER Code of Practice: To ensure the consistent reporting of usage metrics for electronic resources, including OJS, the PKP follows the COUNTER (Counting Online Usage of NeTworked Electronic Resources) Code of Practice. The COUNTER Code of Practice establishes guidelines for counting and reporting usage statistics in a standardized manner. It helps ensure that usage data across different platforms and services can be compared and understood in a consistent way.

The COUNTER Code of Practice defines what should be considered as a “view” or usage event, providing specific rules for counting views and preventing abuse. These rules also include guidelines for handling robot usage and multi-click abuse to ensure accurate and reliable statistics.

PKP, as part of its commitment to adhering to the COUNTER guidelines, actively participates in the COUNTER Bots and Crawlers Working Group. This group focuses on addressing issues related to bots and crawlers in the context of usage statistics, aiming to improve the accuracy and integrity of usage metrics in the face of automated systems.

Overall, the integration of the COUNTER guidelines within OJS helps provide reliable usage data and allows users to analyze the impact and reach of their content effectively <https://docs.pkp.sfu.ca/learning-ojs/en/statistics> (accessed on 14 June 2023).

UCT’s Publications on the Platform

UCT has already published 25 monographs (<https://openbooks.uct.ac.za/uct/catalog/> (accessed on 14 June 2023)) on the platform and publishes six journals. Two of the six journals (<https://journals.uct.ac.za/> (accessed on 14 June 2023)) are included in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)—*Journal of Construction Business and Management* and *Journal of African Real Estate Research*. The other South African institution that is publishing on the platform is the Durban University of Technology. The first non-South African university to adopt the platform is the University of Namibia. Three universities in Zimbabwe and one in Cameroon are already publishing on the platform. Training sessions have been held for institutions in Ghana and Nigeria. Training is planned for May 2023 for representatives from across the continent. This training will be appended to the African Library and Information Associations and Institutions conference.

The success of the “library as publisher” service has lured the University of Cape Town to rethink its commercial model in lieu of an open model—to be discussed later.

4. Results and Discussion

As indicated, the UCT Libraries publishing platform is used as the unit of analysis to demonstrate how libraries can dismantle structures that perpetuate inequality and exclusionary practices. The authors will use two of the 25 publications, primarily the *Constitutional Law for Students* textbook, to show that libraries can reclaim the philanthropic underpinnings of the openness movement and to champion inclusivity, equity and diversity.

It needs to be reiterated that the fundamental driver of the openness movement is the open sharing of scholarship. By default, the principles of inclusivity, equity and diversity need to be cocooned. To demonstrate the effectiveness of the service, the authors use downloads as a means of measuring success. The synopsis below of additional criteria points to success more than the basic of being openly shared.

4.1. Constitutional Law for Students

The first book is *Constitutional Law for Students*. This textbook has and continues to have a significant impact on teaching, learning and research. This diamond open-access publication addresses the issue of equity, inclusion, development and empowerment as pointed out in the synopsis. It also brings to the fore the mainstreaming of scholarship.

This is a book written for students by students in support of a complex subject in the law degree in South Africa. This book had a soft launch in 2019 at the SPARC Africa open-access symposium. The hard launch was in March 2020 and has since solicited 150,780 downloads. Of the 150,780 downloads (Figure 1), 101,470 (67.3%) are from within South Africa and the other 49,310 (32.7%) are from the rest of the world including Global North countries.

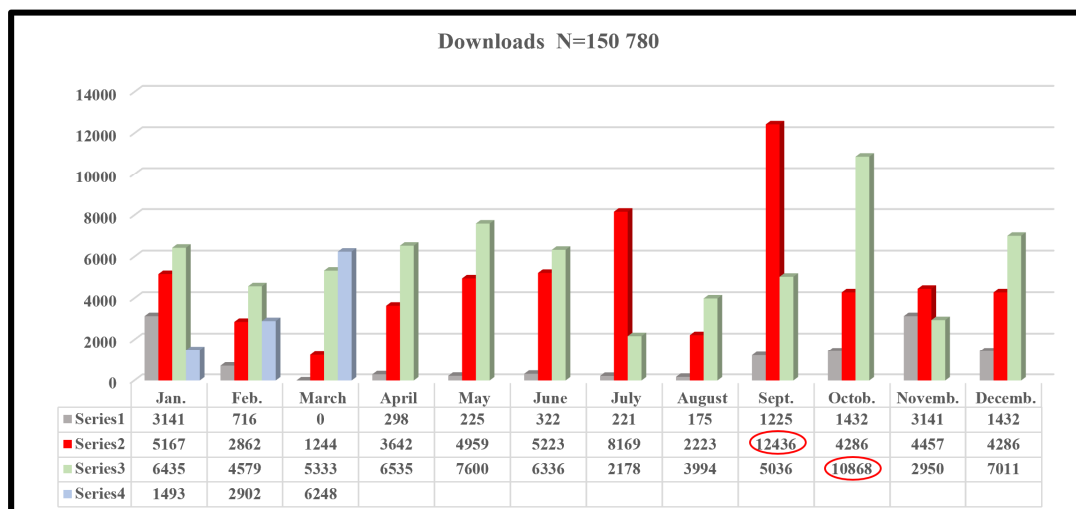


Figure 1. Downloads of Constitutional law textbook.

As can be seen from the graph (Figure 1), there is a steep rise in downloads just before the examination period. One can safely infer that students are using the book in preparation for examinations.

4.1.1. Synopsis of Additional Criteria

As pointed out by Raju [9], there is very little contestation that this textbook has met the minimum benchmark. It is freely accessible and has been downloaded in numerous countries in both the Global North and Global South. Let us examine the additional criteria to demonstrate inclusivity, equity and diversity.

Equity: a large cohort of students are second-language or later English speakers, who have challenges navigating the dense legal content. The book is written by students for students under the guidance of a very experienced tutor. The language is more understandable without compromising academic rigor. The book is available for free—another achievement.

Inclusion: to continue addressing the language challenge—this book is also available in audio format, which allows students to listen to the book before reading it. This feature makes the book more inclusive, as it caters to different learning styles. The visually impaired can also listen to the book without seeking appropriate software to support their learning. It is important to note that 19,027 (18.8%) of the 101,470 were for the audio format of the book.

It is common knowledge that smartphones are more available than computers. The fact that the content can be viewed in HTML or ePUB format radically improves accessibility.

Leveling the playing field: embedded in the textbook are mini workbooks to help students prepare for the constitutional law examination.

Expanded readership: when this book was conceptualized, the assumption was that it would be used across the country to assist with teaching and learning in South Africa. As indicated, there were 150,780 downloads. What was most surprising was that 32.7% (49,310 of 150,780) of the downloads were from outside of the country, which was further spread across 154 other countries (Figure 2). Even more surprising was the fact that the book was downloaded in several Global North countries (Figure 2). An important lesson for all is that open publishing makes the book internationally available and allows for the book to be downloaded anywhere in the world.

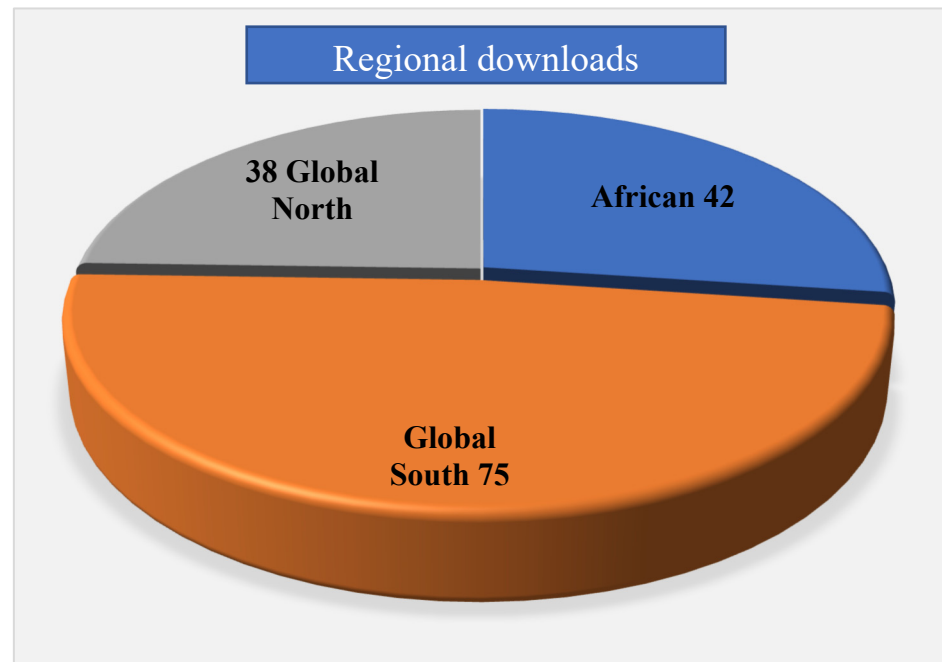


Figure 2. Regional distribution of downloads.

Development: the use of students to create content is also in support of developing the next generation of academics.

Empowerment: the fact that text is easily understandable serves to empower citizens. The rank and file can familiarize themselves with their rights, consolidating South Africa's democracy. Further, by increasing readership, it subsequently means that more people are learning about and becoming aware of their rights, empowering them to take an active role in their own protection as citizens.

4.1.2. Impact of Constitutional Law for Students

The relatively high number of downloads from across the world is a demonstration of this book being compliant with the philanthropic elements of the open-access processes, that is, free to the reader and with an open license.

The authors examine the impact of the book on student pass rates at UCT. The data for analysis were obtained from the university's student administration system (PeopleSoft) and extracted by the relevant authorities. The authors acknowledge that there are numerous variables that contribute to student success. Be that as it may, the authors delved into the inferred impact of the publication of the textbook on student pass rate.

Given that there was a soft launch of the book in 2019, the authors used this year as the pre- and post-launch separation. As can be seen in [Table 1] the average pass percentage of Black³ students for the period 2016–2018 was 65% and the average for the period 2020–2022 was 74%. This is a significant increase after the launch of the textbook. In the years 2021 and 2022, the pass percentage was 80% for each year.

Table 1. Black student pass rates.

	No. of Black Students	Fail	Fail %	Pass	Pass %	
2016	115	36	31	79	69	Pre-intervention
2017	137	44	32	93	68	
2018	136	47	35	89	65	
2019	132	50	38	82	62	Intervention
2020	133	50	38	83	62	
2021	132	27	20	105	80	Post-intervention
2022	176	35	20	141	80	

A substantial number of Black students are funded by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Limited funding has forced students to make choices between the purchase of textbooks and other essentials such as food and accommodation. The authors analyzed data relating to the success rate of NSFAS students. For the period 2016–2018, the average pass rate was 14.4% (Tables 2 and 3) and the pass rate post-publication was 32% (see Tables 2 and 3). The inference drawn here is that there is more than a 122% increase in the pass rate of the extremely needy, that is, those Black students on NSFAS funding.

Table 2. Black students and NSFAS pass rates.

Year	Race Group	Registered Students	NSFAS Passed	%	Year	Race Group	Registered Students	NSFAS Passed	%
2016	African	67	10		2020	African	85	16	
	Colored	34	3			Colored	34	6	
	Indian	14	2			Indian	14	3	
		115	15	13%			133	25	18.80%
2017	African	82	15		2021	African	95	40	
	Colored	36	4			Colored	28	15	
	Indian	19	0			Indian	9	2	
		137	19	13.90%			132	57	43.20%
2018	African	81	17		2022	African	116	45	
	Colored	35	3			Colored	50	13	
	Indian	20	2			Indian	10	2	
		136	22	16.20%			176	60	34.10%
2019	African	80	15						
	Colored	38	6						
	Indian	14	2						
		132	23	17.40%					

Table 3. Pass rate of Black NSFAS students.

Year	% Pass	2019	Year	% Pass
2016	13	17.4%	2020	18.8
2017	13.9		2021	43.2
2018	16.2		2022	34.1
Average	14.4			32

The impact, via downloads and student pass rate, in the opinion of the authors fulfils all obligations as outlined in the synopsis above.

4.2. *Dikeledi ha di Wele Fatshe*

The second book is *Dikeledi ha di wele fatshe*. The dearth of Sesotho literature at South African schools has negatively impacted the study of language. With the publication of this book, learners will be reading, for the first time, a book written by an African for the purpose of supporting literature studies in schools (Figure 3). Previously, Sesotho students read English language books and converted the discussion into Sesotho.

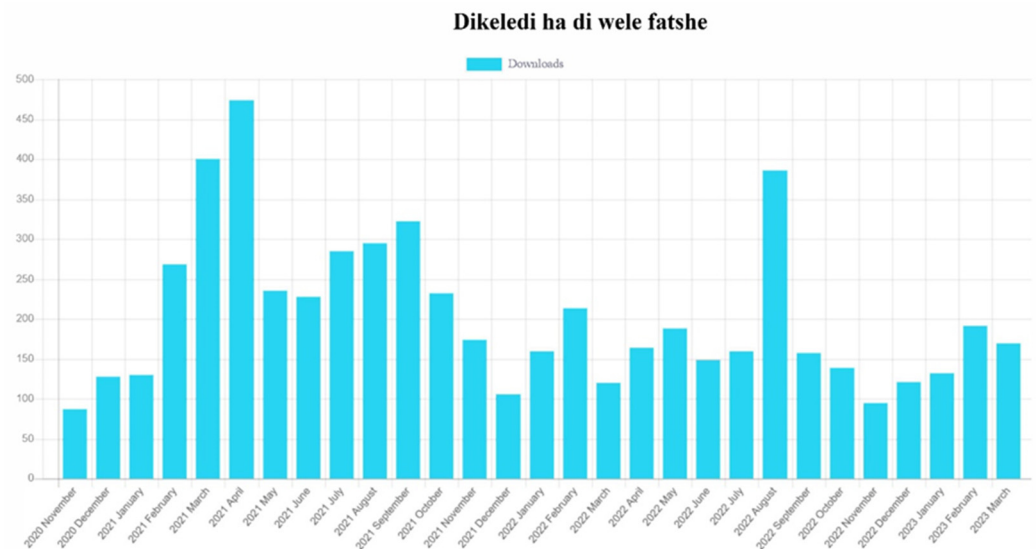


Figure 3. Downloads of *Dikeledi ha di wele fatshe*.

What is extraordinary is that this is an indigenous language book that is being downloaded across the world (Figure 4). The most notable aspect is that the book is being accessed by Global North countries. Despite the modest number of downloads, it still indicates access and thus interest by countries in the Global North.

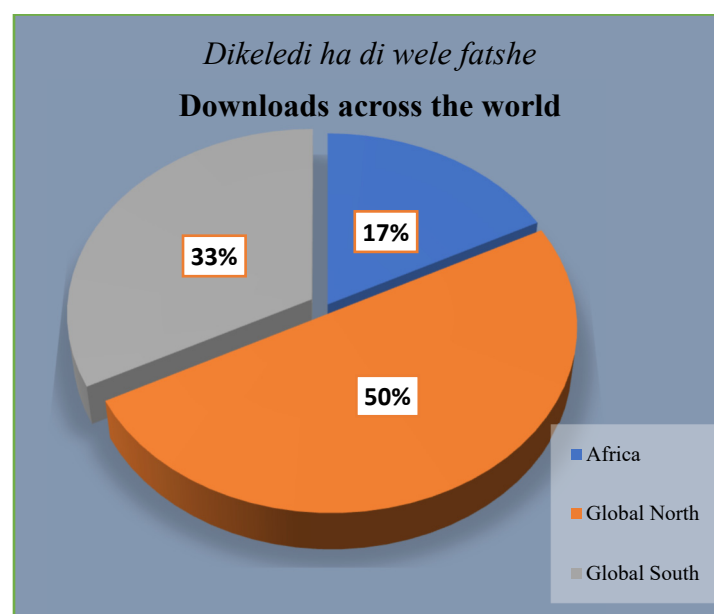


Figure 4. Distribution of downloads of *Dikeledi ha di wele fatshe*.

4.3. Transitioning of Commercial Arm to the Continental Platform

In 1994, UCT created UCT Press, as university presses are considered to be strategically important since they serve two critical imperatives, namely, enhancing the prestige of the institution and distributing the scholarship generated by the institution. The commonly held view is that a press facilitates the roll-out of the university's "noble duty". There is also a school of thought that asserts that university presses have the potential to be inspirational in the promotion of research. In the context of UCT, the press will contribute to accelerating the growth of research and enhancing its research-intensive leadership role on the continent.

The university sought a commercial entity to manage the publishing and ancillary processes. After 25 years, the commercial publishing house declared that UCT Press was financially unsustainable resulting in a proposed dissolution of the business relationship between the publishing house and UCT. The UCT Press imprint was returned to the university [23]. In accepting the return of the Press and guided by the university's commitment to pursuing a social justice agenda, UCT embarked on a hybrid model with the commitment of being completely open-access in the coming years.

Since the return of the imprint to UCT, 64 of the back titles have been published on the continental platform (<https://openuctpress.uct.ac.za/uctpress> (accessed on 14 June 2023)). For all intents and purposes, these are titles that were not selling, with large quantities of the print version being disposed. However, since being published openly, there has been a significant increase in the number of downloads of these "non-selling" titles, clearly showing the increased visibility and discoverability of open content.

Two of the more downloaded titles are (see below the screen captures):

1. A Dictionary of South African Indian English (with 1626 downloads) (Figure 5)
2. Beyond Impunity: New Directions for Governance in Malawi (with 525 downloads) (Figure 6).



Figure 5. A Dictionary of South African Indian English.

Beyond impunity: New directions for governance in Malawi

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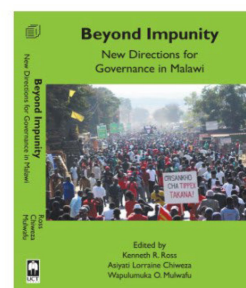
Asiyati Lorraine Chiweza
University of Malawi

Wapulumuka O. Mulwafu
Mzuzu University

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58331/UCTPRESS.12>

Synopsis

"This comprehensive, compelling, accessible and timely volume should be compulsory reading to academics, policy makers, social activists, and the



Print on Demand [↗](#)

Month	No.
May	80
June	5
July	118
August	20
September	29
October	77
November	21
December	22
January	47
February	63
March	43

Beyond impunity New directions for governance in Malawi

PDF

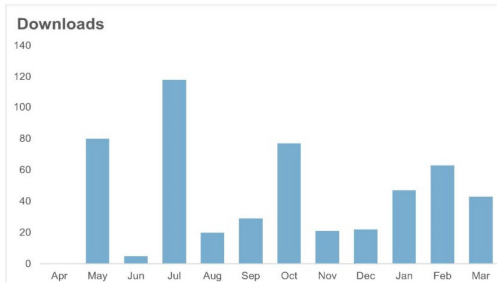


Figure 6. *Beyond Impunity: New Directions for Governance in Malawi.*

5. Conclusions

Despite the origins of the open-access movement, we are still far from a world of knowledge exchange that is truly open. This is perpetuated by myriad biases that are held within the current scholarly ecosystem that consciously or unconsciously uphold the unequal transfer of knowledge between the Global South and Global North. In the current openness movement, exclusion and elitism contradict the principles of diversity and social inclusion on which the movement is rooted. It is against this backdrop that UCT Libraries, with the assistance of the University's central ICTS department, established the continental platform. The platform exemplifies that to overcome the boundaries set by traditional publishing practices, there has to be an intentional strategy that is embedded with social justice imperatives. Its multi-tenant model fosters collaboration in Africa by opening channels for knowledge dissemination. The exemplar of the constitutional law textbook highlights the authors' aspirations to disrupt the current commercial publishing model. It also demonstrates the value of the OA movement in contributing to student success and the increased accessibility of freely available content. The exemplar also illuminates how the advancement of social justice principles has reshaped the scholarly publishing landscape. In developing and growing this platform, not only does it highlight and introduce a larger pool of African voices into the research landscape, but it is also an act of reclaiming and returning to the philanthropic principles on which OA was founded.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ ORCID is a persistent digital identifier (an ORCID iD) that the researcher owns and controls and distinguishes one researcher from another.
- ² Crossref is an official digital object identifier Registration Agency of the International DOI Foundation.
- ³ In terms of the South African legal system, the racial classification “Black” is defined as Africans, Indians and Coloureds.

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