

Realising the Potential of Open for Equitable, Resilient Recovery

Side event organised by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, UN, New York and the Hernan Santa Cruz Library, ECLAC, 5 May 2021

KEY POINTS

- *Open access promises to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. However, this contribution is not guaranteed, and gaps and inequalities remain.*
- *The pandemic has underlined that simply making research open does not – on its own – guarantee an effective counterweight to misinformation.*
- *To combat this, a range of policy and practical actions are also needed, notably around connectivity, business models for scholarly communication, skills and campaigns and platforms for information dissemination.*

The pandemic has thrown a new light on both the potential, and the risks associated with information. We have seen both the power of open access and open science to accelerate the search for effective treatments and vaccines, as well as to enable wider research and learning to continue.

Nonetheless, open access to the results of scientific research – and the possibility to participate in its creation through open science – remains unequal across the world. In particular in developing countries, researchers can face challenges in order both to read, and to publish work that could help accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

At the same time, concerns about an ‘infodemic’ (or ‘disinfodemic’) have heightened concerns about the impact that misinformation can have on the effectiveness of responses to COVID. Despite the increasing volume of high-quality research information available for free, it is clear that this is not enough on its own to provide a response.

In short, action is required if the potential of open access to support development (including combatting misinformation harmful to development) is to be achieved.

This side event, organised by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, UN, New York and the Hernan Santa Cruz Library at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, looked to explore which actions in particular were already proving their value. Moderation was provided by Wouter Schallier, Head of the Hernan Santa Cruz Library, and Stephen Wyber, IFLA.

OMO OAIYA, Chief Strategy Officer of the West and Central Africa Research and Education Network, highlighted the importance of good **internet connectivity** to allow for more equitable participation in open science.

He also highlighted the need to develop open science in a way that respected local, national and regional preferences and ways of doing things, in order to ensure a strong sense of ownership.

ELLEN TISE, Director of Libraries at Stellenbosch University, focused on the need to reflect further on **business models** in publishing which risked excluding developing countries, either through high subscription prices, or high article processing charges.

She noted that a key goal was to find a way of sustaining local journals and repositories, for example in Africa, which were best placed to promote local research and innovation.

JONATHAN HERNANDEZ-PEREZ, Researcher at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, echoed this emphasis on promoting models of open access publishing that promote a **diversity of contributions**, drawing on long-standing work on information diversity.

In particular, action was needed to avoid dominance by one language leading to the devaluing of research in other languages, for example through lower impact factors.

DILARA BEGUM, Chair of the Department of Library and Information Studies at East-West University, Dhaka, focused on the importance of accompanying the availability of materials with a drive to build **information literacy skills**.

The need to build such competences had been made clear by the pandemic, and in particular by the emergence of the 'infodemic'. In addressing this, libraries could play an essential role.

JUAN MIGUEL DIEZ-JIMENEZ, UN Information Centre for the Caribbean, presented the **Verified initiative**, which provided set of resources both to encourage people to double-check what they read, as well as to provide responses to common misconceptions.

The initiative has had a major impact, thanks to its attractive presentation, translation into different languages, and responsiveness to developments. He encouraged libraries around the world to draw on the available resources as part of their own work.

Finally, **THANOS GIANNAKOPOULOS**, Head of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, UN New York, presented about the work of the United Nations to develop its own repository as an easily used **tool for accessing information** about the organisation's work, supporting both research and better information.

The complexity of the task at hand represented a major challenge, requiring careful thought about design and use of the latest technologies, offering valuable lessons about how to facilitate access to quality information.

From enhancing connectivity to consideration of business models and their side effects, and from information literacy skills to the development of platforms and tools to support discovery, many elements need to be in place. Active and well resourced libraries can play a major role in making progress.

With less than ten years to go to deliver on the 2030 Agenda, it is high time to fill these gaps, and so ensure that openness can fulfil its potential as a driver of inclusive growth and resilience.

Watch the session on [IFLA's YouTube Channel](#).