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Landmark global summit advances commitment to social justice in open access publishing

The University of Cape Town (UCT) Libraries, in collaboration with global partners, recently hosted the second Global Summit on Diamond Open Access (DOA), advancing a movement committed to equitable knowledge dissemination. Building on the momentum of the inaugural summit in Toluca, Mexico, this edition placed social justice at the heart of DOA, emphasising the development of an inclusive, bias-free publishing ecosystem.

A global commitment to social justice in open access

The summit, co-hosted with Redalyc/Amelica (Latin America), SPARC (USA), the National Research Foundation (SA), UNESCO, CLACSO (Latin America), the Association of African Universities (AAU) and Science Europe, reinforced the need for DOA as a model that ensures accessibility, equity and independence in scholarly publishing. While the Toluca summit focused on positioning DOA as a public good, the Cape Town meeting took a transformative step further by prioritising social justice, decolonisation and inclusivity.

UCT Library Director of Research and Learning Dr Reggie Raju said the primary goal of the summit was to embed social justice within the Diamond Open Access movement, ensuring a more equitable and inclusive publishing landscape. Key objectives included:

- Expanding the DOA model, particularly among marginalised research communities;
- Strengthening the open access movement to be more inclusive and equitable; and
- Building capacity by integrating scholarly communication into Library and Information Science (LIS) education curricula.

The summit also addressed the systemic challenges within academic publishing, focusing on:

- Fostering independence in DOA through authorship, editorial and journal management training;
- Developing the next generation of scholarly communication leaders;
- Creating global communities of practice to sustain DOA growth;
- Establishing adaptable DOA frameworks across diverse regional contexts;
- Reforming research assessment to sustain the model; and

- Drafting a declaration advocating for an inclusive, bias-free publishing ecosystem.

Key outcomes and future commitments

Raju said a significant summit milestone was the drafting of the Toluca-Cape Town Declaration on Diamond Open Access, a definitive statement affirming that scholarly knowledge is a human right. The declaration underscores DOA as a community-owned, community-led and non-commercial model that prioritises social justice, decolonisation and inclusivity.

Additional key outcomes included:

- Increased visibility of research from marginalised communities;
- Strengthening of non-commercial publishing infrastructures;
- Addressing systemic biases in academic publishing;
- Expanding regional forums to challenge exploitative research practices; and
- Promoting research assessment models that recognise diverse contributions

Strategic initiatives set in motion include:

- The establishment of the African Coalition of Library Consortia to advocate for DOA;
- The publication of a scholarly collection from the DKIS conference, set for release in April 2025;
- The formation of the African Forum for the Advancement of Diamond Open Access;
- The integration of DOA into the strategic agenda of African academic institutions; and
- A proposed collaborative agreement between Redalyc, AAU and UCT to advance DOA.

The impact of the Toluca-Cape Town Declaration

“The Toluca-Cape Town Declaration represents a transformative shift in global scholarly communication, particularly for the Global South. Eliminating financial barriers for both authors and readers ensures that knowledge remains a public good rather than a commodity,” added Raju.

High article processing charges and restricted access have historically excluded Global South scholars from dominant publishing systems. Diamond Open Access directly addresses these inequities, fostering a community-driven, non-commercial and inclusive model.

Beyond accessibility, the declaration advocates for research assessment reforms that recognise the value of diverse knowledge systems. Current evaluation frameworks favour high-impact journals controlled by commercial publishers, often sidelining scholars from marginalised regions. A shift toward recognising community-driven, open-access scholarship is essential to sustaining equitable knowledge production.

The declaration promotes linguistic and regional diversity, ensuring that scholarship is not measured solely by Global North-centric metrics or confined to English-language publications. This commitment strengthens a more representative and just scholarly ecosystem where diverse epistemologies and perspectives are valued.

A call for a just and open knowledge future

The second Global Summit on Diamond Open Access marks a pivotal step in reimagining scholarly publishing as an inclusive and equitable system. “UCT Libraries and its global partners remain steadfast in their commitment to fostering an open, just and sustainable knowledge-sharing ecosystem,” concluded Raju.

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