

Chapter 8

Institutional Repositories in Africa: Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of open access has opened a world of opportunities for academic and research institutions. One of such opportunities is the establishment of institutional repositories (IRs). This chapter examined the emergence and creation of IRs and trends in Africa. It noted that the development of IRs in most African countries is still at the infancy stage. The chapter highlighted the important role of libraries in the management of IRs. The Chapter also identified and discussed important issues and challenges of IRs in Africa. The identified challenges include lack of awareness, lack of required funding to establish and manage IRs, lack of Information and communication technology infrastructure, among others. It concluded that the establishment of IRs is a compulsory venture for institutions of higher learning in Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of scholarly communication in an academic environment cannot be overemphasized. The American Library Association, ALA (2015) defined scholarly communication as the system through which research and other scholarly writings are created, evaluated for quality, disseminated to the scholarly community, and preserved for future use. Various media of scholarly communication abound which according to ALA (2015) may be through formal or informal channels. The formal and informal channels according to ALA include publication in peer-reviewed journals and electronic listservs respectively.

As important as scholarly communication is to the scholarly environment, it has been observed that most of the outlets used for communication such as journals, online databases etc. are beyond the reach of the scholarly community in terms of the cost of subscription which has led to the expression of dissatisfaction by scholars. Ogbomo and Muokebe (2015) observed the increasing dissatisfaction expressed by scholars and researchers with the existing model of scholarly communication where they lamented that subscription rates for journals were high and the fear that universities may lose their print materials if not properly archived was on the increase.

Abubakar (2010) noted a profound and progressive change across various disciplines as occasioned by the rapid development and advancement of information and communication technology (ICT). The ICT era has indeed heralded a new way of preserving scholarly communications making them available and accessible on the web without any form of restriction. This is a total departure from the traditional way of preservation. Digital preservation of such scholarly communications has become widely accepted hence the introduction of repositories. Bailey (2005) observed that repositories are an essential component in reforming the system of scholarly communication. Institutional Repositories (IR) provide an alternative model of scholarly communication that is less cumbersome when compared with the traditional publishing model (John-Okeke, 2008). Commenting on the importance of repositories especially to higher institutions of learning, the Alpha Babel Library (2007) observed that “the institutions of higher education all over the world are experiencing the necessity of managing their education, research and resources in a more effective and open way. By making the research and scientific output easily available, they will support the development of new relationships between the academicians and both national and international research centres”.

A lot of researches go on in higher institutions of learning which according to Ogbomo and Muokebe (2015) have led to the increased quest for alternative modes of preserving and disseminating findings of the research. Ivwighreghweta (2012) also noted that the emergence of IR has revolutionized the methods of preserving as well as communicating research outputs in academic and research institutions.

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