

# Where is the money?

## Funding for open access book publishing in Africa

Hetta Pieterse

There is widespread international pressure for South African authors and publishers to make more book content available for free. For open access (OA) publishing to be enabled, someone needs to foot the bill – creating the publication does come at a high labour cost, apart from the dilemma that the content creator, the author, is even expected to give up all royalties and literally in most cases cannot earn any income from her/his written outputs. While funding is more readily available for journals publishing, this article traces sources of funding available for publishing OA books.

Funding in OA scholarly publishing remains focused on journals (EmeraldOpen 2020, p1) at the expense of OA books, although in the Northern hemisphere wider financial support is available. The Swiss Higher Education Policy was adapted in 2018 to fund open access book and book chapter publishing (SNSF 2020, p1) in support of its expectation for all publicly financed research to be freely accessible from 2024.

Of the 18 business models in use by OA book publishers internationally, the highest number of variations in practice is for institutional subsidy, and most of the sponsored publishers sell print on demand (POD) copies to help recover costs (OADWiki 2020, p1).

In 2015 a group of mission-driven open access publishers formed the Radical Open Access Collective (RAD) (RAD 2019, p1). The South African OA book publisher, African Minds is listed among the 21 academic-led publishers. Within the RAD's substantive information portal is an OA funders list, where Northern Hemisphere-focused funders dominate (14 from Europe, eight from the USA) – while an additional list of 24 OA funders (12 in Europe, eight in the USA and four in Canada) is dedicated to Film and Media Studies (RAD 2019, p1).

Africa's OA scholarly book publishing sector forms part of the higher education ecosystem per country, where most scholarly presses have affiliations with higher education or research institutions. Out of the 52 scholarly presses in Africa, the only publishers found to publish OA books are based in Burkina Faso, Gabon and Ethiopia (one in each country) and the rest are in



Hetta Pieterse, UNISA, [pietehe@unisa.ac.za](mailto:pietehe@unisa.ac.za)

South Africa (Van Schalkwyk & Luescher 2017, p17).

In terms of Fourth Industrial Revolution digital infrastructure, many countries in Africa are rated as under-connected (African Development Bank Report 2020, p83). The internet penetration percentage across countries varies; from 14.9% in Ethiopia, 18.2 % in Burkina Faso, to 46.7% in Gabon, while 53.7% of South Africans have internet access (Internet World Stats 2019, p1).

Only 15 out of Africa's 52 scholarly book publishers are active, based on publications output and online activity (Van Schalkwyk & Luescher 2017, p15). This indicates

that even traditional scholarly book publishers are under economic strain, apart from the more demanding, upfront fund-driven OA publishing model. Crow (2009, p2) warns that OA is 'a distribution model, not an income model'.

African publishers are subject to upheavals in political and economic environments which affect access to funds. Given dire and specific health and infrastructure needs, funders' priorities are focused to provide for basic needs – from health care and agriculture (ensuring sustainable living and food security), to small business, ICT and infrastructure development, and on children's needs. Of the 24 countries in Western and Central Africa it supports, UNICEF identifies five funding priorities (two of which cover access to education and quality learning, but for children and adolescents) (UNICEF 2020, p1). The World Health Organisation also offers OA funding for sponsored research (RAD 2020, p1).

### Partnerships and available funding

Partnerships could benefit Africa in terms of resources sharing and collaboration. The African Publishers Network (APNET) was founded in 1992 with the aim of boosting indigenous and independent publishers on the continent. Supported by membership from 41 countries, at a June 2019 seminar with the International



One of the relatives of the last speakers of the Kora languages seen here holding the book with author Menan du Plessis: *The Kora* book pictured is an open access and print book in parallel.

