

*A Global Perspective on Open Access*  
Amsterdam, January 20, 2011

Open Access has become a passionately discussed topic all over the world. Important milestones in this global debate were the Budapest Open Access Initiative (2002), *Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities* (2003) and the *Salvador Declaration on Open Access* (2005). More and more funding agencies make Open Access-publishing a prerequisite for their support. Universities urge scholars to disseminate their publications via freely available repositories. Libraries, publishers and governments reflect upon adequate policies.

Yet the issues at stake demand a global perspective. The voice of the Global South is not sufficiently heard in these discussions. Therefore, the Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO **convened** an expert meeting in order to discuss the role that Open Access can play in the development of global science. Participants came from various parts of the world – Europe, Latin-America, Africa and Asia – and from institutions that organize science and access to scientific information in the Netherlands and in the world, such as the International Network for the availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), the International Council for Science (ICSU), the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the organization of European Research Libraries SPARC-Europe, the scientific publishing house Elsevier, organizations that provide archiving and ICT services for the Dutch scientific community like DANS and SURF, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences and Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research. Stakeholders from universities, the government, the European Commission and the UNESCO Secretariat in Paris also participated in the discussion.

In this document a comprehensive definition of Open Access is used, comprising both peer reviewed scientific publications and research data, and including access via institutional repositories. Long term preservation ('Permanent Access') is an essential part of Open Access.

The Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO **summarizes the results** of this meeting as follows:

UNESCO supports Open Access for the benefit of the global flow of knowledge, innovation and equitable socio-economic development. Its Constitution, written long before the advent of digital publishing, gives the Organisation a clear mandate in this field: UNESCO should 'maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge, by assuring the conservation and protection of the world's inheritance of books, works of art and monuments of history and science' (Constitution, art, 1.2 c). Open Access is one of the three pillars of UNESCO's approach to increase access to scientific knowledge, together with the promotion of Free and Open Software (FOSS) and of Open Educational Resources (OERs).

Open Access should not be seen as an end in itself, but as an instrument for enhancing access to scientific knowledge. As such, Open Access can be defined as a 'global public good': an instrument to stimulate the growth and quality of global science, as well as an instrument for realizing the rights to share in scientific advancement and its benefits, to education and to information (articles 27, 26 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights respectively). So UNESCO can use Open Access to advance, among other things, the quality of education, public health and economic progress. Permanent Access is an important component of increasing and diffusing knowledge by creating the possibility of re-use, re-analysis, inter-comparison and combining of publications and data, thus increasing productivity and new insights.

When discussing the position of the Global South in the worldwide promotion of access to knowledge it should be noted that this region is all but monolithic. The most vigorously developing countries in the world are situated in this region, and science is definitely included in their general dynamism. So there is a mutual interest for North and South to share research findings and data through two-sided linking of scientific information and promoting the internationalisation of science. Open Access facilitates the communication of research findings worldwide. Awareness raising among scientists and other stakeholders on the possibilities and advantages still needs to be enhanced.

But awareness raising is not enough. There are several practical obstacles to sharing scientific information in large parts of the world: the lack of access to expensive scientific journals, publishing models that charge authors for the article process costs, poor or unreliable access to internet, the lack of local databases for research data. As sustainable Open Access to scientific publications and data is one of the most promising tools for the progress of science in the global South, the specific problems of researchers in this part of the world should receive more attention of all policy makers.

This means that the goals of Open Access should be pursued in a pragmatic way, following a pluralistic approach that takes into account relevant peculiarities of individual cases. What will work in one place, will fail somewhere else. Countries differ vastly in the way scientific life is organised, in their social and legal systems and technological infrastructure. There is linguistic diversity and differences between scientific disciplines. Local journals often have an important role to play in the scientific development at the national or regional level. The proportion between publicly and privately financed science is not everywhere the same, so the argument that publicly funded research should be freely available to the public is, though universally true, not everywhere equally strong.

So all stakeholders should be aware that there is no 'royal road' to unhampered access to reliable and current scientific information. At the same time, it makes no sense for one country or region to act alone. Standard setting and coordination of efforts are important tasks that are beyond the power of individual governments. International cooperation is crucial to create systems that are flexible but reliable, secure but open, local and global. There is a need for a shared framework for research and development in order to develop high quality reliable systems, combining scientific quality control, guaranteed privacy mechanisms and ownership to individual researchers.

Therefore the Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO **appeals to**

*UNESCO*, with its function to maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge, to play an effective role as a clearing house, a standard setter, capacity builder and awareness raiser for the dissemination and long-term preservation of scientific knowledge. UNESCO should vigorously implement its Open Access policy, using both a top down and bottom up approach to provide support for Open Access policy development and implementation among high-level policy makers and research funding organizations. It should strengthen its partnerships with organisations for capacity building and training in this field. UNESCO has a special role to play in ensuring that there is full global involvement in the policy development.

*The Dutch government*, to take due notion of the prominent role that Dutch stakeholders play in the international discussion on Open Access when determining its Open Access policy and contributing to the policy of the European Union. Moreover, it should be aware that promoting Open Access has implications for the research output in the Global South. This can have important spin-offs for economic development. Providing access to on-line scientific resources can be a valuable instrument of development cooperation for which appropriate funding should be made available.

*Scientific institutions and other stakeholders*, to take on board the insights of this document when shaping their policy, by contributing to awareness raising on Open Access among scholars and policy makers. They should reflect upon sustainable new publication models, cooperate internationally on reliable processes and procedures, and play their role in capacity building in the Netherlands as well as internationally. Research funding agencies should accommodate the implications of Open Access in their funding strategies and procedures.