

SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS PUBLISHED RESEARCH: THE AFRICAN JOURNALS ONLINE (AJOL) CASE STUDY

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The Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI) was launched by INASP to improve access to research results between developing and developed countries. This project includes 4 components: (1) supply information online into academic and research libraries, (2) assist dissemination of national and regional scholarly publications, (3) provide training on best use of online resources, and (4) support local publishing through training in publishing skills. The first component of the programme provides over 7000 journals through negotiations with commercial publishers and learned societies in Europe, USA and Australasia. This ensures up-to-date and reliable information is provided to researchers. However, it is recognised that promoting indigenous scholarly/academic publications is equally important in supporting research. African Journals OnLine (AJOL) was launched as a pilot in 1997, and on the Internet in April/May 1998 with 10 science and 3 medical journals. The pilot ended in Dec 1999, and funding was given to continue the service. This online service (www.inasp.info/ajol) provides tables of contents and abstracts, plus information about each journal, including instructions for authors and subscription information. There are currently 161 titles on the service from 20 African countries, in Health, Agricultural Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts and Culture and Science and Technology. The service also provides a document delivery service, and between January-March 2003 supplied 95 articles. Almost 6000 people are registered onto the service, with approx. 200 new registrations each month. From pilot findings and subsequent evaluation the most important features of such a service are: (1) providing a repository of information about African journals (there are no similar lists of journals currently in publication); (2) diversity of subjects (this increases traffic to the site and helps to improve visibility of all journals); (3) credit card document delivery service (when credit card payments were introduced the number of orders increased substantially); (4) available abstracts (some journals cannot supply these, but their importance is continually commented upon by users of the site); (5) author instructions (several authors contact INASP asking about submission where there are no guidelines). The main reported benefit to journals on the service is increased visibility outside their country of publication, and some titles have reported increased submissions. It is more difficult to prove if the service has resulted in increased subscription and citation levels. The project appears to be providing some tangible benefits to the journals included, and may be considered a successful approach to supporting indigenous published research.