EIFL-OA: Open Access

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Open Access Advocacy at Sudan Higher Education Institutions

National Level (SudHENL)

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Results of the EIFL-funded Open Access Project

"*We are so interested in volunteering to promote open access among our colleagues as this is a great help for our community*" 5th year student, University of Khartoum

"*We will do our best, as this is helpful to us*" A representative of the Faculty of Science Students Union, University of Khartoum, 3rd year student

INTRODUCTION

University of Khartoum (U. of K.) is the leading higher education and research institution in Sudan, over half of the Sudanese research output is produced at U. of K. However, prior to the launch of the Dspace@ScienceUofK, an open access (OA) institutional (faculty) repository at the University of Khartoum's Faculty of Science, which was funded by EIFL in 2011 (learn more), there had not been any OA repositories in the entire country and there was very little awareness of OA as a tool of scholarly communication. Building on that success, this new project planned to extend DSpace@ScienceUofK to become the University of Khartoum's OA institutional repository (IR) and conduct awareness-raising campaigns among students and researchers across three significant institutions in Sudan: the University of Khartoum, Sudan University of Science and Technology (SUST), the first and leading polytechnic university in the country, and El Neelain University whose enrolment includes a large number of distance learning students.

The three universities decided to collaborate on this OA awareness raising project because the communication between their libraries was already established and they had already conducted several joint trainings.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Successfully engaged undergraduate students and young researchers to become new, major stakeholders in the project. The students created a SudHENL Facebook page and also provided feedback for innovative ways to raise awareness of OA among students, including drama and poetry based OA promotion activities.

- Government officials from the Sudanese Ministry of Communication and the Ministry of Justice, as well as journalists were also introduced to the benefits of OA. The Ministry of Justice is currently discussing strategies for a simple, standardized way to grant copyright permissions to all Sudanese output available online (Creative Commons licenses was one of the approaches being discussed).

- The University of Khartoum's Faculty of Science IR expanded to become a University of Khartoum OA IR. A productive dialogue was established at University of Khartoum during a one-day training course of 17 librarians and University administrators with regards to depositing materials in the OA IR.

- University of Khartoum created a Digital Content Online Higher Committee and one of its responsibilities includes drafting an OA policy. Three meetings have already taken place and OA policy wording is in progress.

- SUST and EL Neelain universities set up OA repositories (using DSpace FOSS) with the help of an enthusiastic IT engineer at University of Khartoum who installed and customized DSpace for them and trained IT engineers at SUST and El Neelain. Librarians at the three universities were trained by Rania M. H. Baleela on depositing into a DSpace repository. Both events took place under a UNESCO fund that was obtained by the Sudanese Universities Information Network (SUIN) – the national research and education network in Sudan composed of 37 governmental and private universities and institutions – prior to the start of SudHENL.

STRATEGIES, TACTICS AND TOOLS

Training activities started at Ahfad University for Women (a private university) and at the University of Khartoum (a governmental university). The project blog http://sudhenl.blogspot.com/ was established in Arabic to target a broader audience.

Copyright issues were covered in the training to ensure that researchers were aware of the opportunities and the restrictions for making their work openly available. Word-of-mouth is a very important communication tool in Sudan. We established a campaign based on this by contacting some very active undergraduate students and introducing the project to them. Knowing that they already have too many lectures and training courses, we asked them to tell us how to approach them with OA advocacy and promotion. They suggested a variety of innovative ideas to improve their university grounds and entertain students while advocating for OA; they suggested holding a tree planting event, cleaning the universities campuses as needed, and organizing poetry and art galleries in open spaces at the universities, all the while wearing the campaign logo and handing out pamphlets, in addition to holding signs saying "Ask me about IR" and "Do you wish to know about OA? Ask me".

On the day we received our OA pamphlets, as students helped to carry them into the building it drew the attention of other students who asked: what is going on? What are these materials about? And they got interested. The interest continues to grow since we gave out caps with the campaign logo for protection against the hot sun to those who helped. We have since received lots of interested students asking about how to join us. We are planning big a OA promotion event in February - March 2013.

Two training courses were held:

- **September 22, 2012, Ahfad University for Women**, a private university and member of the SUIN network. IT personnel and medical doctors at the Faculty of Medicine in addition to other departments attended a one-day course which provided an introduction to OA, OA IR and practical sessions on how to deposit materials into a DSpace-based repository. The audience was very interested and asked for another OA advocacy course to which they would invite their principles and the university higher administration.

- **October 6, 2012, main Library, University of Khartoum,** a one-day training course for 17 attendees from academia and research administration, IT specialists and librarians which resulted in a productive dialogue between librarians and administrators on depositing in the IR.

Two presentations on OA were given:

- **October 21, 2012:** a presentation entitled: "OA awareness-raising campaign among researchers at the Faculty of Science, University of Khartoum 2011 (OACIR2011) & OA Advocacy at Sudan Higher Education Institutions National Level 2012 (SudHENL2012) Projects: Enabling Sudanese Intellectual Output & OA" was delivered at the SUDAAK workshop on digitizing Sudanese culture. In addition to being very well received, the two projects generated a good discussion among the Sudanese Ministry of Communication personnel, journalists and other audience members. The organisers invited key members of the Ministry of Justice; their discussion focused on strategies for a simple, standardized way to grant copyright permissions to all Sudanese output available online (Creative Commons licenses was one of the solutions discussed).

- **January 13, 2013**: A presentation on OA publishing was delivered during the workshop, 'How to Write/Publish a Scientific Paper', which was attended by over 200 participants at the National Telecommunications Corporation hall. The event was an initiative of the Sudanese young researchers (see their Facebook group). The presentation was welcomed by the audience and positive feedback was posted on the Facebook group page (in Arabic). A large number of the attendees came forward afterwards to discuss the benefits of OA publishing, for many it was the first time that they had ever heard about OA. A blog post discussing the successes of the event and how much the audience enjoyed it is available here (in Arabic).

The 'word-of-mouth' campaign:

- We started a 'word-of-mouth' campaign among undergraduate students and it continues to grow. We asked them to join the project and brainstorm on the best way to involve their colleagues in the movement. A big meeting took place on January 14, 2013. As a result of this meeting a SudHENL Facebook page was created, and drama and poetry based OA promotion activities were suggested to demonstrate the value of OA to their peers. Undergraduate students are now actively involved in the project.

Pamphlets and caps:

- Three OA pamphlets in Arabic specifically designed for Sudanese students and researchers were designed and distributed.

- Head caps with the OA logo and SudHENL printed on them have been designed and distributed.

LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES

- Planning events at three universities with different strategies and priorities may be difficult, but not impossible if the team has a shared understanding of the goals (which was the case with this project).

- It is possible to achieve ambitious objectives on a tight budget when enthusiasm is the driving force. However, it is extremely important that there is a strong institutional commitment to the project.

- Having a clear institutional OA policy in place greatly facilitates the process when trying to raise awareness about the importance of OA to scholars. However, getting such a policy in place can take a very long time, which is frustrating.

- We faced lots of challenges, the most difficult was that we only received the funds in November 2012 due to sanctions on the country, which meant that there was a great deal of pressure to complete a lot of activities before the end of the year. The SudHENL achievements mentioned above are the results of a very enthusiastic team who started working even before receiving money and who are still doing a great job.

- There is a need for a better Arabic OCR software and we tried to develop the software. Unfortunately, our plans were unsuccessful not only because of the lack of time but also because of the realization that it is a very large task that requires a lot of research and in fact even large labs are trying to solve this with little success. Nevertheless, we are now approaching another colleague to try and do something about it.

THE FUTURE

SudHENL is proving to be a successful project as more students and colleagues get involved. The project team has been strengthened, the Project Deputy-Manager, Mr. Mukhtar M. Mahmoud, is now well informed and is completing a variety tasks. The project assistant Ms. Isra ELfaki is becoming more involved and interested in OA and will be able to help with dissemination of campaigns planed for the future.

We are also planning two events to take place at the three universities (University of Khartoum, Sudan University for Science and Technology (SUST) and El Neelain University) in February and March 2013. The first event includes a drama team presenting work focused on the advantages of OA publishing for Sudanese researchers and students (we have already met with a staff member at the College of Music and Drama, SUST and discussed ways to advocate OA using drama). This event will be documented and the video recording will be uploaded to YouTube. The other event will focus on creating a better physical environment by having student volunteers get involved in community projects to improve university grounds (e.g. growing trees for shelter where needed, painting walls, cleaning, etc) while distributing pamphlets and small idea cards and explaining OA, IRs and CC-BY licence to passers-by.

We will keep working with the University of Khartoum Digital Content Online Higher Committee towards adopting institutional OA policy.