



*An Overview of the Emergence of ... Ibrahim, S. Y. & Abdullahi, H. (2025)*

## **An Overview of the Emergence of Open Access Publishing: Government Policies and the Academia in Africa**

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### **Abstract**

*The movement towards Open Access began in earnest in the late 20th century, driven by technological advancements in the digital realm and growing dissatisfaction with the traditional publishing model. This Paper explores Open Access (OA) publishing and how it facilitates free access to research materials, ensuring wider dissemination of knowledge. It includes several models such as Gold Open Access where Articles are freely available on the publisher's site, with authors or their institutions typically paying an Article Processing Charge (APC) to cover publication costs. Green Open Access where Authors self-archive their work in repositories after an embargo period, allowing free public access to preprints or post-prints and Diamond (Platinum) Open Access with both publishing and access free for authors and readers, often seen in smaller or community-driven journals. In Africa, initiatives like African Journals Online (AJOL) and the African Open Access and Scholarly Communication Coalition (AASCC) have driven OA adoption. These platforms provide access to African scholarly journals, promoting visibility and international collaboration. National policies in countries like South Africa, Uganda, and Nigeria also support OA, though challenges like inadequate infrastructure and the financial burden of APCs persist. Academics play a critical role in OA, publishing in OA journals, advocating for policies, creating repositories, and educating others. Their involvement enhances the accessibility, visibility, and impact of African research, fostering collaboration and supporting local development. Despite the advantages, barriers such as APC costs, limited infrastructure, and concerns about the prestige of OA journals hinder broader adoption in Africa. However, OA remains a vital tool for enhancing access to knowledge, particularly in low-resource settings, and contributes to Africa's scientific and social development. While open access is transforming scholarly publishing by making research more accessible and reducing barriers to knowledge, challenges related to cost and quality control remain.*

**Keyword:** Open Access Publishing, Emergence, Academia, Africa

### **Introduction**

**Open Access (OA)** is a publishing model that allows scholarly works, particularly research articles, to be made available online without access barriers such as paywalls or subscription fees. The primary goal of OA is to ensure that academic knowledge is freely accessible to all, thereby promoting the dissemination of research findings, accelerating innovation, and enhancing public access to scientific information (Suber, 2012). The movement towards Open Access began in earnest in the late 20th century, driven by technological advancements in the digital realm and growing dissatisfaction with the traditional publishing model. The first formal discussions on OA emerged in the 1990s, fueled by the rapid growth of the internet. Early proponents of OA, argued that publicly funded research should be freely available to the public (Harnad, 1995). The *Budapest Open Access Initiative* (BOAI) in 2002 was a landmark in the history of OA, outlining important principles for the movement and urging the global adoption of open access to scholarly literature. BOAI called for the transition of academic publishing towards OA models to ensure the free and universal availability of scholarly knowledge (Suber, 2012).



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Progressively, the development of Green OA and Gold OA was bolstered by policy changes in the early 2000s. Notably, in 2003, the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) mandated that all research funded by the agency be made freely available in PubMed Central (PMCID) after a 12-month embargo (Suber, 2012). The OA movement gained significant momentum with the rise of online repositories, such as arXiv (founded in 1991), which made preprints in physics and other disciplines freely available to the public (Laakso et al., 2011). In recent years, the momentum for OA has continued to grow, especially in Europe and the United States, where public funding agencies and academic institutions have pushed for the adoption of OA mandates. The European Union introduced OA policies through Horizon 2020 and later Horizon Europe, mandating OA publication for all research outputs resulting from EU-funded projects (European Commission, 2022). One of the most significant recent milestones was the launch of Plan S in 2018 by a coalition of research funders in Europe. Plan S aims to make all publicly funded research OA by 2025, requiring that researchers publish only in compliant open access journals or repositories (Coalition, 2024).

In Africa, the OA movement has been steadily growing, particularly with the support of international organizations, governmental policies, and local initiatives. One of the important drivers of OA in Africa has been the push for increased access to knowledge, especially given the financial barriers that hinder researchers' ability to publish in high-cost subscription-based journals. African researchers and institutions have increasingly embraced OA as a means to make their research accessible to global audiences (Okpechi, 2019). For instance, African Journals Online (AJOL) is a leading platform that supports OA by providing a repository of African scholarly journals. (Ogunyomi & Adeboye, 2017). Various African countries have taken steps to promote OA through national policies. For example, in 2018, the South African Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) introduced an OA policy that mandates OA publication of research funded by the government (Wagner, 2020). This policy was part of a broader strategy to improve the visibility of South African research and increase the country's scientific impact globally. Similarly, the Ugandan National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) has also introduced policies to support OA and open data as part of the country's development agenda (Olatunji & Ojo, 2021). Academics in Africa also play a central role in the Open Access (OA) movement, as they are both the producers and the primary consumers of scholarly research. Their involvement is crucial to the success of OA, influencing its adoption, development, and sustainability. Academics' engagement with OA is multifaceted, encompassing research publication, advocacy, and the creation of OA resources.

### **Collaborations and Global Support for Open Access in Africa**

The promotion of Open Access (OA) publishing in Africa has been significantly influenced by both regional collaborations and international support. While Africa faces unique challenges in terms of research funding, infrastructure, and access to academic resources, various collaborative initiatives and global partnerships have played a crucial role in advancing the OA movement across the continent. These collaborations have facilitated the development of OA infrastructure, increased access to scientific knowledge, and promoted African research on the global stage. International collaborations have played a crucial role in advancing OA in Africa. Initiatives like OpenAIRE and The Digital Library of Information on African Research (DLIR) are working to improve the accessibility of African research. OpenAIRE, for instance, is an EU-funded project that helps African researchers manage and disseminate research data through OA (Githaiga & Mgaiwa, 2021). Moreover, African participation in global OA initiatives, such as Plan S (which mandates that publicly funded research



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must be openly accessible), continues to grow, even though some African countries face challenges in meeting these requirements due to limited funding and infrastructure (Coalition, 2024).

Some of the international initiatives directed towards supporting OA in Africa, to bridge the gaps in resources and infrastructure include but not limited to:

**The OpenAIRE Project:** OpenAIRE is a European Union-funded initiative that supports researchers, institutions, and funders in adopting OA practices. While OpenAIRE primarily operates within Europe, it has expanded its support to include African researchers, offering tools, training, and guidance on managing open research data and ensuring that research funded by European and African organizations is publicly accessible (Githaiga & Mgaiwa, 2021). OpenAIRE's support has been instrumental in increasing the visibility of African research, particularly in terms of open data and publications.

**The Research4Life Initiative:** Research4Life, a partnership between the World Health Organization (WHO), FAO, and other stakeholders, provides free access to academic journals and e-books in low- and middle-income countries, including many in Africa. This initiative has played a vital role in improving access to scientific literature for African researchers, enabling them to stay abreast of global developments without facing financial barriers (Muthusamy et al., 2017). Research4Life's OA model helps to alleviate the knowledge gap in Africa by offering free access to academic resources across disciplines, particularly health and agriculture.

**The Global Open Access Fund:** Initiatives such as the Open Society Foundations (OSF) support OA publishing in Africa through funding opportunities that promote the development of local OA journals and platforms. By providing financial backing, the OSF has helped reduce the reliance on expensive APCs, which are often a barrier for African researchers (Tennant et al., 2016). These collaborations ensure that African researchers are not excluded from the OA movement due to financial limitations.

### Types of Open Access (OA)

1. **Gold Open Access:** In this model, articles are made freely available on the publisher's website, and the author or their institution often pays an Article Processing Charge (APC) to cover the costs of publication (Tennant et al., 2016). This method has gained popularity in recent years as a way to ensure that academic research is accessible without the need for readers to pay for access.
2. **Green Open Access:** This model involves authors self-archiving their work in institutional or subject-specific repositories, often after an embargo period (Suber, 2012). While the final version of a paper may not always be freely available immediately, the preprint or postprint versions can still be accessed by the public.
3. **Diamond Open Access:** Also referred to as "Platinum" OA, this model does not require authors to pay any charges and ensures that both publishing and access are free to both authors and readers. This model is more commonly seen in smaller journals or initiatives, especially in developing countries (McKiernan et al., 2016).

### African-Led Collaborative Initiation for Open Access Publishing

While global support is essential, African-led initiatives have also been important in fostering OA growth within the continent. Some of the most significant African-led initiatives include:

**African Journals Online (AJOL):** AJOL is one of the largest and most well-established OA platforms in Africa. It provides free access to thousands of African scholarly journals, enabling African researchers to share their work with the global community (Ogunyomi & Adebayo, 2017). AJOL is a



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vital resource for African academics, facilitating the dissemination of research from a variety of fields such as health, agriculture, and education. AJOL's success highlights the importance of regionally based OA initiatives in making African research more visible and accessible to the world.

**The African Open Access and Scholarly Communication Coalition (AASCC):** The AASCC is a network of African academic institutions and organizations aimed at promoting OA publishing practices across the continent. Through the AASCC, African universities and research institutions collaborate on building the infrastructure needed for OA, as well as advocating for policies that ensure the accessibility of African research outputs (Mabweazara et al., 2017). This coalition has been instrumental in raising awareness about the importance of OA for Africa's development, especially as African scholarship faces challenges in being published in high-impact, international journals. Several African-led open access journals have been established to address local needs and provide a platform for African scholars. Journals such as African Health Sciences, African Journal of Information and Communication Technology, and The Pan African Medical Journal contribute significantly to the body of open access research in Africa. These journals play an important role in increasing the global visibility of African research, especially in fields like health, agriculture, and technology, which are critical to the continent's development (Jambo & Mulikita, 2021).

**The South African Research Chair Initiative (SARChI):** In South Africa, the government has supported OA through the SARChI program, which encourages researchers to publish their work in OA journals. This initiative not only facilitates the dissemination of South African research but also creates opportunities for collaboration with other African and international researchers. SARChI is part of a broader national strategy to increase the visibility and global competitiveness of South African science (Wagner, 2020).

### **Institutional Support and National Policies**

Several African governments and institutions have adopted policies that facilitate OA publishing. The most notable policies include:

**South Africa's National Open Access Policy:** In 2018, the South African Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) introduced a national OA policy. This policy mandates that all publicly funded research outputs be made available through OA platforms. The policy is supported by both local institutions and international collaborations, such as those with the South African National Research Foundation (NRF), which encourages the publication of research in OA journals and repositories (Wagner, 2020). The policy is part of a broader government initiative to enhance South Africa's participation in global research and increase the impact of locally produced knowledge.

**Uganda's National Open Access Policy:** Uganda has also made strides in promoting OA through the creation of a national OA policy. The policy encourages researchers to publish in OA journals and archives their research outputs in OA repositories. This policy is part of Uganda's broader scientific development agenda, which seeks to improve the accessibility and global competitiveness of the country's research (Olatunji & Ojo, 2021).

### **Adoption of the National Open Access Policy (NOAP) in Nigeria**

In 2012, Nigeria made an important move towards OA by adopting the National Open Access Policy (NOAP), which was developed by the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in collaboration with the National Universities Commission (NUC) and other stakeholders in the academic and research communities (Adeyemo et al., 2021). The policy aims to ensure that publicly funded research is freely accessible to the public, thereby supporting the development of a knowledge-based economy. The main goals of the Nigerian OA policy are to promote access to



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scientific information, encourage the dissemination of Nigerian research globally, and improve the quality of higher education and research by making research findings available to a wider audience. The policy specifically mandates that all publicly funded research outputs in Nigeria be made available through OA platforms, with a focus on repositories, journals, and institutional archives (NITDA, 2012).

### **Implementation of the Open Access Policy**

The Nigerian Open Access Policy encourages universities and research institutions to establish institutional repositories where scholars can deposit their research publications and data. The policy also calls for the creation of national digital archives for research outputs to ensure long-term preservation and access. Furthermore, it urges Nigerian researchers to publish in OA journals and make their work available through international OA platforms (NITDA, 2012). The policy promotes the use of Creative Commons licenses to ensure that works are freely available but still protected by copyright laws. This is crucial for allowing researchers to share their findings while maintaining control over how their work is used. However, the implementation of the policy has faced challenges, including limited infrastructure, inadequate funding, and a lack of awareness and training on OA practices among researchers and institutions (Ajadi & Okunoye, 2019).

### **Government and Institutional Support**

Nigerian universities and research institutions have begun to embrace OA through the establishment of institutional repositories. For instance, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), and University of Lagos (UNILAG) have set up institutional repositories that allow their researchers to deposit their works in OA formats (Okpechi, 2019). These repositories are essential in improving access to the research produced by Nigerian scholars. Additionally, the Nigerian Digital Library initiative, supported by the government, has worked to create a centralized platform for accessing OA materials from Nigerian academic institutions. The government has also been involved in international OA initiatives, collaborating with organizations like Research4Life, which offers free access to scholarly literature for researchers in low- and middle-income countries (Olatunji & Ojo, 2021).

### **Objectives of Nigeria's Open Access Policy**

The primary objectives of Nigeria's OA policy include but not limited to:

**Increasing access to research outputs:** The policy aims to make publicly funded research freely accessible to researchers, policymakers, and the public, addressing the gap caused by the high subscription fees of academic journals (Muthusamy et al., 2017).

**Promoting scientific collaboration:** By making research more accessible, Nigeria's OA policy seeks to foster collaborations between local researchers and international scholars, enhancing the quality and impact of Nigerian research on the global stage (Olumide & Akinmoladun, 2020).

**Encouraging the use of Institutional Repositories (IR):** The policy encourages universities and research institutions to set up institutional repositories to house research outputs, ensuring long-term access to these materials (Olatunji & Ojo, 2021).

**Enhancing the development of Nigerian knowledge and innovation:** Open Access is viewed as a tool to stimulate innovation and support the development of a knowledge-based economy by making research outcomes more widely available for use by industries, policymakers, and other stakeholders (Olumide & Akinmoladun, 2020).

### **Challenges in Implementing the Open Access Policy in Nigeria**

Despite these efforts, Nigeria faces several challenges in fully implementing the OA policy. A major challenge is the digital divide, where many institutions lack the technical infrastructure needed to



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manage OA repositories effectively. The lack of stable internet access in some regions further hampers the ability to disseminate research freely (Tennant et al., 2016). Additionally, the financial burden of Article Processing Charges (APCs) remains a significant barrier, as many Nigerian researchers cannot afford the fees required to publish in high-quality OA journals (Björk, 2017). Another challenge is the low awareness of OA among researchers. Many Nigerian scholars still prefer to publish in traditional subscription-based journals, which are often considered more prestigious. This is partly due to a lack of training and awareness about the benefits and procedures of OA publishing (Okpechi, 2019).

### **Role of the Academia in the Open Access (OA) Publishing**

Academics play a central role in the Open Access (OA) movement, as they are both the producers and the primary consumers of scholarly research. Their involvement is crucial to the success of OA, influencing its adoption, development, and sustainability. Academics' engagement with OA is multifaceted, encompassing research publication, advocacy, and the creation of OA resources.

#### **1. Publishing in Open Access Journals**

One of the most significant ways academics in Africa contribute to OA is by publishing their research in OA journals. By choosing to submit their work to OA platforms, academics ensure that their research is freely accessible to a global audience. This is particularly important for scholars in lower-income regions, where subscription-based journals may be inaccessible due to financial constraints (Björk, 2017). Academics also help improve the visibility of OA by contributing to the growing body of open literature. This not only increases the reach and impact of their own work but also advances global scientific knowledge, facilitating collaboration across borders (Piwowar et al., 2018). In some cases, authors may need to pay Article Processing Charges (APCs) to publish in high-quality OA journals, and thus, their involvement is critical in navigating the balance between access and cost (Tennant et al., 2016).

#### **2. Advocacy and Policy Influence**

Academics also play a vital role in advocating for open access policies at institutional, national, and international levels. Many scholars participate in policy development by advocating for OA mandates within their universities, research organizations, or through their involvement in governmental bodies (Suber, 2012). For example, in the United States, scholars have been instrumental in promoting policies like the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Public Access Policy, which requires that publicly funded research be made freely available within 12 months of publication (Suber, 2012). Moreover, academics contribute to global OA initiatives, such as Plan S, which aims to make all publicly funded research OA by 2025 (Coalition S, 2024). Their participation in such initiatives often involves publishing in OA-compliant journals and ensuring their research adheres to the OA principles outlined in such policies.

#### **3. Creation of Open Access Repositories**

In addition to publishing in OA journals, academics contribute to OA by creating and maintaining institutional or disciplinary repositories. These repositories host research outputs and make them freely accessible to the public. Scholars frequently deposit their works, including preprints, datasets, and final published articles, in these repositories. Such repositories have become increasingly important for preserving and disseminating research outputs in a variety of fields. Notable examples include arXiv for physics and mathematics and PubMed Central for life sciences (Laakso et al., 2011). By archiving their work in repositories, academics also enable broader dissemination and reuse of research data, thus promoting collaboration and accelerating scientific discovery. They also help address issues of long-term accessibility and visibility for scholarly work (McKiernan et al., 2016).

#### **4. Educating and Training Others**



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Academics also play a crucial role in educating and training other researchers, students, and early-career scholars about the benefits of OA and how to engage with the movement. Many universities offer training sessions, workshops, and seminars on OA publishing practices, the use of institutional repositories, and the legal aspects of OA licenses, such as Creative Commons (Houghton et al., 2010). In this way, scholars help foster a new generation of researchers who are aware of and equipped to participate in OA publishing, contributing to the long-term sustainability of the OA movement.

### **5. Peer Review and Editorial Roles**

Academics contribute to OA not only as authors but also as peer reviewers and editorial board members of OA journals. Peer review is a cornerstone of scholarly publishing, and the involvement of academics in this process ensures that research published in OA journals meets high academic and scientific standards (Björk, 2017). By acting as editors and reviewers for OA journals, scholars help uphold the quality of OA research outputs, ensuring that these platforms maintain academic rigor and credibility.

### **Barriers to Open Access in Africa**

Despite these contributions, academics face several challenges in fully embracing OA.

1. One important issue is the financial burden of APCs, particularly in disciplines with high publication costs (Björk, 2017).
2. Some researchers may face resistance to OA due to concerns about the perceived prestige or impact of OA journals, especially when compared to traditional subscription-based journals (Tennant et al., 2016).
3. Lack of infrastructure and awareness about OA policies, particularly in low-income regions, may hinder the broader adoption of OA publishing. The absence of an established publishing infrastructure for OA in many African countries has also contributed to the underrepresentation of African research in global scientific discourse (Mabweazara et al., 2017).
4. Some critics argue that open access publication does not guarantee quality control, as the demand for APCs may incentivize publishers to accept articles without sufficient peer review (Björk, 2017).

### **Benefits of Open Access Publishing**

The benefits of open access are numerous, including increased visibility, citation potential, and broader impact of research findings.

#### **1. Increased Access to Knowledge**

One of the primary benefits of OA publishing in Africa is the increased access to scholarly articles, data, and research findings. In many African countries, access to subscription-based journals is often limited due to high costs, and universities or research institutions may not have the resources to purchase these materials (Mawdsley, 2018). OA allows researchers, students, and practitioners to access high-quality research for free, thus democratizing knowledge and addressing the information gap that exists between African countries and developed regions (Mthembu, 2019). By making research outputs publicly accessible, OA promotes educational advancement, research innovation, and informed decision-making in sectors such as health, agriculture, and education.

For instance, Research4Life, a global initiative providing free access to scholarly publications for institutions in low-income countries, has been pivotal in helping African researchers gain access to academic journals that would otherwise be out of reach (Muthusamy et al., 2017). OA initiatives such as this have provided much-needed resources to African researchers, facilitating the growth of local knowledge bases.

#### **2. Promoting Research Visibility and Impact**



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OA publishing plays a crucial role in enhancing the visibility and impact of African research on the global stage. African researchers often face challenges in publishing in high-impact journals due to limited financial resources, as many OA journals charge high Article Processing Charges (APCs). Despite this, publishing in OA journals increases the likelihood that research will be widely disseminated and cited (Ajadi & Okunoye, 2019). The global visibility that OA provides helps elevate African scholarship, making it more accessible to international collaborators, policymakers, and the public. For example, in fields like public health, agriculture, and environmental science, African research can address unique local challenges and offer solutions relevant to other regions of the Global South (Chawinga, 2017). By publishing in OA platforms, African scholars contribute to global knowledge pools and demonstrate the relevance of their work on global issues, such as climate change, health crises, and poverty reduction.

### **3. Facilitating Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing**

OA fosters increased collaboration among researchers across borders. By removing the financial and access barriers to scholarly information, OA enables African researchers to collaborate more easily with peers from other continents. This is particularly important for Africa, where cross-border collaboration can play a significant role in solving problems that transcend national boundaries, such as diseases, environmental issues, and social development challenges. Global initiatives like OpenAIRE and the African Journals Online (AJOL) platform facilitate this kind of cross-border collaboration by providing repositories where African researchers can share their findings with the global community (Githaiga & Mgaiwa, 2021). Collaboration is essential for accelerating the pace of scientific discovery and fostering innovation, and OA serves as a bridge that connects researchers from different regions and disciplines.

### **4. Supporting Local Capacity Building and Policy Development**

OA publishing not only helps disseminate research but also plays a crucial role in building local research capacity in Africa. As researchers are encouraged to deposit their work in OA repositories, the academic community becomes more engaged in the practice of sharing knowledge and creating open resources. African universities, research institutions, and libraries are increasingly adopting OA practices, and this has contributed to capacity building in the region (Mabweazara et al., 2017).

In addition, OA provides opportunities for local scholars to develop policies that address regional challenges, as the freely accessible research can inform national and international policymaking. For instance, governments and development agencies in Africa can use OA resources to shape policies related to public health, agriculture, and environmental sustainability. By making research more accessible, OA empowers African institutions to create evidence-based policies that support the continent's development goals.

### **5. Cost Efficiency and Sustainability**

OA publishing offers a more cost-effective alternative to traditional subscription-based publishing models, which are often financially burdensome for African researchers and institutions. With many African universities and research bodies operating under budget constraints, OA offers an affordable solution that allows them to access and contribute to academic literature without the need for expensive subscriptions (Björk, 2017). Moreover, OA can contribute to the sustainability of the African research ecosystem by ensuring that local researchers and institutions are not dependent on external publishers. By developing regional OA journals and repositories, African countries can maintain control over the dissemination of their research outputs, keeping the process more localized and self-sustaining (Muthusamy et al., 2017). OA publishing can also reduce the costs associated



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with physical distribution and access, making research outputs more accessible even in remote areas with limited infrastructure.

## 6. Contribution to Social and Economic Development

OA publishing can also support Africa's social and economic development by providing access to research that directly addresses local issues. African research often focuses on topics such as poverty alleviation, sustainable agriculture, and improving healthcare systems issues that are vital for the continent's progress. By promoting the accessibility of such research through OA, the findings can be used by policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders working to implement solutions in these areas. In sectors like health, for example, open access to research on diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis can help improve healthcare policies and interventions. Similarly, OA publishing of agricultural research can support smallholder farmers by providing them with knowledge on sustainable farming practices and new technologies that could improve food security (Chawinga, 2017).

## 7. Overcoming Infrastructure Barriers

Although Africa faces challenges in terms of internet connectivity and technological infrastructure, OA publishing can help bridge some of these gaps. Many African institutions are adopting institutional repositories and digital libraries to store and share research outputs. Initiatives like the **Open African Innovation Research (OpenAIR)** program are working to build the infrastructure required to support OA publishing across the continent. These efforts help address the technological limitations faced by African researchers and improve their ability to participate in the global knowledge economy (Okpechi, 2019).

## Conclusion

while open access is transforming scholarly publishing by making research more accessible and reducing barriers to knowledge, challenges related to cost and quality control remain. Nonetheless, the drive toward open access continues to grow, driven by evolving policies and a collective effort to make knowledge available to everyone, everywhere. Open Access publishing is an essential tool for fostering research visibility, collaboration, and capacity building in Africa. It promotes equity in access to knowledge, supports sustainable development, and empowers local researchers to contribute to global scientific discourse. However, challenges such as financial constraints, infrastructure issues, and limited awareness remain. Despite these obstacles, the continued growth of OA publishing in Africa holds significant potential for enhancing the region's research landscape and fostering long-term social and economic development.

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