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## REPORT ON THE 3RD OPEN SCIENCE SOUTH CONFERENCE (DECEMBER 9-11, 2024, CAPE TOWN)

► « A recognized and eagerly awaited open science event in Africa »



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Inclusive, shares and equitable science is a key success factor in achieving the aspirations of Agenda 2063 “The Africa We Want”<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, UNESCO’s recommendation on open science offers a powerful tool to achieve sustainable development goals by opening up scientific practices and productions. In this context, increasing the visibility of scientific productions to promote their impact and reuse is one of the main objectives of open science. In Africa, there is an urgent need to increase the visibility of scientific output. Despite their richness and diversity, they remain very poorly indexed in the international publishing system, partly due to many years of exclusionary practices..

In 2023, if we exclude South Africa, only around sixty of the more than 30,000 journals indexed in Web of Science were published in Africa south of the Sahara<sup>2</sup>. The share of African contributions to worldwide indexed publications is estimated at 3.3%, while the continent accounts for 16% of the world’s population.

<sup>1</sup> <https://au.int/sw/node/34994>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.globalafricasciences.org/numero-07/art-07-03-fr>

## ► « African scientific publishing we want »

With this in mind, the theme of the Third Edition of the Open Science in the South conference, “African scientific publishing we want”, was dedicated to the challenges facing scientific publishing in Africa: the visibility and impact of publications, the sustainability of publishing systems, and the emergence of inclusive and equitable publishing models. Co-organized by IRD, the National Research Foundation of South Africa and CAMES, the conference was held in Cape Town, South Africa, from December 9 to 11, 2024, hosted by University of Cape Town, as part of the Global Summit on Diamond Open Access <sup>3</sup>. Already recognized at the two previous editions, the “Open in the South Conference” has truly become the open science forum of the African scientific community.



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## ► A wider audience for African ESR evaluation and governance bodies

The fact that the Science Ouverte au Sud conference was held in conjunction with the international summit on open access to diamonds helped to broaden the audience to include scientific communities from English- and Portuguese-speaking regions that were poorly represented at previous events. This concomitance of events also increased the participation of representatives of African learned societies ( AAU <sup>4</sup>, NASAC <sup>5</sup>, AAS <sup>6</sup>), higher education promotion and evaluation bodies (CAMES <sup>7</sup>), university presidencies and influential players in the development of open science at an international level (UNESCO, Science Europe).

<sup>3</sup> <https://doasummit.uct.ac.za/> <sup>4</sup> AAU: Association of African Universities <sup>5</sup> NASAC: Network of African Science Academies

<sup>6</sup> AAS: African Academy of Science <sup>7</sup> CAMES: Conseil Africain et Malgache de l'Enseignement Supérieur

Out of a total of 183 face-to-face participants, 48 countries were represented, including 31 African countries. Dedicated to scientific publishing, these three days were aimed at exchanging issues, experiences and practices specific to the African scientific community, in particular to meet the challenges of the visibility and impact of African scientific publications, the sustainability of publishing platforms in Africa, and the emergence of equitable and inclusive publishing models to reinforce the dissemination of local knowledge.

## ► Highlights of the conference

### Low visibility of African publications and regional inequalities :

low contribution of African publications worldwide, but increasing since 2001: African contributions to indexed publications worldwide have risen from 1.3% in 2000 to 3.3% in 2021, with strong disparities between regions. 88% of scientific output is concentrated in 11 countries representing half of Africa's population, led by South Africa, Egypt and Nigeria. The other half of the African population accounts for only 12% of internationally visible publications.

### Need to strengthen political commitment to research :

the absence of a national research policy in many African countries, coupled with limited or uncertain funding, means that the countries concerned are unable to ensure full sovereignty in research matters, due to their heavy dependence on international donors and publishers. In addition, this low level of investment does not meet the needs of publishing and data infrastructures, resulting in low adoption of open science practices.

### Necessary recognition of the diversity of knowledge and languages of publication :

scientific credit and notoriety are partly based on the use of so-called "colonial" languages. These don't allow for the expression and transmission of indigenous knowledge, which is essential for understanding local issues.

## ► Conference recommendations

These recommendations were presented to the assembly on December 11, 2024 during the closing session.

### 1 Equitable partnerships for sustainable research :

during the debates, speakers stressed the importance of creating balanced partnerships between African institutions and international organizations or partners. These collaborations should help to strengthen local capacities and initiatives, while ensuring a fair distribution of the benefits of research. This first recommendation is a prerequisite for reducing regional and national inequalities in Africa, strengthening research on themes that take account of national issues, and producing and disseminating research results that enhance indigenous knowledge

### 2 A community of practice for African open science :

participants called for the creation of a structured network bringing together all stakeholders involved in the deployment of open science in Africa. The aim is to provide a framework and conditions for exchanging best practices, sharing experiences and tools on the political, organizational, capacity-building and digital fronts.

### 3 Multilingualism and inclusion of all local communities in production and dissemination, access and discoverability of African publications :

to increase the impact of African research, multilingualism has been identified as an essential lever. This means promoting publications in local and international languages to reach a wider, more diverse audience. Beyond publication practices, the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge that takes indigenous knowledge into account must also be encouraged.

### 4 Research Assessment :

fostering full adoption of open science requires that research evaluation bodies take into account all forms of scientific production, consider their societal impact and value scientists' involvement in initiatives that strengthen equitable and inclusive research was highlighted. This crucial topic will be the focus of the next edition of the Open Science in the South conference, which will concentrate on the theme of research evaluation in the light of open science practices.