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## Seeking Impact and Visibility

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# Chapter 9

## Recommendations

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To optimise scholarly communication at Southern African universities, there are four stakeholders that can play a dynamic role in improving universities' dissemination activity: national governments, university administrations, university academics and research funding agencies. Each of these groups contributes to research and communication practices at the institution, thereby impacting the potential visibility of Southern African scholars' research outputs. In this chapter, we provide recommendations tailored to each of these stakeholders with a focus on enhancing research production, open dissemination and regional collaborative opportunities.

### To national governments

#### Build a national research infrastructure

- *Establish a national research foundation* so that scholars can seek local funding from more sources than just the university research budget. Use that foundation as a platform for providing larger grants than the university provides so that scholars can embark on more ambitious, original and empirical research projects.
- *Design a virtuous research funding cycle* (similar to the SAPSE subsidy system in South Africa) in which, for each recognised output produced by a scholar and disseminated in an open access fashion, funds are directed into that scholar's university for the sake of both rewarding and incentivising the future production of research.
- *Provide funds for open access research dissemination*, such as through an article processing charge (APC) fund.
- *Require that all publicly funded research be made open access.*

## To university administrations

### Enhance the institutional research culture

- *Grow the university research budget* so that it meets and accelerates the demand for research funds by scholars.
- *Offer a reduction in teaching time* to scholars who demonstrate ambitious research activity.
- *Establish digital platforms for sharing publication success* by university scholars. Use website profiles, email circulars and other communication opportunities to tell stories that develop a positive, supportive collegial environment in which research, open dissemination and peer expectation (the social pressure to engage in research) is prized.

### Incentivise open dissemination

- *Develop an open access policy which mandates that all publicly funded research be made open access*, either through publication in open access journals or through the payment of article processing charges in traditional journals. Increase the recognition of outputs that are disseminated in an open, rather than closed, fashion.
- *Base performance assessment of scholars' outputs on what they deposit or profile in the university's institutional repository* (if one is in place).
- *Run university-affiliated journals on the Open Journals System and make them open access*.
- *Induce academic staff to create personal profiles on their departmental web pages* in which they include a biography, research interests, classes taught, memberships and publications.
- *Explore the utility of altmetrics* – or a related complementary metrics system – by providing scholars with data from institutionally curated and profiled outputs.

### Provide support services for scholarly communication

- *Establish or identify support service providers who can translate scholars' research* for government and community-based audiences (e.g. condensing journal articles into accessible policy briefs).
- *Develop a network of communication officers/content managers* so that disparate dissemination activity can be pursued in a more cohesive and strategic manner.
- *Encourage scholars to share their research insights (and bibliographic references for them) on Wikipedia* so that university research can reach a broader audience.

- *Invest in training for library staff* so that they can operate effectively in the new, open scholarly communication landscape.
- *Pressure consultancies to make as much of any contract research usable by academics* for their own scholarly outputs.

### Enhance the department-level research culture

- *Explore developing a quality assurance workflow process (at the department or faculty level) to allow scholars to improve the quality of their outputs* (prior to depositing them on an institutional repository).
- *Reduce administrative duties for academics – such as registering students and invigilating exams – to an absolute minimum* to free them for academically productive pursuits. Allow graduate students to handle such tasks, if possible.
- *Train and incentivise scholars to use Web 2.0 platforms* so that they can share the responsibility of making their own research more visible.

### Leverage regional expertise

- *Collaborate in the construction of short-term regional exchanges for administrators and librarians.* This would allow them to be immersed in other contexts in which they can learn new skills and approaches through interaction with senior hosting staff members. They would be responsible for producing an output from their experience and sharing it with staff members at home.
- *Invest in regional journal production opportunities.*
- *Incentivise regional research collaboration* through enhanced funding and recognition for SADC-based activities.

## To university scholars

### Raise personal visibility

- *Share responsibility with the administration for research visibility.* Communicate research findings to the communities that the research may concern but also to the audiences that could best leverage it for developmental purposes. Ensure that it is published through an open access channel.

## To research funding agencies

- *Include a plan for capacity-building* at Southern African universities where technological interventions are envisaged. Do not assume that staff members in the region possess the same skills or job descriptions as those with similar titles elsewhere.

- *Determine the feasibility of developing a regional megajournal.* Prepare costings for launching one new open access megajournal (in the style of *PLOS ONE*). The study should include consideration of: how to provide publishing services (hosting, editorial services, peer review management); researcher interest and willingness to take on the new challenges involved; readiness of research funders to support the venture in terms of cash and support for the principle and the practicalities involved; and how this journal can be made viable and how it should be sustained and supported.