

How Have We Tread so Far in Bringing in Equity and Inclusion Into Academia through Open Access

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Post Url

<https://www.enago.com/academy/open-access-week-2020-equity-and-inclusion/>



Open Access (OA) is no longer an unknown word in the [academic publishing](#) industry. Open Science is the rational choice to promote openness, integrity, collaboration, and reproducibility in scholarly research. OA supports transparency and free availability of research articles. OA is also our means to establish equity and promote inclusion. This thought leads us to the celebration of the Open Access Week this year (October 19-25), along the theme “Open with Purpose: Taking Action to Build Structural Equity and Inclusion.”

Open Access Week 2020 Theme

International Open Access Week is that time of the year when the whole academic community comes together to make openness the default for research and ensure that equity is at the center of this work. Let us discuss this year's theme in detail now.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion must be consistently prioritized year-round and integrated within the functioning of the academic [publishing process](#). International Open Access Week is an important opportunity to strike new conversations and create connections across and between communities. These connections, in turn, can facilitate this co-design, and advance progress to build more equitable foundations for opening knowledge. During this week, we also discuss and think about processes that need to be continued, to spread the message of Open Research.

How Powerful is Openness?

The power of Openness is beyond our consideration. It is a tool for building more equitable systems of sharing knowledge. We must rebuild research and scholarship structure by making it open to all. This will help us lay the foundation that is fundamentally more equitable. However, despite all of these efforts, there are still instances of structural racism, discrimination, and exclusion present and persistent in places where openness is a core value.

As a global community, it is important to understand that addressing these inequities is a necessity. As we work together to rebuild these structures, we need to commit to moving from conversations to concrete commitments and to hold one another accountable for making real progress.

How Far Have We Reached to Establish Equity and Inclusion

Plan S

One of the major events of the OA movement was the introduction of Plan S, from the group [cOAlition S](#). The key goal of Plan S is that, initially by 2020, now by 2021, publications from research funded by public grants must be published in open access journals or platforms. Plan S also has ten principles, covering factors such as copyright, funding, and timelines. Any researcher planning to publish their research will fall under the direct effect of Plan S. So does the fate of the publishers as well, but how?

Transformative Agreements

With the concept of Plan S being pitched, we came across the term “transformative agreements”. Basically, a TA changes the contract between a subscriber, such as a

library, and a publisher. The change is from a subscription model to an open access model. The best part of transformative agreements or TAs, as popularly known, is that it is [beneficial to both researchers and publishers](#). There are two types of TA. Confusingly, they have very similar names! The first is known as **read-and-publish**. Under this agreement, a publisher receives payment for both reading and publishing in a single contract. For researchers, this means that payment for publishing will be dealt with by a contract with the institution. This is in contrast to the current situation, where authors choose open access on an individual basis. The idea is that funds will be used to pay for publishing, rather than journal subscriptions.

The second type is called **publish-and-read**. In these agreements, the publisher is paid only for publishing. Reading is included at no extra cost. Libraries might find that there is no real difference between the two types of agreement, as long as the overall cost remains the same. Although Plan S and TAs may be significantly more beneficial for larger publishers and smaller publishers might lose out, the main motive of Plan S would be to prioritize [enabling a wider choice of open access journals](#).

Concept of Open Abstracts

Another new concept that paved the way through open access was the concept of open abstracts. Abstracts are the first thing that catches the attention of the reader. Therefore keeping them open would increase the range of target audiences, beyond imagination. Recently, [The Initiative for Open Abstracts \(I4OA\), was launched](#) at the online conference of the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) on September 24, 2020. I4OA is actually a collaboration between scholarly publishers, academic librarians, researchers, infrastructure providers, and other stakeholders. The initiative calls on all scholarly publishers to open the abstracts of their publications, and specifically to distribute them through Crossref, in order to facilitate large-scale access and [promote discovery of critical research](#).

Regional Approaches to Open Access

Besides these, we have different countries trying to bring equity and inclusion in their own ways. Indonesia is a [world leader](#) in the number of free-to-read published research journals. Journals published with open access (OA) licenses are available to read for free and can be legally redistributed with the approval from the government. As a result of this, with the license, anyone can get the full article and all supporting documents for free because the author or research institute already bears the cost of publishing. In fact, the latest data show Indonesia has published 1,717 OA articles, followed by the United Kingdom (1,655) and Brazil (1,544). [This number reflects Indonesia's important position in global academic publishing](#).

Apart from Indonesia, we have countries like Africa where a [local open science platform was launched](#) only to support the researchers of the country. The rise of open access publishing should be applauded. Scientific research and literature should be made available to everyone, with no cost to the reader. But nothing is actually free and someone has to pay. The open access model merely changes who pays. So rather than

individuals or institutions paying to have access to publications, increasingly, academics are expected to pay for [publishing their research in these “open access” journals](#). This has given rise to the concept of these regional open science platforms.

There are always two sides to a coin. Although the discrimination and inequity have given rise to these regional platforms, they have also shown the research community that no researchers, irrespective of the country or the gender, can be considered inferior to another. They have the potential to mark their presence in their tiny yet firm way. This will give us to strive towards our purpose of bringing in openness to establish and promote equity and inclusion.

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