

African scientists get their own open-access publishing platform

Venture will launch next year and seeks to strengthen continent's science by helping academics share work more quickly.

Linda Nordling

15 November 2017

Africa's academy of science has announced that it will launch an open-access publishing platform early next year — the first of its kind aimed exclusively at scientists on the continent.

The platform, called *AAS Open Research* and announced by the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) in Nairobi on 15 November, is being created with the London-based open-access publisher F1000, adopting the model of its *F1000Research* publishing platform. *AAS Open Research* will publish articles, research protocols, data sets and code, usually within days of submission and before peer review. F1000 staff will arrange post-publication peer review: the reviews and the names of their authors will be published alongside the papers. The papers will be indexed in abstract databases such as PubMed only after they pass review.

The AAS says that the platform will be especially useful for young African academics, who can face difficulties publishing in overseas journals. Some studies suggest¹ that research from low-income countries is perceived differently from that done in high-income ones, for instance. The portal will cut the time and effort scientists have to put into finding homes for their work, and will make the review process more transparent, the academy says.



How the genomics revolution could finally help Africa.

Although there are already open-access publishers that focus on Africa, such as AOSIS Publishing, based in South Africa, *AAS Open Research* will be the first to adopt open peer review.

The new platform does carry a caveat, however: it will initially take submissions only from AAS fellows and affiliates (who together number around 400), as well as researchers funded through programmes managed by the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Africa. The Nairobi-based body manages

grants for African research programmes that come from international funders, mostly targeting health research but also areas such as climate change.

Limiting eligibility to the platform is critical to ensure that submissions are of high quality, says AAS executive director Nelson Torto. Researchers who meet the initial criteria have already been vetted and selected through a rigorous grant-review process, he says. In future, to open up the platform to more researchers, the academy wants to partner with other African research funders whose selection processes are similarly rigorous, Torto adds.

Following a trend

The African venture follows a series of open publishing portals launched with F1000 in the past 18 months, including those set up by the Wellcome Trust in London and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle, Washington — both large charities that fund scientific research. Research centres including the UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health and the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital in Canada have also teamed up with the firm; the European Commission is considering creating its own open publishing platform for outputs from its main Horizon 2020 research programme.

Related stories

- Gates Foundation announces open-access publishing venture
- Science journals permit open-access publishing for Gates Foundation scholars
- Gates Foundation research can't be published in top journals

[More related stories](#)

Related stories

- Gates Foundation announces open-access publishing venture
- Science journals permit open-access publishing for Gates Foundation scholars
- Gates Foundation research can't be published in top journals

[More related stories](#)

The AAS will not itself be covering the costs of publishing on the platform. Rather, the academy says, African researchers' grant funders will pay publishing fees directly to F1000: £120–800 (US\$160–1,100) per article, depending on length.

Some scientists have raised concerns that publishing on open-research platforms might stop African academics from getting the recognition needed for career advancement that they receive for publishing in conventional journals. In South Africa, for instance, academics are rewarded for publishing in a list of titles maintained by the country's higher-education department.

“For open publishing to be successful, it will need to be accompanied by changes in the criteria for academic recognition and promotion within African institutions of higher learning,” says Salim Abdool Karim, an HIV researcher and AAS fellow in Durban, South Africa.

The risk of publishing on little-known platforms is a concern, agrees Gordon Awandare, a biochemist at the University of Ghana in Accra who will be eligible to publish on *AAS Open Research*. However, the AAS platform will help to chip away at the grip of the big journals, says Awandare, which will be good for African science. “Our approach has always been to spread our research across several platforms, so we will continue to do that.”

Nature [doi:10.1038/nature.2017.23018](https://doi.org/10.1038/nature.2017.23018)

References

1. Harris, M., Macinko, J., Jimenez, G., Mahfoud, M. & Anderson, C. *BMJ Open* **5**, e008993 (2015).