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SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL LIBRARY AND  
INFORMATION CONSORTIUM – (RF) NPC

## SANLiC Statement on Open Access

### Preamble

At a Special General Meeting of the South African National Library and Information Consortium (SANLiC) Board of Directors, a task team was proposed and mandated to assess the impact of recent open access (OA) developments on SANLiC and its business model in order to determine the direction that SANLiC should take in the future.

It must be reiterated that SANLiC and its members are fully committed to:

- promoting Open Access for the advancement of South African research and research production through the increase in access to scholarly information,
- reducing the overall cost of library subscriptions, and
- seeking alternative forums for the distribution of South African scholarship.

It is against the background of this commitment that this statement exploits the nuances of open access to advance African scholarship to bridge the knowledge exchange divide between the global north and global south - *global south scholarship matters*. As much as finances are a critical element, the broader principles of open access must take precedence in planning the trajectory of South Africa's adaptation and roll-out of open access. At the epicentre of the open access movement in South Africa are the principles of social justice, the denorthernisation of the publishing landscape and the advancement of platforms for the dissemination of South African scholarship.

### COVID-19 as a disruptor

It must be acknowledged that COVID-19 has been and continues to be a major disruptor to the delivery of library services. What the pandemic has highlighted is the desperate need to openly share scholarship when physical access to academic libraries is a challenge. Further, the pandemic's disastrous impact on the economies of the world has to be factored in when projecting library budgets and the knock-on effect of this on subscriptions and/or article processing charges.

### South African National Library and Information Consortium

SANLiC operates on a non-profit, cost recovery basis to harness the collective buying power of its members to negotiate and secure electronic license agreements for digital content. The primary members of SANLiC are the public higher education institutions and the public research institutes, represented in the organisation by their heads of library services, although not limited as such.

SANLiC was originally initiated in 1999 by the library sub-committees of the several regional academic consortia that existed at the time. Known at the time as the Coalition of South African Library Consortia (COSALC), the role of the organisation has always been to establish high quality, scholarly electronic information needs, negotiate licences and associated costs, as well as to co-ordinate access, delivery and training related to these resources, all of which is in support of teaching, learning and research in South Africa's public higher education and research institutions.

The paramount critical success factor for SANLiC has been to lower the cost of subscription access for member libraries thereby enabling them to greatly expand their collections. In 2019, SANLiC- negotiated

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discounts and package deals accounted for an overall 87.4% cost avoidance on subscription list prices. However, as phenomenal as this may sound, it is insufficient to address the unsustainability of the entire model of paying to read. Internationally, the bulk of research output is produced by researchers employed and/or funded in the higher education and research system. Yet the same system is then required to pay again to read this research output.

### **Successes in SANLiC negotiations**

The annual expenditure on scholarly literature by South African higher education and research institutions, in the main, is allocated to 'pay-to-read' subscriptions. About 80% of these subscriptions are based on SANLiC-negotiated deals. It is likely that most, if not all of the non-SANLiC subscriptions are for content that falls outside of the content subscribed to through SANLiC at each respective institution.

In 2020, 82% (\$27 130 138) of the SANLiC journal expenditure was on Big Five journal packages (Elsevier's ScienceDirect, Wiley, Springer Nature, Taylor & Francis and SAGE). It must be noted that only 52 % of South African research output (where the corresponding authors are South Africans) is published within these packages.

### **Data Analysis - Research output and open access**

In addition to subscription expenditure, South Africa spends considerable funding via article processing charges (APCs) to publish their research output. To gain a more holistic understanding of the cost of paying to publish, SANLiC initiated a data analysis project in early 2020. Research and review articles published by corresponding authors whose first address is a South African institution were isolated for the years 2014 to 2019. Of the total 62 549 articles assessed, approximately one third are open access and the remaining two thirds are behind paywalls. The data gleaned will facilitate the extrapolation of future costs where there is growth in open access publishing.

To build on the successes of SANLiC negotiations and to improve the dissemination (or distribution) of South African research, it is critical to contextualise South African open access practises within the broader African open access landscape.

### **Contextualization of African Open Access**

It is argued by Langheinrich (2019) that OA2020 was conceptualised with the goal of abolishing both the subscription-based publishing model and the hybrid version of the model. In addition, a global consortium of funders (Plan S) was of the opinion that decisive steps needed to be taken for the realisation of full and immediate OA irrespective if the scholarly articles were published in subscription journals, OA journals or other platforms. The proponents of OA2020 were working on the premise that there is more than enough money in the subscription system worldwide to make a complete transition to OA. Plan S funders want the research they fund to be accessible to all. This flip from subscription to OA will ensure that all published material will be accessible to all.

However, the OA movement in Africa must be far more encompassing – it has to be developed on a philosophy and purpose that is relevant to the African environment and its challenges. The movement in Africa must have *a transformative world view of OA which is driven by social justice imperatives and equity principles for inclusion resulting in growth and development of society.*

The basic philosophy of the African OA movement is the accentuation of social justice principles resulting in the transformation of access and distribution of scholarship for the growth and development of Africa's research agenda; and, to nurture and grow a culture of civil society accessing and manipulating accessed scholarly content for economic and social emancipation. Further, the African research landscape needs to be transformed to address local research imperatives while contributing to bridging the 'research-exchange divide' between the global south and global north through the adoption of progressive OA practices and policies. The transformed practices will enhance sharing of African scholarly output for the generation of new knowledge for manipulation by Africa and the rest of the world.

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Working with the assertion by Schöpfel (2017) that, “open access is not only access and consumption but also and above all, **production and dissemination .....** **[and] has the potential to contribute to and foster local research and development**”, it is advanced that transformative agreements must be contextualised. These agreements must promote accessibility to local research which is crucial for accumulating and developing a corpus of local knowledge for the growth and development of society – African society.

### **Transformative agreements vs transformational agreements**

Transformative agreements are associated with the principles of cost neutrality during a transition period, that is, the conversion of the current subscription budget into a publishing budget. This proposed model meets the demands for the global north which has far less challenges in the dissemination of their research output. The issue of escalating subscription costs together with the access barriers is at the epicentre of the OA movement in the global north. However, in the global south and in Africa in particular, the challenges are far more wide ranging, hence the need for cost efficiency rather than cost neutrality. In this cost efficiency model, there is a need, amongst others, for opening the doors of African scholarship and denorthernising the publishing landscape. The agreements that South Africa needs to pursue must be transformational to achieve what is intended by the transformative agreements but much more – inclusivity and social justice must be core to transformational agreements.

### **African research dissemination**

Nwagwu and Ahmed (2009) stated that in 2001 Africa produced less than one percent of the world’s research output. Almost twenty years later, Vice Chancellors of African universities (2018) affirm that Africa still produces less than 1% of the global research output. Further, the World Bank (2014) data shows that collaboration among local researchers in sub-Saharan Africa ranges from 0.9% in west and central Africa to 2.9% in southern Africa – more than 93% of the research collaboration is outside of sub-Saharan Africa. Essentially, Africa produces very little and collaborates very little with fellow Africans. With more than 99% of the research being produced outside of Africa and acknowledging that collaboration within the continent is low, it is incumbent to seek a transformational model that will nurture and grow Africa’s research agenda and the dissemination thereof.

This low or non-existent growth in Africa’s contribution to the world’s research output is indicative of a practise that continues to prejudice or marginalise Africa scholarship. Hence, there is a need to open channels of dissemination for African scholarship. In searching for an alternative to the current subscription model, there has to be a commitment to denorthernising the publishing landscape and for the landscape to be more inclusive of marginalized research voices.

### **Denorthernisation of the publishing landscape**

The ‘unintended but systematic’ ‘northernization’ of the publishing landscape must be addressed in the search for an alternative to the current publishing model.

There are two fundamental processes that fuel exclusion: firstly, the delegitimation of research emanating from the global south. The second, which is a product of the first, is that global south researchers, in the main, do not have access to research already published for them to adequately contribute to the world’s knowledge production. To address this vicious cycle of prejudice, it is recommended that South Africa (and Africa) look at forums to disseminate their research. A growing service that addresses this issue is self-publication, that is, libraries supporting the publication of journals and monographs. Further, this self-publication process removes barriers to publication opening new forums for the sharing of South African and African scholarship.

Currently, South African academic libraries publish more than 70 journals. It is recommended that a single platform be created for the publication of journals – this mode for the dissemination of relevant research will contribute to changing the ‘less than one percent’ conundrum. Such a platform will address the issue of skills capacity which is a challenge. Further, the platform will facilitate the inclusion of the marginalized research voices from the global south.

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### **SANLiC position**

SANLiC has taken the brave step to engage the nuances of open access before adopting practises that are not fit for purpose for global south countries such as South Africa. Exacerbating the situation is the extreme negative impact of COVID-19 and the possible ramification on libraries' capacity to uphold current subscription budgets.

It is proposed that SANLiC assumes a leadership role, via transformational agreements, to nurture and enhance a research and innovation culture on the continent. It is through transformational agreements that SANLiC can provide a holistic perspective to open access. In rolling-out such an agreement, South African academic and research institutions can use a scaffold process and build on the successes of SANLiC's negotiating strategies.

**Hence, *SANLiC holds the position that South Africa is not ready for transformative agreements and that transformational agreements must be explored to foster social justice and inclusivity. The influence of COVID-19 must be given serious consideration in developing a transformational open access strategy to ensure marginalised global south scholarship is accessible to the widest reading audience. Acknowledging that global south scholarship matters, there is a dire need for a fit-for-purpose model, a multi-pronged model that demonstrates inclusivity, a model built around social justice principles.***

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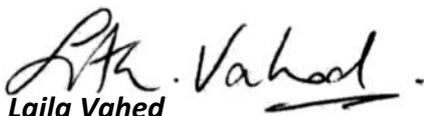
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**Chair : SANLiC Board of DIRECTORS**

**10 November 2020**

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