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Editors' Comment: Thematic Edition on Scholarly Communication and Opening Access to Knowledge.

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EDITORS' COMMENT

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Thematic Edition 2009/2010: Scholarly Communication and Access to Knowledge

This edition of the African Journal of Information and Communication addresses an aspect of 'information society' discourse that has taken shape in the world of universities, research, publishing and creative works. Given the potential offered by the Internet to leapfrog the divides that currently inhibit the reach and impact of African research, this thematic edition explores an African perspective on scholarly communications in the 21st century. What is the university's contribution to knowledge on the African continent and how does it make this contribution in an Internet age? Should knowledge be 'protected' through copyright and other forms of intellectual property rights (IPR)? What is the value of open access to scholarly knowledge? How can Southern African universities improve the visibility and accessibility of their research output?

The articles seek to take the discussions currently occurring within African scholarly and research networks to a broader audience of researchers and scientists, librarians and students, university leadership, government administrators and national policy-makers, as a contribution to the debate on the revitalisation of Africa's universities. While many articles or reviews explore the Southern African context specifically, the article on Copyright and Education looks at a broader sample of African countries, while the article on 'Access to Africa's knowledge' and the CODESRIA review addresses itself to a continental audience.

This volume includes pieces based on studies conducted in the SADC region and on the African continent. It also includes theoretical perspectives, based on an analysis of pertinent discourse and literature, contextualised to Southern Africa and the continent. The review articles provide a brief insight into current thinking and developments on the theme of scholarly communication and open access to knowledge, including perspectives on books and legislation. A number of articles refer to the concepts of 'global south' and 'global north' generally accepted to mean the materially poor underdeveloped countries and the materially rich industrially advanced countries.

Each of these pieces aims to present a novel view of the world of African universities in an Internet age.

In a continent increasingly linked through the Internet and through telecommunications infrastructure, the flow of information and knowledge across national boundaries presents an opportunity to universities, academics, students and researchers to increase the volume, quality and relevance of their knowledge outputs. However, this opportunity may remain 'theoretical' and beyond the reach of many universities in the region, based on a range of challenges in a number of spheres. These challenges include using Internet-based journal publishing platforms and publishing under Open Access licences such as Creative Commons.

Future editions of the journal will focus on other themes in the information society discourse, including eGovernance; ICT policy, regulation and governance; broadcasting and new media; information society development; and other emerging themes in the broad field of ICT, economy and society. ❑