

Proposal: A Coalition for Open Access (OA) publishing of Public Health in Africa

Aim: to form a coalition of partners who will develop a preprint and open review repository for public health research in Africa, supported by mentorship and online courses for African researchers.

Rationale:

There is a need for local research in Africa to help provide an evidence base for policy development. There needs to be more opportunity, capacity, and funding for researchers to publish their findings in local journals, with high-quality research results readily available to other researchers or policymakers through open access. Greater academic credit is currently given to researchers who publish in high-impact international rather than in local journals. Most international journals either have high article processing charges or their contents are hidden behind paywalls. Researchers often cannot read papers for free, although some platforms such as HINARI and the illegal Sci-Hub¹ offer free journal access to those working in institutions in some African countries. Peer reviewer shortage is a global phenomenon, and Africa is underrepresented in the reviewer pool. There is a need for a new era to advance equity and innovation in publishing through open access². Since public health problems are widespread, the issues discussed above are of particular concern to the academic discipline of public health in Africa.

Our experience: Many African countries have no health journals or only one. A survey by PublicHealth.Africa³ found journals not indexed in scholarly search engines and one-half of the journals levied full Article Processing Charges to be paid by the author or their institution. A subsequent survey of African teachers, researchers, editors and publishers by the same group⁴, found experience of open access publishing to be limited as was their knowledge of its advantages and disadvantages. Two-thirds of the respondents expressed a desire to join a mentoring programme and to have access to online courses relevant to their interests which included research methods and journal article reviewing and publishing.

¹ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(18\)30388-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(18)30388-7/fulltext)

² <https://www.cgdev.org/event/advancing-equity-and-innovation-research-publishing-time-new-era-open-access-movement>

³ Agyei, D.D., Sangare, M., Anyiam, F.E., Ruredzo, P.I.M., Warnasekara, J. and Heller, R.F., 2023. Open access publication of public health research in African journals. *Insights: the UKSG journal*, 36(1), p.6. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.605>

⁴ Machingura Ruredzo, P.I., Agyei, D.D., Sangare, M. and Heller, R.F. (2024) 'Open publishing of public health research in Africa: an exploratory investigation of the barriers and solutions', *Insights: the UKSG journal*, 37(1), p. 6. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.635>.

A site has been established for free open access courses for public health through a partnership between Peoples-Praxis and PublicHealth.Africa⁵. This includes a group of courses, '[Publishing, reviewing and appraising](#)' – and a facilitated module - 'Peer review and open publishing pilot course for African researchers' run in 2023/24 for 40 participants.

Following these activities, an online workshop was organised in April 2024 by a consortium of [PublicHealth.Africa](#), [LIBSENSE](#) (both associated with [WACREN](#)), [Peoples-Praxis](#), [West African Institute of Public Health](#), and [AFREhealth](#). The aim was to explore how to develop an ecosystem for the open publishing of public health in Africa.

The workshop concluded that there was a need and enthusiasm for developing a programme that included repositories for preprints and open reviews, supported by capacity building for reviewing, research methods, advocacy through online courses, and mentoring of early career researchers.

Goals

- To build editorial capacity among African researchers and expand the opportunities for the publication of African research and local access to it;
- To build capacity and enthusiasm for scholarly open review of preprints among African researchers;
- To build capacity and provide opportunities to actively participate in peer review and gain recognition through community engagement;
- To help decolonise the academic publishing process by creating equitable opportunities for African researchers to learn together, lead and teach others;
- To establish an open peer review community for public health in Africa;
- To provide opportunities for the open publishing of African research, including preprints and open peer reviewing.
- To be an exemplar for other regions seeking to increase open access publishing capacity.
- Take advantage of the opportunities offered by rapid, widely available internet access to enable isolated researchers to take part in the academic community whilst avoiding the costs and environmental damage of travel

⁵ <https://courses.peoples-praxis.org>

Objectives of the Coalition:

- To expand and support a group of organisations to develop:
 - o a preprint and open-review repository for public health research in Africa
 - o capacity building through mentorship and online courses for African researchers
 - o the infrastructure to support this
 - o a research and evaluation programme to support and expand these developments
- Collaborate on the creation of repositories for preprints and open reviews and advocate for appropriate recognition of these publications.
- Collaborate on the production, provision, delivery and evaluation of online courses, with consideration of other methods, such as workshops, to support high-quality peer review and open publishing and help early career researchers develop research skills.
- Provide a platform for the recruitment of mentees and mentors to support the delivery of learning and facilitate open access research.
- Ensure that the work published on the repository is of high quality, fit for open publication.
- Develop an accreditation system for achievement of capacity building for course graduates, mentees and mentors.
- Seek funding support for this initiative
- To explore the use of institutional repositories to raise profiles.

Members of the Collaboration: Those involved in organising the April 2024 workshop have agreed to participate; Peoples-Praxis, PublicHealth.Africa, LIBSENSE, West African Institute of Public Health (WAIPH), and AFREhealth are joined by the [United Nations University](#). Others may join later.