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From outreach to readiness building Africa's presence in DOAJ

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To understand the significance of the growth in the number of African journals - from 268 in 2022 to more than 830 today - it is important to appreciate the scale and complexity of the continent.

Africa stretches across more than 30 million square kilometres and has a population of approximately 1.55 billion people. Its journals operate across many countries, languages, institutional settings and publishing systems.

In several countries, scholarly journals are not coordinated through a strong national structure. There may be no complete national journal database, central support programme or clear mechanism for identifying active journals and helping them meet international standards. Journals often operate independently and in isolation.

The result is a fragmented publishing landscape. Valuable journals can remain difficult to discover, while their policies, editorial information and published content may be distributed across multiple institutional or publisher websites.

Africa's knowledge remains severely underrepresented in the global research system. UNESCO* estimates that only around 1% of global scientific research is generated in Africa.

This is striking for a continent representing almost one-fifth of the world's population. It means that African research, perspectives and locally relevant knowledge are still far less visible than they should be.

Helping African journals meet the DOAJ criteria is also about building the infrastructure, coordination, skills and visibility required for African knowledge to become a stronger part of the global scholarly record.

What helped drive this growth, and how do we continue strengthening Africa's participation in trusted scholarly infrastructure?

Our work began by examining the journals more closely. An early analysis of African journals revealed several recurring challenges, including:

- limited and unstable funding
- heavy reliance on unpaid editorial labour
- limited editorial and technical capacity
- incomplete policies
- poor metadata
- fragmented infrastructure
- low visibility and, in some cases, weak continuity arrangements

*UNESCO. 2025. Transforming knowledge for Africa's future. 8 September 2025.

We then looked specifically at readiness for DOAJ and saw the same issues repeatedly:

- Copyright and licensing statements were unclear.
- Peer-review processes were sometimes described too vaguely.
- Editorial board information was incomplete.
- Information about APCs or other charges was missing.
- Open-access policies did not always provide enough information for someone outside the journal to understand exactly how it operates.

This led us to an important realisation:

Many of these journals are already doing much of the right work. Their websites simply do not always make those practices visible, clear and verifiable.

This challenged our thinking, and we began asking:

What do African journals need to demonstrate their practices more clearly, address the gaps and become ready?

They need direct engagement, training, multilingual training materials and targeted journal support:

- In 2025, we appointed two additional African Ambassadors, bringing the total number to four.
- We organised webinars and national and regional engagements with editors, journal managers, librarians and publishers.
- We worked with partners to organise in-person training and developed a structured Google Classroom course, which around 500 participants have completed.
- We developed multilingual training materials and videos in English, French, Arabic and Portuguese.
- Working with local coordinators and national partners in Kenya, Namibia, Ghana and Nigeria, we identified active journals and contacted promising journals directly.

This raised another question:

How do four Ambassadors assess and support large numbers of journals consistently and manageably?

We used an automated AI-assisted DOAJ pre-assessment tool that produces a detailed, structured report. It shows where journals are doing well, identifies gaps and translates the findings into practical recommendations. The tool:

- provides a consistent assessment framework
- reveals previously unseen patterns and trends
- enables us to work at greater scale - by July 2026, we had completed almost 300 pre-assessments
- helps us prioritise our support
- makes follow-up easier
- shifts the role of the Ambassador towards that of a connector, trainer, diagnostician and facilitator of journal development.

The tool also highlighted a further problem: multiple journal websites are often out of sync.

The same journal may appear on two, three or even more websites. Which one is the authoritative journal website? Which policy should be trusted?

We encourage journals to establish one clear, authoritative primary version of the journal online. This enables better harvesting, indexing and linking, while increasing the visibility of the journal's content.

Throughout this work, we have continued to promote Diamond Open Access as an important part of an equitable African scholarly communication system.

For me, the wider message of this poster is that equitable open infrastructure requires equitable access to the knowledge, guidance and support needed to participate in it.

We hope to reach 1,000 African journals in DOAJ by the end of this year - a fitting milestone as the DOAJ Ambassador Programme celebrates its tenth anniversary.