

Transcript- In conversation with Elizabeth Marincola

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Elizabeth is a global leader of science publishing, education, advocacy, and policy. She joined the Science for Africa Foundation in 2021. A senior advisor following six years advising the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa on open research. Elizabeth was CEO of PLUS, the world's largest Open Access publisher, served as President of Washington, DC based Society for Science and the Public.

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And was publisher of Science News magazine, as well as executive director of the American Society for Cell Biology. She's authored dozens of articles and chapters published by Science, Nature Medicine, The Huffington Post, and Oxford University Press. Do you think that access to research and also to publishing across Africa is equal and fair?

1:02

In a word, no. There but and there are problems on several levels. One is the reason that Open Access publishing was developed in the 1st place is actual access to the content, the need to subscribe to journals in order to read the content in the journals. There still exists of course traditional subscription journals and to the extent that.

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Funding doesn't exist to subscribe to these journals. African countries are at a distinct disadvantage, which is not to say that everybody in the rest of the world can afford to subscribe to every journal that they need. But it's worse than Africa because there's less funding for science. So on that level it's a problem.

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But there are other equity issues that touch on access that are more subtle but very real. In Africa, one issue is the problem of bias in peer review. There's a tendency to look favorably upon those institutions and individuals that the reviewers know in their field.

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And when there's a submission to a major journal from perhaps an African institution, from authors with African names that may be unfamiliar to the reviewers chosen by editors of traditional journals, they're at a disadvantage in terms of acceptance and treatment of their content. This is one of the big advantages of Open Research Africa, because the content is published.

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Before it goes through rigorous peer review, and in this way it's accessible to the world. Anybody can read it. It's clearly marked as not yet peer reviewed, not yet having passed peer review, but in the meantime it's available. Other scientists can build on results. This, fundamentally, is the whole purpose of publishing.

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Of course, there is also the subtext of advancing the author's career through their publishing record. But while it's out there awaiting peer review and awaiting indexing, it's available, and this is critically important. Another problem that transparent publishing involves is it's.

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More incumbent upon the reviewers to review fairly. In the old traditional space of scientific publishing, there tended to be, I'm sorry to say, quite a bit of extemporaneous criticism, which the reviewers could feel free to.

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To offer knowing that nobody would see it when reviews are transparent and the whole world consume the reviewers accountable for what they say. And in this way the quality of peer review improves.

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Demonstrably compared to closed peer review. So in all these ways, African scientists and African science itself is greatly advantaged through a transparent publishing process such as that that F-1000 offers. And to what extent do you see these principles, if you like, of?

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Open data sharing, transparency, open peer review and so on being adopted across Africa and perhaps even to what extent embedded it is being accepted across Africa. I think researchers have readily seen the advantages in terms of the uptake of their science.

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They also have the advantage of a more rapid date stamp. They can establish themselves as having contributed their output to the scientific literature sooner than in a traditional peer review. There's exists a real challenge, though still in Africa, and it's the same one exists everywhere in the world, but it might be more distinct in Africa, and that is what I think of as.

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The tyranny of the impact factor, that is, people continue to believe, and to a great extent it is regrettably true, that one's career depends upon the impact factor of the journal in which they're publishing. This is one of the things that Open Research Africa and all of F1000 suite of journals have tried to address with their different approach to publishing.

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Yet there is understandable hesitation on the part of African scientists because they believe, and again they're not wrong to believe, that if they can get an article or another research output accepted into a very high impact, albeit closed access journal such as Nature or Science, it will be a big boon for their career.

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So it's this tension that we're fighting. Ironically, and by the admission of the developers of the impact Factor, it was never meant to reflect the quality of a research output. But it has become a proxy for the quality of research output, even though it's not a valid measure of that output. So we have to continue to fight against this.

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The perception which has become reality. Can I ask a question about the impact of open research? Africa faces a number of complex, big challenges. What role do you think that open research plays in helping to solve those problems?

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It plays a huge role because by publishing in an open environment, not only is the work available to other scientists who can build on it, and therefore advanced solutions to whatever the problem is that's being addressed, but it's also accessible to the world so it can get picked up by journalists who call public attention to whatever the issue is.

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It gets picked up by clinicians who can take the lessons of whatever the output is and apply it to their thinking about their patients and a group that is often forgotten but at the end of the day is the most important group and that is patients and patient advocates who are demanding access to this information.

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On behalf of those who are suffering from different health situations and they've played a critical role, these advocates, whether they're family members or professional advocates, in demanding the governments and other entities fund scientific research and push it forward so all these things interact to make open research.

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Really important in terms of advancing research in general and as a part I'm going to just ask as what role do you think that if you like external partners, particularly in the publishing area like F1000 should be playing, can play, should be playing in helping to promote not just open research but helping to solve some of these complex problems.

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Yeah, I think it's very important that publishers don't take the pressure off policy makers in demanding that public money is used for the benefit of the public without unreasonably withholding this publicly funded research.

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I think publishers have a very large role to play. They have a lot of influence and leverage with policy makers, their employers, their economic generators. And so I think to the extent that publishers and F1 thousands been very good at this through its history, can continue to advocate for open publishing practices again.

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Especially with public money then, then I think society in general will benefit. I guess just a final question about Open research Africa and where you see it going, if you like what, what's your you know so far? What have been the things you're most proud of but also you know looking back 1015 years from now, what would you?

11:01

Of hope to have achieved one of the areas that I think is most important to continue develop on open Research Africa is what we call our gateways. This is an opportunity for a sister organizations to develop their own presence on open Research Africa and we have a number of them and it enables these groups such as the African Society for Human Genetics.

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To encourage their own constituencies to publish on the platform Open Research Africa, and the reason that it has such an ambitious, broad name, aspires to be an umbrella publisher for all of African science. And I should say, beyond the.

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Life and Health Sciences. It aspires to be a home for African science in the in the physical sciences, chemical sciences, social sciences, etcetera. So if I consider where we are 10 years from now, what would make me most proud looking back is if other scientific organizations beyond Science for Africa foundation.

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Found it to be a satisfying home. And the transparent publishing practices are multiplied across the continent. Elizabeth, Marine Color, thank you so much for joining us for this F-1000 in conversation. It's been a real pleasure talking to you. Thank you so much. Thank you for the opportunity, Martin.