

## **SPENDING UP ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT – BUT WHERE DOES IT GO? ACADEMIC PUBLISHING FACES THE CHALLENGE...**

South Africa has increased its spending on research and development (R & D) to R10 billion over the past year, a recent survey commissioned by government's Department of Science and Technology has revealed. In the period 2003-04, R & D spending accounted for 0.81% of the gross domestic product (GDP) – a respectable figure which is edging up to the target of 1% in 2008, set by Science and Technology Minister Mosibudi Mangena. The challenge now is how to make ever-growing R & D results accessible to those who require it, on both a local and international scale ...

While the growth of R & D is welcomed as a healthy indicator of the country's economy, it needs to be met with a corresponding capacity to distribute information. However, academic publishing (which traditionally supports R & D publishing) has been steadily shrinking as publishing houses either battle for funds, or are over-subscribed in certain areas. The question, then, is how to find new ways to disseminate vital research information, with cost and accessibility being major factors.

In this light, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Press has been developing a dual publishing philosophy with an emphasis on making top-quality research material available via a variety of options. The HSRC Press is responsible for publishing up to 50 titles a year, promoting social science scholarship through a broad author pool. Both local and international academics and research specialists contribute to an ongoing, peer-reviewed catalogue of publications focusing on a range of topics including democracy and governance, education, and arts and culture. While partially government-funded, many HSRC publications serve to critically assess government policy. The HSRC Press serves a readership that includes the academic community, policy-makers, governmental departments and civil society.

Most importantly, because the Press is partially funded by a Parliamentary grant, it seeks to establish itself as a resource for the public benefit. In practical terms, this means making HSRC publications as broadly accessible as possible within the public domain.

In terms of the HSRC Press dual publishing philosophy, valuable academic research material can be accessed both in print and online. Printed copies of HSRC publications are available in bookstores, libraries and via online bookshops, while online versions can be downloaded (either as specific chapters or as entire publications) at no cost via the HSRC Press website.

[www.hsrcpress.ac.za](http://www.hsrcpress.ac.za) is the first fully-functional Open Access publishing website in southern Africa.

"Printed journals and books have long been the traditional means of disseminating material. But modern technology offers even more in terms of distribution of knowledge," says Garry Rosenberg, Publishing Director for the HSRC Press. "Electronic publishing establishes the possibility of sharing information faster, and even for free. At a time when the privatisation of academic publishing is growing on the one hand, and economics are limiting independent publication on the other, it is important to create something that is owned and held collectively with no restriction on access."

The HSRC Press dual publishing philosophy and Open Access website is part of a dedicated strategy to publish groundbreaking material (which sometimes may not necessarily account for massive sales) that is crucial in terms of its contribution to the social sciences research community.

"The cost of traditional academic publishing has meant that less and less important research, particularly by newer authors, is being published – publishing houses tend to play it safe by sticking to recognised names, thus diminishing the actual amount of critical debate on the shelves," says Karen Bruns, Marketing Manager for the HSRC Press. "But by offering several publishing options, we have been able to extend our range of authors and maintain a high standard of quality publications."

This strategy also takes circulation and print runs into account, as Bruns explains that HSRC Press publications do not go "out of print" when market demand drops. "Instead, we are able to electronically archive material and supply copies in small quantities."

In addition, online versions can be downloaded either as specific chapters or as entire publications, which puts more choice in the hands of the public.

This implementation of an Open Access philosophy follows a worldwide movement towards making information more easily available using electronic/digital resources. Accordingly, many more websites are now offering their information at little or no cost. There's been a general shift in publishing away from online pay-sites with restricted content to an increasingly non-restrictive approach. However, quality is an ongoing issue, one which the HSRC Press is not prepared to compromise on.

"All our publications are subject to a strict, peer-review process and production values are high. We are not simply posting raw data to the web. Moreover, our website is not an online catalogue. It is a public resource and a fully-functional publishing tool. We are, ultimately, providing extremely valuable research at no cost to the consumer, with the election of purchasing a print product should the consumer so wish," says Bruns.

The HSRC Press Open Access publishing model is breaking new ground in terms of electronic publishing in southern Africa. With a publishing record of some 50 new titles a year, it is set to become a formidable resource both locally and globally. And it goes a long way to addressing the issue of shrinking publishing capacity in an ever-increasing R & D environment.

- Visit the HSRC Press website at: [www.hsrcpublishers.ac.za](http://www.hsrcpublishers.ac.za) or [www.hsrcpress.ac.za](http://www.hsrcpress.ac.za)

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