

OPEN AND SHUT?

Thursday, May 20, 2010

A letter to CGIAR in support of Open Access

Last week Indian Open Access (OA) advocate [Professor Subbiah Arunachalam \(Arun\)](#) organised a letter to the top management of CGIAR — the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research. The letter spoke of the need for, and advantages of, making all of CGIAR's research output Open Access.

In doing so, it pointed out that one of CGIAR's research centres — the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in India — has already introduced an OA mandate, and this has proved hugely successful.

Since the mandate was introduced, the letter says, OA has grown fast, "and the portal now has virtually all the research papers published in recent times, and all the books and learning material produced by ICRISAT researchers."

Yet, the letter adds, today ICRISAT is the only international agricultural research centre with an OA mandate. [After the letter was sent, the signatories discovered that The International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) also has an open access mandate in place.]

Since the ICRISAT mandate has proved very successful, the letter suggests, now would be a good time for other research centres to follow suit. As the letter puts it, "We believe that it would be great if other CGIAR laboratories could also mandate open access to their research publications. Indeed, it would be a good idea to have a system wide Open Access mandate for CGIAR and to have interoperable OA repositories in each CGIAR laboratory."

The letter adds: "Such a development would provide a high level of visibility for the work of CGIAR and greatly advance agricultural research. Besides, journals published by CGIAR labs could also be made OA."

CGIAR, we should note, was initially an initiative of the [Rockefeller Foundation](#), and is focused on reducing poverty and hunger, and improving human health and nutrition, as well as enhancing ecosystem resilience through high-quality international agricultural research, partnership and leadership.

Following the Rockefeller initiative it was proposed in 1970 to create a worldwide network of agricultural research centres under a permanent secretariat, and today CGIAR has 64 governmental and nongovernmental members and 15 research centres around the world.

Along with Arun, fifteen other OA advocates signed the letter (including me).

So why target CGIAR? I emailed Arun and asked him to explain the background.



Photo courtesy of Suchit Nanda

Subbiah Arunachalam

RP: Why did you decide to write a letter to CGIAR?

SA: What one does largely comes from one's own experience. After a long career in scholarly communication — as editor of scientific journals and secretary of a

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Richard Poynder
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scholarly Academy in India — I spent 12 years as a volunteer with an NGO headed by Professor M S Swaminathan and was engaged in a rural development project focused on poverty alleviation. The letter to the CGIAR top management was a direct result of these two experiences.

RP: Essentially this is a developing world issue isn't it?

SA: Of course. Agriculture is the poor cousin among different areas of research; just the same way the Third World countries are the poor cousins of the advanced countries.

Most people in poor countries depend on agriculture for a living. How can they improve their lives if agricultural knowledge and innovations are privatised or, even if they are not privatised, made so expensive that they cannot afford to access them?

If we want to address the problem of rampant poverty in the developing countries, it is important to make agricultural knowledge flow freely and be easily available to people in the developing world.

RP: The point here is that the traditional method of publishing research in subscription journals means that that research remains inaccessible to most researchers in the developing world, since most research institutions there cannot afford to pay the very costly subscriptions imposed by scholarly publishers?

SA: Correct. The CGIAR laboratories were conceived, largely by the Rockefeller Foundation, with the clear purpose of helping the developing countries, and later on funded by the World Bank, FAO, and UNDP.

Unlike development aid where funds from the rich countries are transferred to poor countries, the CGIAR was set up to transfer knowledge to the poor countries as well as help them be part of knowledge production. The difference is clear: If you want to help someone who is hungry better to teach him fishing rather than give him a fish.

Unfortunately, research findings of CGIAR laboratories often end up as articles in refereed professional journals, most of which are behind toll access. I thought it needed to be corrected.

RP: OA has been a cause for you for some years now hasn't it?

SA: I have been talking about and promoting open access for nearly a decade and indeed it has become a passion. Some of my friends, eminent academics and researchers, refer to me jokingly as "Mr Open Access of India." I found in my friend and former colleague Dr Venkataraman Balaji someone who can actually implement it in ICRISAT, the CGIAR laboratory located in India.

We worked together in holding a half-day symposium on Open Access as part of the annual meeting of the Indian Science Congress Association held at Hyderabad (close to where ICRISAT is located). And we invited Alma Swan from the UK and Professor Pushpa Bhargava, one of India's leading life scientists and humanists, to the symposium. As I did not have any funding support, Balaji hosted all the speakers as guests of ICRISAT.

Then about two years ago Dr Balaji convinced his Director General and the senior management of ICRISAT about the need to adopt OA for all research publications of ICRISAT.

RP: So your letter is the next step in an extended process of OA advocacy?

SA: It is. Long before ICRISAT decided to adopt OA I had met Enrica Porcari of CGIAR at a Global Knowledge Partnership meeting in Kuala Lumpur or Bangkok and I had broached the topic of OA and her response was positive. I have been in touch with her ever since then.

I am also associated with IAALD, a worldwide group of agricultural information professionals, and I talked to them about the need for adopting OA. Peter Ballantyne, an old friend of mine from his days at IICD, in The Hague, was the President of IAALD and a few months ago he joined one of the CGIAR laboratories.

I have been sending advocacy letters to all three of them (Balaji, Porcari and Ballantyne) and I got a sense that CGIAR information professionals and knowledge managers were now moving towards OA. So I thought it would help them if some of us activists in the Open Access movement wrote to the top management of CGIAR.

So I decided to draft a letter. I thought if the letter was signed by some of the leaders of the OA movement, it would have a much greater chance of achieving its purpose. I sent it out to about 20 champions of OA and 15 of them readily agreed to be signatories. As I did it in a short time, I might have missed some real champions of OA. My apologies to them.

RP: Why target CGIAR?

Alternatives , explained why he believes the var...



PLOS CEO Alison Mudditt discusses new OA agreement with the University of

California

The Public Library of Science (PLOS) and the University of California (UC) have today announced a two-year agreement designed to make...



The Open Access Interviews: Publisher MDPI Headquartered in Basel,

Switzerland, the Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, or more usually MDPI , is an open access publisher...



The OA Interviews: Taylor & Francis' Deborah Kahn discusses Dove

Medical Press

Please note the postscript to this interview here The open-access publisher Dove Medical Press has a controversial past and I have writ...



The Open Access Interviews: OMICS Publishing Group's Srinu

Babu Gedela

***Update: On August 26th 2016, the US government (Federal Trade Commission) announced that it has charged OMICS with making false claims, ...



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In calling for research papers to be made freely available open access advocates promised that doing so would lead to a simpler, less cos...



Robin Osborne on the state of Open Access: Where are we, what still needs to be done?

One of a series exploring the current state of Open Access (OA), the Q&A below is with Robin Osborne , Professor of Ancient History a...



Community Action Publishing: Broadening the Pool

We are today seeing growing dissatisfaction with the pay-to-publish model for open access. As this requires authors (or their funders or ins...

SA: Actually I have been writing such letters to many organisations, although mostly Indian organisations and a few international organisations such as [ICTP, Trieste](#).

In India I have written frequently to organisations like the office of the Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government, the Department of Science and Technology, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Indian Council of Medical research, and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research — with varying levels of success.

But I wrote to CGIAR above all because agriculture is vital for the poor countries of the world. Besides, CGIAR is an umbrella organisation that covers 15 laboratories dealing with virtually all aspects of agriculture. Unlike the physics OA repository [arXiv](#), and the biomedical research archive [PubMed Central](#) there is no central repository for agricultural research. And most importantly, one of the CGIAR laboratories has already adopted full Open Access. At the same time many others in the system *do not* know about it even a year after it began operation.

RP: What would you like people to do in response to the letter?

SA: If by 'people' you mean people belonging to CGIAR, I would like them to implement full OA in each one of their laboratories. I would like agricultural research organisations such as the US Department of Agriculture and major agricultural universities of the world to adopt OA.

I am happy to inform you, after Dr S Ayyappan took over as Director General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research a few months ago, [ICAR](#) is moving fast towards OA. He made their two refereed journals OA and he has assigned a full-time Assistant Director General to implement many OA-related initiatives.

RP: What about other researchers, OA advocates and anyone else who is interested in helping to ensure the free flow of research information in the developing world. What would you propose they do?

SA: Any movement of this kind is like a [temple car](#) in India. The more people come forward to pull, the faster the car will move, and the faster it will reach its destination.

All those interested may also write to the Board of CGIAR and the Directors General of CGIAR laboratories recommending the adoption of an OA mandate.

They can also talk to individual researchers and persuade them to make their own research openly accessible.

I understand that knowledge managers in CGIAR laboratories are not averse to the idea of Open Access. If they know that many of us outside the system are also keen that they adopt OA, it will help them move to forward quickly.

Posted by Richard Poynder at [13:03](#)



9 comments:

Francesca said...

I completely agree with Professor Arunachalam. Research outputs should be made as widely and accessible as possible; this is one of the ways the CGIAR can fulfil its mission. CAS-IP, the legal unit to the CGIAR, is assisting other centres in going "open" advising on open access strategies and copyright. That is why Boversity, CIMMYT, and ICARDA are following ICRISAT's example, adopting an open access policy and consistently use Creative Commons as well as OpenData Commons for their data exchanges. We are really pleased to be involved in this process which will ultimately benefit research in the agricultural sector in developing countries. Dr. Francesca Re Manning, IP Solicitor, CAS-IP.

May 24, 2010 9:25 am



Richard Poynder said...

Thank you for this Francesca. I did, by the way, do an interview with CAS-IP last year. It can be read [here](#).

May 25, 2010 4:17 pm

enrica porcari said...

While Open Access as a principle finds me in complete agreement, as research organizations such as the CGIAR cannot be satisfied just with doing great science. We need to find ways to ensure our research reaches the hands of those who need it. But looking at open access journals is one one aspect. In my response to the letter <http://bit.ly/9egVCr> I invite further thinking on additional aspects of



Open Access:
What should
the priorities be
today?

This year marks
the 15 th
anniversary of the Budapest
Open Access Initiative
(BOAI), the meeting that led
to the launch of the open
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Followers

"opening access to research as a pathway to increasing the impact of our work"

Enrica Porcari
Chief Information officer, CGIAR

May 26, 2010 7:55 pm 

 **Unknown said...**

Dear Dr Francesca Re Manning:

I read your short response to Richard Poynder's recent blog on making CGIAR work open access. Thanks very much for the support you and your colleagues at CAS-IP are providing CGIAR centres in making their research freely and openly available to researchers, farmers and policy makers around the world. Your decision to consistently use Creative Commons and Open Data Commons is commendable. Hope you will succeed soon in helping all the 15 CGIAR centres adopt open access self-archiving and in mandating OA for all research outputs of all CGIAR centres. As you may know, Dr William Dar, DG, ICRISAT, is a great champion of OA and he is on the advisory board of EOS (Enabling Open Scholarship). At the time EOS was inaugurated Dr Dar said, "Open scholarship benefits the whole world's science, not just that of the western world. It enables the free flow of research information between north and south, east and west, helping research to progress much more effectively. EOS will be very valuable in advancing this process and improving the way science is carried out across the globe".

May 27, 2010 10:06 am 

 **Unknown said...**

Dear Enrica:

We agree that "CGIAR cannot be satisfied just with doing great science. We need to find ways to ensure our research reaches the hands of those who need it." We are happy to know that you are thinking of additional aspects of "opening access to research as a pathway to increasing the impact of our work." The crucial first step that will ensure CGIAR research reaches those who need it is to make all of CGIAR research output, the great science as you put it, open access. That is the one pathway without which all other pathways may not be able to deliver effectively.

Incidentally, the signatories to the letter are talking about open access and NOT about open access journals. There is a world of difference between the two. A mandate for open access does in no way restrict the freedom of researchers in the selection of journals where they can publish. They can publish their papers in any journal of their choice including toll-access journals, provided the editor of the journal accepts the paper, and make the final author's version openly available on an institutional or a central inter-operable open access repository. As Dr William Dar said, "Open scholarship benefits the whole world's science, not just that of the western world. It enables the free flow of research information between north and south, east and west, helping research to progress much more effectively."

Arun

May 27, 2010 10:32 am 

 **anil said...**

in fact harvard made it obligatory for all the papers published by its faculty to be openly accessible. once this is made into a policy by cgiar, the publishers will have to fall in liner. I endorse this idea and wish that it is accepted by cg management soonest

anil k gupta
sristi.org/anilg

May 28, 2010 6:24 pm 

 **Unknown said...**

The New York Times of 28 May 2010 (page A 23) carries an op-ed contribution by Daniel N Baker, Professor of Astrophysical and Planetary Sciences, and Director, Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics, University of Colorado, Boulder.

Entitled "The Earth's Secrets, Hidden in the Skies", the article suggests "Allowing the public access to the environmental data gathered by U.S. military satellites would have many benefits." Yes, Prof. Baker is talking about throwing open data collected by military satellites. He goes on to state, "Making the data more available would be remarkably simple. The

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Departments of Energy and Defense, which operate the satellites' detection functions, should apply the same standards used for G.P.S.: All but the most sensitive data is disseminated automatically, so that anyone in the world can tap into the flow of information beaming down from the satellites." As simple as making "the data is disseminated automatically." In the case of CGIAR it should be even more simple, as no military sensitivities are involved. On the contrary the very purpose of CGIAR is to help the poor. All that CGIAR has to do is just to mandate open access. But for a few of the CGIAR centres the others have delayed it for too long. They should go ahead and do it now.

"Making the data truly public would allow full peer review of their findings, leading to higher-quality research," says Prof. Baker. How very true! I am sure all of us want to improve the quality of CGIAR research.

Prof. Baker concludes his reasoned argument thus: "Much as America's scientific leadership and policy of open inquiry did wonders for its prestige during the cold war, making most of the detection system data available to the global public would show friends, allies and adversaries that the United States is willing to use even its most advanced defense assets for the betterment of humanity.

American taxpayers support a truly remarkable monitoring system whose information could significantly improve our health, security and well-being. We should use this hidden treasure to make the world a better and safer place."

Prof. Baker highlights the value of open inquiry. He reminds us that taxpayer support (or public funding) should mean that we should use the results of research for public good by making it open.

Arun

May 28, 2010 11:11 pm 



Richard Poynder said...

Enrica Porcari, Chief Information Officer of the CGIAR and Leader of the CGIAR's ICT-KM Program, has **responded** to the open letter to CGIAR on the ICT-KM blog.

Enrica makes a number of points.

First, while agreeing that Open Access "is a good idea" she suggests that it should "not be an end in itself", and that making research freely available "will take more than just focusing on publishing in open access journals".

Second, she says that while OA policies are useful for research that stays in CGIAR's hands "the situation becomes more complex when it comes to articles published by third parties".

Finally, she says that "Each centre makes its own decisions" on how it makes its research available; and that "this approach is more likely to be followed, and sustained over the long term, than a one-solution-fits-all approach."

Arun has addressed the first two points. As he says above, OA does not imply only publishing in Open Access journals. Researchers can also make their work freely available by continuing to publish in traditional subscription journals, and then self-archive a copy of their paper in their institutional repository. Self-archiving, in fact, should be the main focus of an OA mandate, since it makes no sense to limit researchers to publishing exclusively in OA journals.

And as Arun **points out** on the CAS-IP blog, the US National Institutes of Health, the Wellcome Trust and the seven UK Research Councils did not view the complexity of publishing papers in subscription journals as a sufficient obstacle to prevent them introducing OA mandates. Neither did Harvard University. This issue is not as complex as it may at first seem, and indeed today most subscription journals permit authors to self-archive.

What would perhaps move the debate forward now would be for Enrica to expand on her third point? Why is success more likely if each centre is left to decide for itself whether to adopt OA? Is not calling for such a bottom-up (rather than top-down) approach to OA comparable to saying that employees in an organisation should be able to decide how many hours a day they work, or whether they even turn up for work on a

particular day?

A final thought: In her response Enrica says that making CGIAR research freely available is, "in line with the Independent Review of the CGIAR, *which recognizes the need for OA*. It suggests that CGIAR Centers should be encouraged to 'make their research available and useful for development' as well as for international science ... [and that] ... the 'CGIAR can achieve development impacts where they matter only by *being part of an international public goods [IPG] delivery system*'."

What better and more effective way of fulfilling both these recommendations made by the Independent Review than by mandating open access to all CGIAR research publications through inter-operable institutional open access repositories?

May 29, 2010 9:12 am 



Unknown said...

I read a few minutes ago a talk on Academia as a commons delivered by Prof. David Bollier at the Robert Frost Library, Amherst College, on 26 April. I was very impressed, especially by the following passage, and I wanted to share it with CGIAR KM community.

"Why aren't all students in our country sent a letter from their college or university that reads:

As a member of an academic community, you have an affirmative duty to share your work with your peers and as widely as possible. That is a major responsibility of belonging to an academic commons. By making your work freely available, it acknowledges your debt to prior generations of scholars. It also improves contemporary academic research by subjecting it to the widest, most rigorous scrutiny. And will make it easier for future scholars to develop their own discoveries and innovations, and so contribute to a more bountiful future.

If we stand on the shoulders of giants, as Isaac Newton famously declared, why should academia so willingly embrace the closed, proprietary norms of the entertainment industry? Academic knowledge should be regarded as the inalienable resource of a commons.

Why, indeed, should academia even use the term "intellectual property?" The term was barely used thirty years ago, even by law scholars and attorneys. Copyright industries deliberately popularized the term as a way to strengthen their claims of absolute ownership. It was also a way to demonize unauthorized uses of copyrighted works that are entirely legal, as piracy. That point bears repeating: Many unauthorized uses of copyrighted works are entirely legal!"

May 30, 2010 8:10 pm 

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