Challenging libraries in the alternative dissemination of African scholarly communicastion

Recent studies have shown that more research on Africa is being done and published (print and online) outside Africa, than on the African continent. Some years ago in 1999, Justin Chisenga reported at the IFLA conference that the African continent produced only about 0, 4% of the global online content. If SA is excluded, this figure drops to about 0,02%. African countries consume around 12% of books published in the world, but produce only 2%.
Some authors estimate that more than 50 % of books used at the tertiary level in SA is imported, but based on information shared by various university librarians; a much higher figure of about 75 to 80% is suggested.

In developing countries scientific journals are mostly published by research institutions, scholarly societies and NGO's. In most cases the publishing is not economically viable, journals struggle to maintain their costs, and often comes under threat of being closed down. Small publishers have to compete with industry giants, who have a monopoly in the scientific and technology fields.

Scientific information is essential for the socio-economic development of communities and even much more so of Africa. However, many individuals and institutions on the African continent cannot afford the exorbitant prices asked by some publishers. Nothing in the world is free, but if the publishing model could be changed so that publishing costs are absorbed by researchers, research institutions and governments, the access can be open and free.

This paper will first of all examine the current status of publishing. Secondly it will describe various initiatives for the alternative dissemination of African scholarly content through Open Access publishing, institutional repositories and the role of national bodies in facilitating and supporting equitable and affordable access to scientific information. Lastly it would challenge librarians to play a pro-active role in facilitating access to information.