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Building Structural Equity and Inclusion in Open Scholarship

A side event at the 7th Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals
6 May 2022

Concept Note

The choices we make in the transition to open system infrastructures for producing and sharing knowledge will affect how equitable Open Science systems will be in the future. The recent inequities in global health outcomes and the global vaccine inequality are however the stark reality. Institutions can work towards building structural equity by adopting values based in humanities, examining the ways in which current solutions might repeat systemic oppression, and centering and empowering women and vulnerable populations during the solution/system creation process, not after. Open Science can contribute to the creation of equity only if it enables historically marginalized people to learn about and research topics that are important to them and their communities, have their research recognized and rewarded – not through proxies –, and translate this into impact for their communities. Proposals for increasing equity in Open Science include removing barriers to access and publication of scientific papers, lowering language barriers, openly sharing unique collections, centering the voices of the most vulnerable, and decolonizing knowledge.

Open scholarship models and infrastructures in science and humanities education attuned to the SDGs implementations and UNESCO's Recommendation on Open Science, can also substantially contribute towards equity. The UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science in particular is the long-awaited, landmark instrument-setting agreement that provides an initial framework. In a society that daily manifests the pathology of data misuse, that heightens barriers to accessing scientific output, and allows the overconcentration of data-aggregating powers at the hands of purely commercial platforms lacking the checks and balances of democratic, public institutions, there are steps that both institutions and researchers at their workbench need to take to ensure access to research production and dissemination is equitable, data collection more democratic and transparently participatory.

Strengthening the relationship between science, policy, and wider society, known as the science-policy-society interface, has proven essential for resolving global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic. As we slowly recover from COVID-19 and start preparing for future crises, this interface remains a catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and for meeting the commitments of the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Speakers are invited to explore the ways in which values like power, greed, exploitation, profit, and expansion result in educational, climate change, racial/class/global inequalities, and systemic oppression that excludes historically marginalized groups.

Speakers are urged to focus on how open and equitable access to (scientific) knowledge can become a standing item in our society's innovation agenda, and how it can strengthen the science-policy-society interface through the promotion of open dialogue and engagement among diverse social actors.