

Box 20.5: The African Open Science Platform

In December 2016, South Africa's Minister of Science and Technology launched a three-year initiative to lay the foundations for the African Open Science Platform. Funded by the South African Department of Science and Technology, the initiative set out to offer guidance on data policy, map the African landscape and begin the process of building a pan-African open science community.

A Draft Strategy for the African Open Science Platform was developed in early 2018. It argued that 'there is no alternative for Africa but to adapt to this new paradigm but in its own, unique way, as a leader and not a follower'.

The draft strategy acknowledged the risk that open science might allow better-funded research systems to reap the benefits of Africa's open data (AOSP, 2018), yet its authors could 'see no other option'. In their view, to

counter the trend towards open science would be to limit the resources available to scientists and impede international collaboration and engagement. With open science being pursued elsewhere, there was a risk that the African knowledge divide could deepen.*

This vision formed the basis of the official strategy, which was launched at the Science Forum South Africa in late 2018.

The African Open Science Platform should provide scientists and other actors with the tools to embrace open science, facilitate data-intensive research and provide a digital space for interaction between scientists and other stakeholders. The platform comprises six strands:

- a federated network of computational facilities and services;
- software tools and advice on policies and practices concerning research data management;

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- a federated network of computational facilities and services;
- software tools and advice on policies and practices concerning research data management;

- a Data Science and AI Institute in data analytics;
- priority application programmes, such as in relation to cities, disease, the biosphere and agriculture;
- a Network for Education and Skills in data science and information; and
- a Network for Open Science Access and Dialogue.

Membership will comprise pan-African, regional and national institutions, which will participate in financing the platform and in implementing the six strands. Each of the strands is to be operational by 2021.

*See essay on *The Time for Open Science is Now*, p. 9.

Source: compiled by Jake Lewis;
see: <http://africanopenscience.org.za/>

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