



## **Raising Up Journal Publishing Standards**

**Interview with  
Dr. Haseeb Irfanullah & Sioux Cumming**

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KENNEALLY: Around the globe, scholarly journal publishing faces exhausting technological and cultural changes. Perhaps the last great change will remake publishing as a truly international endeavor by including authors and publishers from the nations of Asia, Africa and South America as well as Europe and North America.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center’s podcast series. I’m Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book.

Africa Journals Online and INASP – the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications – are working to raise the profiles of so-called “Global South” authors and publishers. They have developed detailed publishing standards and a publication quality ranking system intended to guide local researchers and editors and spotlight their work.

In Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, Dr. Haseeb Irfanullah has a prominent role in promoting local research – both as Programme Coordinator for the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and as executive editor of the *Bangladesh Journal of Plant Taxonomy*. Dr. Irfanullah has helped to develop a roadmap for improving Bangladeshi journal publishing and his efforts are already making a difference for BanglaJOL, a database of online journals published in Bangladesh. And Dr. Haseeb Irfanullah joins me now, from Dhaka, Bangladesh. Welcome to Beyond the Book, Dr. Irfanullah. Aas Salaamu Alaikum!

IRFANULLAH: Wa alaykumu as-salam, Chris, it’s really nice to be on this (inaudible), thank you very much for having me.

KENNEALLY: You are very welcome, and we are very happy you can join us from Bangladesh to speak about this important issue. Journal publishing is very much a global enterprise today and turning to you is an opportunity for us to learn about the experiences you’ve had and the challenges that you faced in Bangladesh. So for our audience to better understand the situation, can you briefly describe the current



state of scholarly journal publishing in Bangladesh? What are the opportunities and the challenges as you see them?

IRFANULLAH: Bangladesh, as you understand, is a very small country and highly populous country in South Asia, better known for its natural disasters and other climatic impacts. But we do research, and we do publish our journals. And you'll be amazed to know that there are lots of journals being published from Bangladesh with support from the government. Maybe not 100%, but partially. That is a (inaudible). However, my understanding regarding Bangladesh journal publishing ecosystem, fundamentally it hasn't changed much over the last 50 years or so.

When I say hasn't changed much, I'm talking about the way we submit our journal manuscripts to the journals, the way editorial offices handle those manuscripts, the way we publish the format. Those haven't changed much. Of course, there are lots of technological advancement throughout the world, and definitely Bangladesh is getting benefit out of it.

But the major challenges that we often face is both on the demand side and the (inaudible) supply side. I often wonder, (inaudible) if our journals might not be quite sure where their niches are. Why do they publish a particular journal? What's the vision? What particular change they want to make in the particular discipline they're talking about. On the contrary, on the supply side we also see that there are some challenges. For example, are we getting enough quality manuscripts to be published? Are we compromising just to get our two issues for the year published? We are just sacrificing certain standards? Same goes for are we having an effective editorial board to help us with publishing those journals? Are we getting enough peer reviewers, because peer review system is one of the key issues that make a journal standard internationally, globally.

I don't want to go into detail regarding sustainability, financial issues, whether we are embracing technological advancement and all the innovation and creativity going on throughout the world in journal publishing.

KENNEALLY: Indeed, to help promote these standards that you're speaking of, there was something – a session in December 2016 called the “The BanglaJOL (sp?) Dialogue” – BanglaJOL for journals online. There was a chance to discuss ways to promote these international publishing standards, and the result was the development of a 12-step roadmap, something that you worked on a great deal. What are some of the highlights of that roadmap and tell us about some of the progress that you've made since December 2016.



IRFANULLAH: BanglaJOL is Bangladeshi – or Bangladeshi journal online. The aggregated form is BanglaJOL. There are 140 journals, mostly scientific journals, these are being harbored in this particular platform, managed by INASP. What we did in December, we wanted to bring all the – not all, at least most of the interested editors together, just to explore where we stood back then, and how do we define international standards. And if there's a gap, where we stood and where we want to go. What would be the steps? What would be the roadmap?

So the interesting point was that one current of the editors of BanglaJOL, they did come to that dialogue, and it was a quite intensive dialogue, I must say. And together we identified the standards and tried to highlight what are the action points that we need to take together, not only as an individual, as an editor of a particular journal, but together to change the whole culture of journal publishing in Bangladesh. This is the first time we did that, that's why we called it the First BanglaJOL Dialogue, which was facilitated by Bangladesh Academy of Sciences with support from UNESCO.

KENNEALLY: Well, that cultural change is something that you have really emphasized, Dr. Irfanullah, and I wonder if you can explain for us what you think needs to be done, and realistically, what can be done? I understand one of the things you're asking your colleagues to do there in Bangladesh is to not only be creative about the future, but to be self-critical, too.

IRFANULLAH: You are absolutely right, Chris, that one of the purposes of this particular dialogue was being self-critical and regarding what can be done realistically because we can set our target really, really high, but it is not physical. (sp?) So one thing we did – I can summarize all the things we do in, say, four points. The first thing is what we can do on a short-term basis. For example, if we are not having quality manuscripts, what can be done? So there are some action points. How to (inaudible) your journal, how to make them attractive to (inaudible) authors.

A second point is kind of a peer pressure. We proposed that, and it could be done, Bangladesh Journal Watch, it's a kind of a watchdog which will kind of monitor whether a particular journal is doing well or not. You might be (inaudible) a new system, JPPS, Journal Publishing Practice and Standards, which is kind of a joint venture of *African Journal* (sic) *OnLine* and INASP. They tried to put stars on BanglaJOL journals, and only handful of actually got one or two stars out of three stars, and most of them actually found not doing that well. So that kind of peer pressure could be quite an interesting thing to have.



The third thing I would like to say is more like a policy intervention. We don't have any regulation from the government side, so what about having a national science publishing policy that will guide us what to publish, when to publish, and how to publish so that the journals can keep a particular standard.

And the final thing is one of the major issues why we publish so much, we want to publish, we focus on numbers – quantity – rather than quality because academics, they need to show that they have been publishing quite a lot, so they are trying to publish so many papers – (inaudible) papers and others. So we need to influence the academic system, our universities, and both private and public, so that they can actually shift from that kind approach, publish or perish, rather than focus on quality. So these four things can be done if we want to make a real change and be self-critical as well as innovative.

KENNEALLY: We have been speaking today from Dacca, Bangladesh with Dr. Haseeb Irfanullah joining us on *Beyond the Book*. We appreciate your joining, Dr. Irfanullah. Da nobat.

IRFANULLAH: Thank you very much. Da nobat to you, as well, and thank you very much for having me.

KENNEALLY: Sioux Cumming joins me now from Oxford, United Kingdom, where she is program specialist for INASP, the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications. In 2017, INASP and African Journals Online developed JPPS, the Journal Publishing Practices and Standards, a framework for providing accreditation and support for journals in the global south that are hosted on the journals' online platforms. These include Banglajol in Bangladesh as well as others in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, and Latin America. JPPS has been shortlisted for the 2018 ALPSP Award for Innovation in Publishing. Sioux Cumming, welcome to Beyond the Book.

CUMMING: Thanks, Chris. It's great to be here.

KENNEALLY: First, congratulations on the nomination for the Innovation in Publishing Award. The ceremony is later this week as part of the annual ALPSP Conference. I'll take that again.

The award ceremony is later this week as part of the annual ALPSP Conference, and good luck with that. We're looking forward to chatting with you about JPPS. This Journal Publishing Practices and Standards were developed to help strengthen the reputation of publishing and research communities in the developing world. Dr. Hasib Irfanullah has just given us an insider's view of one such community in



Bangladesh. Sioux Cumming, can you help us understand better the situation more broadly? Tell us the before JPPS story and give us the after picture, too.

CUMMING: Well, we've been working with journals from these countries that you mentioned for a number of years now. Of course, African Journals Online started back in the 1990s, when most of these journals were largely invisible. They were housed in universities on bookshelves, and it was really difficult to get hold of this content. So we started this project largely to make these journals more visible. That was our aim at the beginning – just visibility, getting the journals online so that they could be discovered and so that this really valuable research being done in these countries was accessible to a global audience.

As the project progressed, we began to realize that visibility was not all, that a lot of these journals are published by individuals, by scholars – what we call scholar journals – who have a limited experience of the publishing industry. While the research that they were publishing was fine, the publishing practices surrounding journal publishing were often not as good as they could be. So particularly in the last five years of a project at INASP, we focused very much on helping these journals to improve their quality.

Prior to that, their policies were not as good as they could have been. They were not aware of things like copyright to a large extent, licensing permissions, the importance of explaining things like their peer review process. And then in the last three years in particular, both AJOL and ourselves have focused on helping the editors to address those publishing practices.

I want to emphasize here that we're looking at publishing practices. We're not looking at the content. We are not subject specialists. So we can't assist the actual content of the articles and the research that they cover. But we can look at the way in which the journals are being published.

KENNEALLY: And help them as well, as you say, raise the visibility, raise the accessibility of that content, whatever it may be. It's important to do this, I'm sure, in ways that are attainable and relevant for the people in these various publishing communities.

CUMMING: Absolutely. We've done a number of workshops where we explained all the processes surrounding improving quality, but we've actually been surprised ourselves at the response that we've had to JPPS, where it's been a much more structured process, much clearer and easier to understand, with achievable targets for each of the levels. I think that's been really important and interesting to us that



it's almost introduced a competitive element, which I think Hasib alluded to as well, which is quite interesting – that we need to have this competition.

KENNEALLY: Indeed. I guess can you help us understand better the way that someone who is writing for, contributing to, or editing one of these journals feels about the rest of the publishing world out there? Obviously, they're ambitious. They want their contributions to be heard. Have they felt locked out in the past?

CUMMING: If we're talking about the researchers, I think obviously they aspire to be in the most well-recognized, the most famous of journals, but that's a really difficult task, especially when you're first starting out. So perhaps a more achievable goal is to publish in a good journal in your community, and we feel very strongly that research that is done in these countries should be published within those countries, that it should be easily available and accessible within the country, because it also helps to improve the skills, the expertise of the publishing industry within those countries, rather than having your article published outside of the country.

KENNEALLY: So you're not exporting the expertise, so to speak. You're helping develop it there on the local level.

One of the things you do, as I understand, at INASP is to help collect the statistics related to usage of these various sites and inform people about trends there. You produce a newsletter for each of the JOLs, as we mentioned in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, and Latin America. Why is it important to be tracking the usage? I guess documentation is critical to helping the acceptance and the inclusion of these journals in the global collection, so to speak.

CUMMING: Well, the usage of these articles is absolutely phenomenal. It's huge. It's taken a while, but we now have the article-level metrics displayed on the abstract page of each article, and it's really encouraging that they are being downloaded, they're being read by huge numbers of people. But also when we look behind those statistics, we see that they're being read by virtually every country in the world. Researchers from everywhere bar, I think, Greenland and Antarctica are accessing the journals. Even those that come from Latin America which are all in Spanish are being accessed by more than just Spanish-speaking countries.

KENNEALLY: Sioux, I understand that before you joined INASP, you were a lecturer in Zimbabwe for a number of years and also an editor and a manager of a journal there. So you understand this situation from that perspective, working in such a community. Give us a story that helps us understand better how important it is to the community that their work is seen, is visible, is read.



CUMMING: Yes, I was in Zimbabwe a fair while ago now. It's a difficult situation publishing in those countries, because you do feel incredibly isolated. Admittedly, this was 15 years ago that I left, which is not that long ago. But knowledge of how to publish a journal just wasn't available. You could only sort of copy what other people had done. But nobody explained all these nuances to the publishing industry. And certainly things like Digital Object Identifiers – we wouldn't have known what they were or how to use them. So things like that, we've been helping these journals to get hold of them.

But it's also just the whole internet accessibility. When I left Zimbabwe, we still didn't have computers in our offices, and that was only 15 years ago. Things have obviously changed since then. But even so, internet connectivity is not great in a lot of these countries. Once you get outside of the capital city, it's not good. So enabling researchers to have their work published internationally, as they are doing by using these journals, is really important.

KENNEALLY: We have been speaking with Sioux Cumming, a program specialist for INASP, the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications. INASP and African Journals Online helped develop JPPS, the Journal Publishing Practices and Standards, that is currently nominated for the 2018 ALPSP Award for Innovation in Publishing. Sioux Cumming, thank you for joining us today on Beyond the Book.

CUMMING: Thank you very much, Chris. It was a pleasure to be here.

KENNEALLY: Beyond the Book is produced by Copyright Clearance Center, a global leader in content management, discovery, and document delivery solutions. Through its relationships with those who use and create content, CCC and its subsidiaries RightsDirect and Ixxus drive market-based solutions that accelerate knowledge, power publishing, and advance copyright.

Beyond the Book co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Join us again soon on Beyond the Book.

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