
EDITORIAL

WITH THE arrival of a new editor, changes are being made to the *Journal of Social Development in Africa*. These are intended to make the journal easier and more pleasant to read. They include changes to make the house style conform more closely to the Harvard or author-date style used for social science publications. Spelling is in the Oxford house style. Contributors are being asked to communicate with the editor by E-mail where possible and to submit their MSS in electronic form. We are using a PC format as is common in most parts of the English-speaking world. All these changes are designed to make the journal more professional and to speed up the process of refereeing, proofreading and editing.

Some of the changes that will be taking place are designed to take advantage of the arrival of the Internet to our continent. The point of an academic journal is to make research findings available to as wide an audience as possible. This editor believes that our primary audience consists of fellow Africans working in situations that are recognizably similar to each other in significant ways – one of which, of course, is our common legacy in recent history of colonialism and post colonialism. African scholars urgently need to find quick and easy ways of communication. For too long we have been cut off from each other by language barriers and poor postal services – to say nothing of the censorship and self-censorship that has made it difficult to share information and insights, even on an academic level. For too long has communication been limited by the situation in which African scholars find themselves, ranging from poor working and living conditions, inadequate libraries, teaching loads and demoralized students to a shortage of books and, in many countries, war, famine, disease and poverty. The conditions that keep people in poverty in Africa take their toll on scholars and intellectuals as well. Now at last a tool is available for making it possible for us to address fellow Africans and their concerns. By making our work relevant to ourselves we will make it relevant to those who live outside our continent. Journals such as this one provide an ideal means of communication for scholars and we do not intend to abandon paper and the haphazard process of posting our journal to other countries. All the same we recognize the astonishing

usefulness of the Internet. It is cheap, (given the original technology), quick and easy to use. We are therefore exploring ways of making the journal available on the Internet, while acknowledging that Africa is under-equipped in all means of mass communication.

A recent conference noted, for instance, that Africans have access to only two per cent of the world's telephone and, on average, one public telephone is available to 15 000 African users. The world average is one telephone to 600 users. Community radio networks are being installed but they are not available in all parts of Africa, especially where governments practice rigid control of the mass media. About 1.5 million Africans have access to the Internet. One million of these live in South Africa. This means that there is one Internet user for 1400 people on our continent, compared with a world average of one in 35 people and, in the West, one in three.

On the positive side, many African tertiary institutions are creating their own web sites and providing E-mail links for their faculty members. Three years ago only 12 countries in Africa had full Internet access. Now it is available in every capital city in Africa and several virtual universities have been established. As a result the primary target audience of this journal now has much greater access to the type of research we publish than it had three years ago.

Barriers, of course, remain. Internet provision is patchy. The new technology looks intimidating and too many of us are still prisoners of our own inhibitions – let alone our lack of typing skills. Yet this will change. A combination of electronic communication and traditional methods of publication will greatly enhance the spread and reputation of scholarship in Africa and may even help to speed up social development and the alleviation or elimination of poverty that is the main focus of this publication.

Carole Pearce
Editor