



Keywords: Africa; books; business model; distribution; download; e-books; ePub; formats; knowledge; open access; publishing; South Africa

1. Background

About us

The HSRC Press is the external publishing arm of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the largest dedicated research institute in the social sciences and humanities on the African continent. We publish scholarly books in the social sciences and humanities, covering relevant evidence-based analysis on mainly Africa, South Africa and the global south.

Mandate

The mandate of the HSRC Press is also to publish research in and increase knowledge from and about Africa.

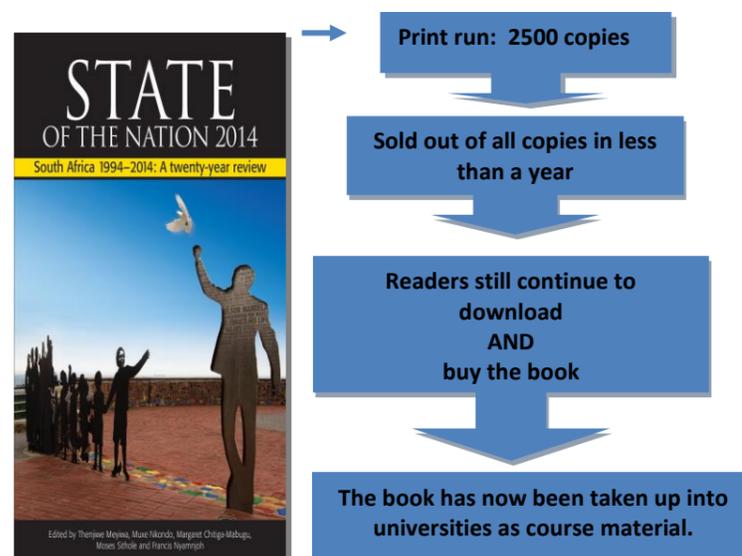
2. Context

The HSRC Press is in part publicly funded (through the Department of Science and Technology, South Africa), and so it makes sense that publicly-funded research is made available to the public.¹ The HSRC Press thus treats its published outputs, (the peer reviewed books, reviewed through our editorial board process and internally peer reviewed monographs) in the same way. In 2003 the HSRC Press adopted its Open Access publishing model.

The HSRC Press, like any publisher, has to recover its costs and generate some income from sales of its printed books to invest in developing future generations of quality scholarly publications.

3. Business model – brief overview

HSRC Press adopted the dual-medium business model, where users pay for the print edition while an e-version (or PDF) is available for a single free download and unlimited viewing. An example of how well this dual-system works for us is our flagship series State of the Nation:



Business model – brief overview continued

The management of different revenue channels, where books can be sold, and the establishment of open access models, where content is for free, required a different mindset and perhaps more creative marketing.

One creative marketing tool is using social media. In October 2013 Facebook reported that fifty per cent of social network users share or repost news stories, images, or videos.²

Using this avenue helps drive traffic to the main website.



4. Tracking and results

In 2007, HSRC Press started its tracking model, to track and measure the use of its books in countries across the world, to assess the impact of its evidence-based publications.

Based on our Google analytics data in 2013, in the ten years since HSRC Press launched its Open Access, **our titles are downloaded from 212 countries worldwide and has over a million page views per year.**

Other interesting stats:

- Our online readers are 35 times more than the number of copies of books we sell annually;
- Our Open Access publications garner on average 4.5 times more citations than print-only equivalents (2009–2010);
- The **fastest growing region in terms of readership is Africa**, which has grown from 0% in 2003 to over 25% in 2013.

We believe that traditional distribution channels of printed books alone could not have achieved this kind of reach.

References:

1. MP Eve (2014) *Open Access and the Humanities: Contexts, controversies and the future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Page ix. Accessed 14 January 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316161012>
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3. J Scott ((2012) Books and Digital Publishing in Africa: What does the future hold? *Africa Bibliography* 2011: xiii, doi:10.1017/S0266673112000025
4. M Starr (2011) *Ebooks and e-readers: FAQ*. Accessed 24 January 2016, <http://www.cnet.com/how-to/ebooks-and-e-readers-faq/>

Tracking and results continued

Here's a look at the top ten site visits from Africa and around the world.

March 2015			
Top 10 site visits from Africa		Top 10 site visits from around the world	
1	South Africa	1	South Africa
2	Kenya	2	United Kingdom
3	Zimbabwe	3	United States of America
4	Nigeria	4	Kenya
5	Botswana	5	Germany
6	Algeria	6	Canada
7	Ghana	7	India
8	Namibia	8	Australia
9	Mauritius	9	Indonesia
10	Uganda	10	Zimbabwe

Source: Google analytics, 2015

5. The way forward

Open Access books and e-books are not the same thing, but there is a growing appetite in the readership of digital content who would want both in all possible formats, preferably available on smartphones or portable devices, at any given time.³

PDFs generally have fixed pages, so to fit text on say an extra-large handset widely described as a 'phablet' (screen size approx. 6-inches) the text would need to be shrunken down, but this would then make the text hard to read, needing you to zoom in to see it. This would lead to a more cumbersome reading experience and therefore the ePub format is preferable when making e-books available as the pages aren't fixed and in this format the e-reader will automatically fill the screen with text.⁴

The HSRC Press would thus like to embark on establishing an integrated digital platform or Dam across which it can one day do all things for all readerships, no matter what the device of the individual and no matter what the reader's need. In addition we wish to innovate our Open Access platform to enable searchability of knowledge/content across books and book chapters, and even across different publishing flagship scholarly houses across the continent – hence an 'open' Africa.

Although the stats above are encouraging, we hope that there will be continued funding available to ensure that the proper infrastructure is in place so that more people in Africa would have ease of access to information.