

**Commonplace • Series 1.3: Global Transition to Open**

# **Ghanaian Authors' Engagement with EIFL's Open Access Agreements**

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Since 1999, [Electronic Information for Libraries](#) (EIFL) has been negotiating free or heavily-discounted access to paywalled e-content on behalf of EIFL partner consortia and their libraries in developing and transition economy countries in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa—including the [Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Ghana \(CARLIGH\)](#). EIFL has also been negotiating open access agreements with publishers since 2016. This article discusses how libraries and authors in Ghana have engaged with EIFL's open access agreements and what progress has been made in terms of increasing open access publishing output. The article concludes by examining hurdles for authors and gives recommendations on how they can be overcome.

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## The Current State of OA Agreements

EIFL currently has [12 open access agreements](#) in place. These include waived and discounted Article Processing Charges (APCs) for authors from certain countries, and free and discounted read & publish terms. EIFL promotes these agreements by sending country-specific title lists of eligible journals to librarians and researchers in the relevant countries. In addition, the EIFL team works with consortia and encourages them, where appropriate, to have discussions with publishers about negotiating transformative agreements, such as read & publish agreements that include fees with the aim to transitioning the spend from reading to publishing over time. EIFL encourages member consortia to register their transformative agreements in the [ESAC registry](#), including examples from Latvia, Estonia, Serbia, Palestine, and Moldova. EIFL has also been collaborating with the OA2020 Initiative by participating in conferences and workshops and contributing to the [OA2020 LMIC Working Group](#).

By partnering with regional organizations like CARLIGH, libraries provide access to a wide range of scholarly e-resources, in this case in Ghana since the collaboration started in 2003. EIFL-supported national and institutional open access awareness-raising and advocacy workshops have resulted in a number of open access repositories in the country. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) introduced the first open-access mandate in the country; among other things, this mandates that authors deposit their AAM in their institutional repository, thereby opening their research to the world. The University of Ghana now has a similar policy in place that encourages authors to deposit articles in their repositories; in total eight universities in Ghana have institutional repositories in which over 40,000 articles have been deposited.

Authors from Ghana are eligible for all 12 of EIFL's open access agreements, 11 of which provide full waivers. [EIFL's title list of eligible journals for authors from Ghana](#) currently counts 1,175 journals. In addition, CARLIGH has signed a read & publish agreement with Cambridge University Press that was negotiated via EIFL. As of October 2021, 14 articles have been approved under the arrangement. Ghana has not signed any other direct transformative agreements, mostly because they do not spend anything on subscriptions. The only other publisher that three Ghanaian institutions pay for access to is Elsevier, with whom discussions about a transformative arrangement have not taken place yet.

## **A Good Route to Publish**

These open access agreements have been widely praised as beneficial by libraries and authors in Ghana. Since January 2021, the title list of eligible journals for authors in Ghana has been downloaded more than 1,200 times from the EIFL website. This title list has been of great help for librarians at Ghanaian institutions, who have used it to advise authors where to publish. For example, at KNUST, librarians regularly consult this list as it gives them a source of journals from reputable publishers they can rely on. Unfortunately, publishing in predatory journals is still a challenge in Ghana since many researchers and academics are eager to be promoted based on the number of papers they publish.

Open Access is generally seen as a good route to publish because of the increased visibility and higher impact of openly published articles. "Publishing in open access journals has been one of the good things that have facilitated the dissemination of scholarly literature. It has bridged the information gap between the north and the south," says Edward Mensah Borteye, Senior Assistant Librarian at KNUST. "There is a challenge in identifying credible open access journals from fake ones for some authors due to the solicitation of APCs. As a way of helping researchers not to solely rely on the information they see on journal websites, I provide them with tools that will help them to determine a good open access journal from a bad one and where there is a demand for APC I show them what they can do to apply for full or partial waivers. I provide those that I assist with EIFL-negotiated waivers with publishers, or sometimes I just refer them to DOAJ where they find journals with or without APCs."

Authors in Ghana have welcomed the title list of journals eligible for waivers or discounts through EIFL agreements, and take a positive view of EIFL's negotiated open-

access conditions as well as publisher's own waiver programmes. Samuel Tawiah Baidoo from the Department of Economics at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology-Kumasi and lecturer at Christian Service University College (CSUC) published six articles in 2020 and 2021 in journals promoted on the EIFL title lists. As a testimony, he wrote: "Thank you for the opportunity you have given me through these open access journals. In fact, this has really helped me to publish a number of articles and others under review. I am really grateful to you for sending this [list of journals] to me."

Richard Kwasi Bannor, Senior Lecturer and Agribusiness Consultant and Dean at the School of Agriculture and Technology at the University of Energy and Natural Resources, has also found the EIFL title list helpful and currently has several articles under review. "I should say the enthusiasm shown by lecturers in my university is superb. The enthusiasm has been phenomenal and [I am] hoping most faculty will begin to have papers published under the agreement," he told us.

## **An Analysis for Further Improvement**

EIFL recently undertook an [analysis of its open access agreements](#). In comparing 2019 output with 2020 in the same eligible journals from Cambridge University Press, Taylor & Francis, SAGE, and De Gruyter by authors from eligible countries, EIFL found that the number of articles published in open access increased by 62%. In the case of Ghana, the increase was lower although still a significant 33%.

However, despite the increase in open access output, there are a number of issues. Firstly, in some cases, discounts aren't enough. EIFL's analysis discovered that some articles were published at no cost but behind a paywall in a hybrid journal, despite being eligible for an APC discount for OA publishing. We believe that the authors did not have funding even for a discounted APC, which is still too expensive for authors from a developing or transition economy country.

Secondly, some waivers aren't applied automatically—and by this we mean without the author having to do anything, such as actively requesting for the waiver to be applied. The [EIFL study](#) found examples of articles that were published in closed access in hybrid journals despite being eligible for waivers simply because the publisher in question had not implemented automatic recognition and was requesting authors to send an email to request a waiver. In Ghana, the same happens many times with

publishers that do not offer automatic recognition to authors in their own waiver schemes.

#### EXAMPLE

Jeffrey N. A. Aryee was billed \$1,740 in publication fees for his article on “ [Low-Level Cloud Development and Diurnal Cycle in Southern West Africa During the DACCIWA Field Campaign: Case Study of Kumasi Supersite, Ghana](#) .” The charge increased to \$4,250 if he wanted to publish in open access. At a loss, he contacted the EIFL coordinator for Ghana, who asked EIFL staff for help. At a closer glance, it was discovered that the journal in question was a fully open access journal that offered waivers to authors from Ghana. The waivers were labelled [on the publisher's website](#) as “automatic waivers”; however the small print revealed that “waivers will only be applied if the corresponding author requests a waiver at the payment step during article submission.” After consultation by email, he was told that his “manuscript does not fit into the waiver criteria.” Aryee wasn't charged with any publication fees in the end, though the article was published in closed access.

The issue is that some publishers do not provide automatic recognition and are not clear in their communication about APC waivers. Despite the work that EIFL and CARLIGH have done in raising awareness of APC waivers and discounts, many authors are simply not aware of them. Those that don't know that they can claim a waiver are often scared off by high APC costs. Within Ghana specifically, there is also a perception that an author that has had their article accepted for publication might be turned away if they request a waiver. There is still a lot of work to be done in terms of redirecting such a perception through training and awareness-raising, providing librarian support to researchers, and spreading the word about available waivers and discounts on APCs.

To address the issues discussed in this article, EIFL and CARLIGH encourage publishers to:

- Have clear communication on their websites about APC waivers and discounts, including a general page with a downloadable title list of eligible journals (ideally this should include subject information and Impact Factors listed), and information on each journal's web page.
- Introduce automatic recognition of eligible authors during the submission process. Waivers and discounts should be applied automatically to the APC price without the

need to tick a box, enter a code, or email the editor.

Libraries and consortia that are engaged in discussions about the equity of publisher's waiver programmes and open access policies should also encourage publishers to act on these suggestions.