

SHORT COMMUNICATION

WORKSHOP ON OPEN ACCESS PUBLISHING

10-11 November 2010, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya
Free access journal; a case of African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development (AJFAND) www.ajfand.net

by

Kimiywe J¹



Judith Kimiywe

Corresponding author Email: jokimiywe@yahoo.com

¹Kenyatta University, Department of Foods, Nutrition and Dietetics, P.O Box 43844, Nairobi, Kenya.

The African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development (AJFAND), is among the very few internationally renowned peer reviewed journals published in Africa. It was launched in August 2001, as the African Journal of Food and Nutritional Sciences (AJFNS) as a pilot project of the Rural Outreach Programme (ROP) by Hon Prof. Ruth Oniang'o. Its aim was to provide a platform, through which food and nutrition issues and information concerning Africa, and its unique problems could be effectively addressed and disseminated. A second objective of the journal was to provide a capacity building facility in scholarly publishing for budding African scholars. It became evident that these issues were also very closely linked to agriculture and human development in Africa. In recognition of this close linkage, the name of the journal was changed to African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development (AJFAND).

AJFAND envisions a world where information on Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development is contributed and shared honestly, respectfully, equally and impartially, a world in which the AJFAND supports all those who would like to contribute to knowledge. The key guiding principle is that no culture has a monopoly of knowledge. The Mission is to improve policy and decision-making in the field of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development, the application of emerging technologies, their regulation and related research. The primary audience of the Journal consists of scientists, researchers, policy makers, students and non Governmental populace whose professions and/or interests lie in sustainable development, agriculture and food security. The secondary target group also includes a wide range of people like journalists, lecturers, and opinion leaders. Those who work in the media provide the actors with information through newspapers, magazines, lectures, website, radio, television, traditional dance and drama.

A number of issues addressed in the articles is uniquely African and may not be suitable for publication in journals outside Africa, or to readership outside the continent. Such issues include: the role of indigenous African foods in food and nutrition security; preparation, processing, preservation and storage of African foods; hunger, malnutrition and the challenges associated with agriculture in Africa; modern technology such as Genetically Modified Organisms and its opposition amidst food insufficiency; women in agriculture; also socioeconomic issues related to agriculture, and emerging issues related to disease (such as HIV/AIDS) and climate change challenges.

The journal initially aimed at releasing two issues per year. Indeed it did and each issue carried about 10 research articles and one or two student articles. The student articles aimed at encouraging and introducing university students to the culture of publishing. The journal grew into a quarterly publication with each issue combining research, programs and policy aspects. Starting early 2010 it has been possible to produce an issue almost monthly of 10-12 articles.

The first issues of the journal were the conventional print version. From March 2002, the journal went *online*, with the website www.ajfns.net. Since November 2003, the journal has been issued entirely *online*; with the change of name, the website is

www.ajfand.net. The benefits that have been reaped by going *online* include: shorter production cycles, increased visibility and recognition, more efficient quality control through electronic peer review, greater versatility in the design of the electronic files and an opportunity to build capacity in electronic publishing.

Since its inception, the journal has grown from strength to strength as evidenced by the diversity and caliber of submissions received. It receives submissions from all over Africa. Quite frequently, submissions are received from outside Africa, including Europe, USA and Asia, the number of reviewers has also grown. Besides academic research, the journal provides an avenue for sharing information on national-level food and nutrition programs, commentaries, short communications, book reviews, and relevant news and events, job and training opportunities.

To motivate reviewers and authors of AJFAND, normally photographs of the authors are allowed on their article, while for the reviewers, their profiles are put on the AJFAND website for visibility and both in English and French for the benefit of French speaking clientele in Africa and abroad. Similarly, in an effort to bring on board Francophone countries, AJFAND publishes article abstracts in French and English and occasionally articles fully in French have been published. However, provision of this service continues to be a challenge due to high costs.

AJFAND activities are grouped in five programme areas:

Education and Research

Supporting networking, accessing, sharing, and publishing of papers for researchers, scholars, scientists, and academics on agriculture, food, nutrition, environmental management and sustainable development related information. As far as it is feasible and affordable, AJFAND always has a young intern for attachment. This is a crucial aspect that is designed to prepare future editors and communicators in this field.

Health and Nutrition

Supporting and facilitating communication, networking, accessing, sharing, and publishing of information between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers involved in health promotion activities. Recent topics include HIV/AIDS, health and sanitation promotion in rural areas, food safety, food security, food trade, healthier eating, infant feeding, and immunization.

Library

Creating and preserving *online* digital information across all formats and ensures effective access and management of information to all, especially those serving research and educational communities. The *online* article library ensures that its collections remain forward-looking, open to browsing, and of world-renown quality.

Publishing Support

It is involved in strengthening the work of editors and communication professionals, especially those in research and science. Through publishing, AJFAND makes people

aware of the resources available to them, and through innovation, it makes access to these resources easier.

Rural Development and Agriculture

It provides an avenue for supporting networking, accessing, sharing, and publishing of information for rural development practitioners. The lack of basic information plays a significant part in the persistence of poverty. Poor people need better connections to schools, health care, markets, essential services and each other. Almost all of the Millennium Development Goals depend on providing efficient and effective infrastructure.

Challenges that the journal has had to deal with include:

Sustainability of the journal in terms of reviewers and paying the secretariat staff is a major and running challenge. Funding for the journal started as a capacity building project and as such it does not impose a fee to publish papers. The journal has had one dedicated donor for the past two years who has since decided to reduce the amount they have been giving, arguing that others should be able to also step in to support such an important initiative.

Evaluation of readership coverage

The number of manuscripts received weekly helps in evaluating the readership coverage. Many manuscripts come in on weekly basis with a checklist attached which means the website is frequently visited. AJFAND has also signed agreements with major institutions that carry and distribute data. The journal can also be accessed through these partners <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajfand> <http://www.bioline.org.br/nd> The journal has also designed a counting tool which helps in evaluating readership.

Quality Assurance

For quality assurance AJFAND has signed contracts with several institutions including: University of Toronto, Canada in 2006; GALE / Cengage Learning, USA in 2009; Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS), a division of The American Chemical Society, USA in 2008; International Institute of Refrigeration (IIR) FRANCE in 2009; CABI Publishing, UK in 2009; Cornell University Albert R. Mann Library, USA in 2009 and EBSCO Publishing, USA in 2010. This enables the journal to maintain international credibility and recognition.

Outstanding achievements so far

The journal has become very popular; for instance, instead of looking for reviewers, the scientists themselves write in to volunteer as reviewers. Thus, the energies that were directed toward marketing the journal can be redirected to addressing other challenges. When the journal started it had, purposed to publishing two issues per year, but now it is almost monthly and carries 10 to 12 articles every month. The quality of publications has also improved, going by the number of articles we receive on a daily basis.

Way forward for the journal

To be indexed by Thompsons SI, to find a more sustainable funding module and to link with policy and program instruments in Africa and internationally.

Message from Founder Editor-in-Chief:

I wish to extend the secretariat's appreciation, and also on my own behalf to ALL THE AUTHORS and REVIEWERS, for making it possible for AJFAND to reach this level of international recognition. It has been a challenging 10 years.



**Hon. Prof. Ruth Oniang'o,
Editor in Chief**