

## **OARE (Online Access to Research in the Environment)**

Text of talk given at OARE Launch at the University Club, New York, on 30 October 2006.

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It is a great honour to be asked to speak at this occasion. I can recall the Press Conference held at the BMA in London for the launch of HINARI in July 2001, and what a huge change in publishers' thinking it represented. Making their journals available in developing countries for effectively no financial return was, looking back on it, an extraordinary decision at that time. Only through the ceaseless efforts of Maurice Long of STM, Barbara Aronson and others, and the WHO providing vital administrative and political support could it have happened. I can remember several deeply cynical journalists in the audience at that first press conference. They believed it to be a publicity stunt with no genuine commitment for the long term.

Clearly HINARI was a great vision, although difficult to achieve. It is of considerable credit to those pioneers that the project progressed sufficiently to lead to the launch of AGORA supported by the FAO and the Rockefeller Foundation and the UK's Department for the Environment. The press conference for AGORA in Rome in 2003 was very different. The new concept of giving free online access was now established and better understood, partly through the backing of the STM association. The mood in Rome was more confident with no non-believers in the room.

Thanks to the contribution of Cornell (AGORA) and Yale (HINARI) and particularly Kimberley Parker of Yale University Library who does so much of the infrastructure work on both HINARI and now OARE with Ann Okerson in support we have a track record of being able to deliver on highly complex projects. And this has enabled our friends at Yale and UNEP to win funding from the Hewlett and MacArthur foundations to launch OARE. The list of titles already committed to this new programme demonstrates the confidence amongst publishers that the team can deliver.

As a publisher I should like to make it clear that in none of the three programmes do we get any revenue: all monies collected from institutions in the lower-middle income countries are remitted by the publishers back to the programmes for training, outreach, etc. Now the partners are committed to extending the programmes at least until the end of the Millennium Development Goals (2015) donor support to assist in infrastructural development, training and outreach becomes critical. We very much hope that the donors will join the publishers, UN agencies, Yale and Cornell in our long-term plans. There is still much to do.

Quite properly HINARI and AGORA have been assessing how effective they have been. They recently published comprehensive reports by Mark Ware and John Scott.

Scott selects some quotations at the front of his report which in a way encapsulate all his findings and analysis.

*“It would be difficult to find a student who did not use HINARI as the principal source for his research.”* ((Universite Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, Senegal))

*“In recent memory twice it’s happened that access to HINARI has been unavailable because our Internet service was down. The first time the students were frustrated. The second time they were angry. Now that the students have access to HINARI they demand it.”* (Faculty of Medicine, University of Cuenca, Ecuador.)

*“There is a huge inequity in the developing world regarding access to health information and HINARI levels the playing field. **But** still there has been little culture of using HINARI as a resource for research so training and experience is needed. HINARI has to be around for a long while before the results will really be seen in terms of a culture of learning.”* (School of Tropical Medicine, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam)

Scott describes the challenge of technology, including poor access to the Internet and insufficient computers; also the insufficient human resources and expertise. As I said there is still much to do which is also clear from the experience of INASP but OARE will be a significant stimulus towards achieving that combination of content, access, technology, expertise and culture. The publishing community greatly appreciates those that are making it happen. HINARI – AGORA – and now OARE. The future.