

**SOUTHERN AFRICA: Affordable access pilot project**

13 September 2009

Issue: 0037

An Affordable Access pilot project is underway to establish whether an online library system, deployed with some success in South Africa, could add value to teaching and learning at universities in Malawi and Botswana.

The project, being championed by the Southern African Development Community and the International Association for Digital Publications (IADP), started in June at the University of Malawi. The University of Botswana's medical school is also participating, and is being provided with digital materials to support new medical students.

"In late 2008 IADP began engagements with stakeholders in the agriculture, nursing, medicine and education colleges of the University of Malawi to ascertain how e-books and the creation of Open Education Resources might address critical textbook needs," the IADP says on its website.

"OER Africa has been established in the belief that Open Educational Resources have a tremendously powerful positive role to play in developing and capacitating higher education systems and institutions across Africa. The project has been set up to ensure that the power of OER is harnessed by Africans for Africans to build collaborative networks across the continent."

In South Africa, the Affordable Access project was launched in 2006 at four higher education institutions - the universities of Fort Hare, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, and the distance learning University of South Africa.

The pilot project in Malawi and Botswana looks to extend the Affordable Access work running in the South African institutions, the IADP said in a message posted on its website.

"It has two main thrusts. Firstly to provide discounted digital texts to staff and students accessed from digital reading rooms as well as private laptops, and secondly it promotes the creation, adaptation and remixing of Open Education Resources into texts to support the student body by providing cheap quality texts."

The association said its programmes have the capacity to become launching pads for a much larger initiative that could transform the quality and accessibility of education in developing countries, not only at tertiary level but also through teacher training at the primary and secondary levels.