

SciELO South Africa as community-led publishing model

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Introduction: Name of the organisation and platform

SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online) South Africa is one of 15 SciELO Network **national** collections.

The **SciELO South Africa** platform is managed by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf).

Brief history and context

The SciELO Network was established in Brazil in 1997 to balance the Northern / Southern hemisphere visibility of scholarly research.

SciELO is a bibliographic database and cooperative electronic publishing model of open access and free full-text journals, created for the needs of **developing countries** and the **visibility of regional knowledge**.

The Network now includes the national collections of 13 Spanish and 1 Portuguese collection as well as South Africa's national collection (*)

-> **SciELO SA** is the South African collection within the SciELO Network.

(*) Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, **South Africa**, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Why SciELO South Africa was established?

In 2001 the SA government requested ASSAf to make recommendations on **how South African research could be made more visible, findable and accessible globally.**

ASSAf recommended the creation of an online open access platform of high-quality South African journals.

After investigating available options, the SciELO publishing model was recommended.

The SciELO SA platform was established in 2009.

It has since grown to a collection of 115+ South African open access peer-reviewed high-quality scholarly journals.

In 2024 SciELO SA celebrated its 15th anniversary.

Model and Governance: How the platform is owned, governed, and funded

- SciELO SA is **non-commercial** and is **funded by the South African government**.
- Most of the journals are from universities, scientific or professional associations, institutes, as well as research councils and organisations.
- All journals must be fully open access, i.e., no embargoes are allowed.
- All have CC-BY open licences.
- Gold and diamond (25%) OA business models accepted.
- i.e. only 25% of the journals in the collection do not charge article processing charges (APCs).

Model and Governance: How the platform is owned, governed, and funded

Open infrastructure (SciELO methodology) and open publishing platforms mostly OJS).

SciELO shares its resources and technical expertise.

The collection is **governed** by:

- the SciELO SA **Advisory Committee** made up of the ASSAf Committee of Scholarly Publishing in South Africa (CSPiSA) members and elected representatives of the journals in the fields of exact sciences, health & medical sciences, humanities, social sciences, agricultural and biological sciences.
- So the decision-making power lies with the editors.

Monitoring and assessment: The SciELO SA staff **monitors** the performance of the journals and the SciELO Network **assesses** the collection biannually for adherence to their strict criteria and for the currency of the journals.

Subject fields covered by this journal collection

Agricultural Sciences Animal Science and Health Architecture Art Biodiversity
Biological Sciences Botany Computer Science Demography
Disaster Management Economics **Education** Engineering Entomology
Exact and Earth Sciences **Health Sciences** Human Sciences
Language **Law** Library Science Linguistics/Letters/Arts Management
Mathematics **Medical Sciences** Military Mining Multidisciplinary
Sciences Natural Science Politics Population Studies Psychology Public
Relations Regional/Town Planning **Social Sciences** Supply Chain
Theology/Religion Transport Water/Hydrology

Partnerships / Networks involved



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Partnerships / Networks involved

- The platform is part of the **SciELO Network** that was established to balance the Northern / Southern hemisphere visibility of scholarly research.
- *Partnership with the **other 14 SciELO national collections**. Meet every five years in São Paulo, Brazil to agree on the adoption of new best-practice trends, e.g. we agreed on the introduction of Open Science practices.*
- SciELO SA sits on the **SciELO Network Steering Committee** alongside Brazil, Argentina and Mexico.
- **The SciELO Citation Index** forms part of the Web of Science search portal which provides greater visibility for all the SciELO Network journals.

Interoperability and standards compliance to ensure metadata quality, indexing and discoverability



Scope and Impact : Size and diversity

Types of content:

SciELO SA only publishes **journals**.

Size:

Currently we have **115** scholarly journals and almost **54 000** articles online.

Diversity:

The SciELO Network's 25th anniversary conference focused on inclusion, diversity, and equity.

In South Africa, both the government and SciELO SA encourage **balance** in terms of the **geography of authors**, as well as inter-university cooperation and **publishing with authors from other universities**.

Scope and Impact : Distinctive features

(1) Rigorous quality assurance for inclusion

Journals are selected through a **formal peer-review–based evaluation process** managed by **ASSAf's CSPiSA**.

- Criteria include:
 - Editorial quality and transparency.
 - Regular publication and peer review standards.
 - Ethical compliance and international visibility.
 - Online accessibility and metadata quality.

(2) **Best-practice:** SciELO SA **supports journals** to remain quality journals and **to implement new best practices (capacity building)**, e.g., the inclusion of AI usage policies.

(3) **Language:** English is the main language, but any other language, especially indigenous languages, are allowed as long as an English title, abstract and keywords are provided.



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Key metrics: views

The monthly page views of SciELO SA articles accessed via the SciELO platform have grown to:

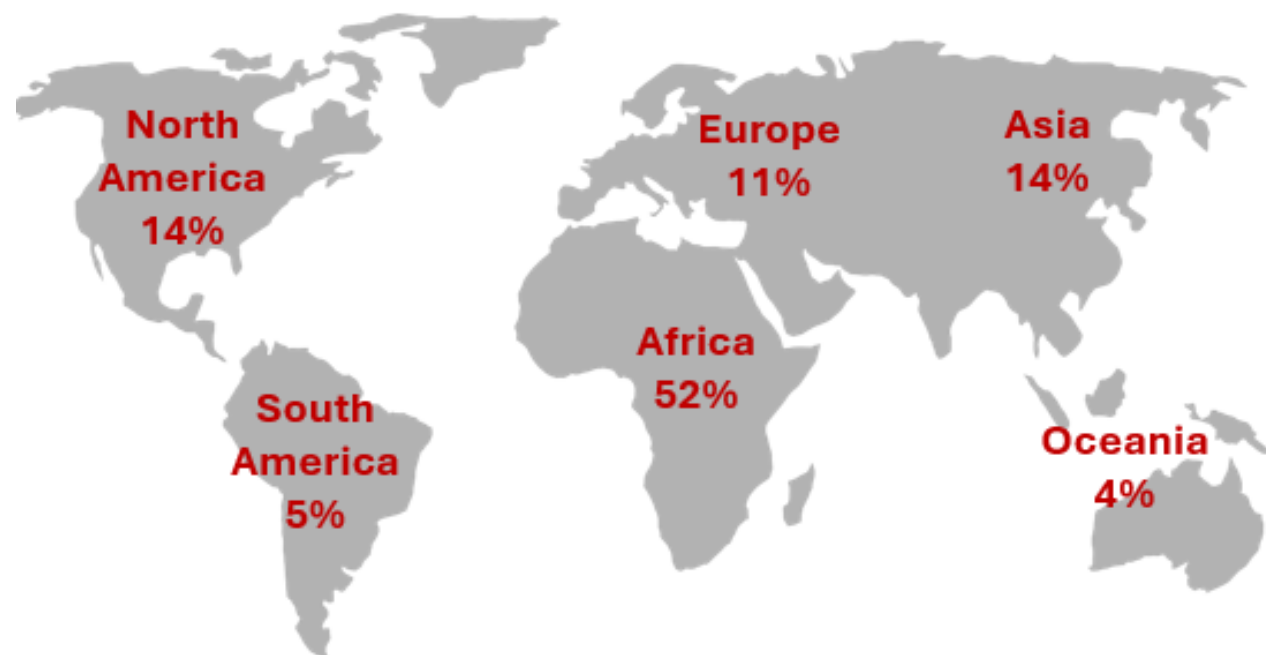
4.2 million unique item requests last **month**

26.5 million unique item requests over the last **12 months**

(Source: SciELO SUSHI API).

These are **unique views**, i.e., if a reader accesses an article more than once, the COUNTER5 system counts it as one view.

Key metrics: global reach



Users by country (over the past 12 months)

Top 10

South Africa

USA

Singapore

Indonesia

UK

China

India

Philippines

Australia

Canada

Source: Google Analytics

Challenges

Initially the differences in **language and time zones** were a challenge.

We have not been able to secure **long-term ‘ring-fenced’ funding** yet.

We have mostly had 3-year funding contracts.

Funding commitments have not been in writing.

In one case, a major decision-maker moved to another department.

→ Learnt to get funding promises in writing.

Technology: The server lies with us, but we need to work with SciELO Brazil on certain infrastructure functions and upgrades, which can cause small delays.

The methodology is complex. So when there is staff turnover, this involves intensive re-training.

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How have we addressed these challenges?

Believing in the **value** of what we offer the publishing and scholarly community in South Africa.

When the SciELO SA collection received **national accreditation** alongside international indexes such as Clarivate's Web of Science, Scopus, IBSS, and DOAJ, that was a big boost for our collection.

Marketing of the SciELO SA collection through:

- Offering **capacity-building webinars** for new and established scholarly editors in South Africa on various aspects of being a journal editor – well attended.
- A **LinkedIn** profile: Built up an increasing following with interesting posts to boost awareness of the collection.
- Regular **liaison and meetings** with the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation.
- A new national Publications Quality Framework is being developed in South Africa. The Director of our Unit is a Committee Member of **this PQF Framework Initiative's** Project Team.

Looking ahead / Future plans

We plan to:

- include all prestigious open access journals in South Africa; and
- ensure the journals in our collection remain quality journals and continue implementing new best-practice guidelines.

We will continue our regular meetings with the funding departments to secure ring-fenced funding for long-term sustainability.

Key recommendation for others considering a community-led model

Liaise with the funders and decision-makers as often as possible, e.g., by sharing your successes with them.