

# UbuntuNet CONNECT 2018

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## Building the Next African Massive Research Repository

Access to scientific research continues to be a challenge for the majority of the African higher education institutions and the academic community at large. Despite the efforts made by many organizations and institutions to curate and aggregate research content, and facilitate access to journals and other academic publications, very few institutions and researchers seem to have access to them due to the relatively high subscription costs and limited institutional budgets. Some might even argue that limited or very scarce local content and very low research output of the continent is a contributing factor.

Higher education institutions in some African countries, as is the case in Somalia, have been struggling with their main mission of education; however, increased awareness of the need to strengthen research capabilities and improve research output has been recorded in the last couple of years. This has mostly been driven by the efforts of these institutions to enhance their credibility as higher education institutions, and to uplift their rankings among the world's universities, resulting in more academic conferences, funding for research publications and moral support from the institutions' leadership. This momentum creates an opportunity to create and strengthen research culture among the African institutions. An impeding factor from riding this wave is the limited access to already existing research output from the continent as well as around the world. The purpose of this study is to identify and propose a local solution to the limited access to scientific research while at the same time organizing the existing and future local scientific research publications. The study looks into the roles of the key stakeholders and specifically the role of the African NRENs and that of Regional RENs (UbuntuNet Alliance and WACREN). The NRENs are well-positioned to support the setup of federated research repositories (FRR) that organize journals and scientific research from their respective member institutions; while the regional research and education networks in turn federate these NREN-level repositories into one massive research repository (MRR). Issues of consideration include the role of political bodies such as IGAD, and the Association of African Universities as well as the licensing aspects of the published content.

A case study based on a pilot project to deploy research repositories at the member institutions of SomaliREN with the support of the UbuntuNet Alliance is presented as an example. Approaches to integrate the local content access with the access to aggregated scientific research are explored with a focus on leveraging the existing political and organizational structures in demand aggregation and combined purchasing power.

In a nutshell, regional and national research and education networks have the potential to address the challenges of access to scientific research the same way they have tackled the problem with exorbitant connectivity bandwidth costs. Demand aggregation combined with enhanced local scientific research with just the right amount of political and institutional will can have a lasting positive impact not only on the quality of education but also the quality of life and economic development in the African nations.

### Summary

Regional and national research and education networks have the potential and are well-positioned to address the challenge of limited access to scientific research as they have tackled the connectivity challenges for the higher education institutions.

### Sub-Theme

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