OUR VISION TO 2030

research4life

RESEARCH4LIFE
STRATEGIC PLAN
2022

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research4life

FOREWORD

When United Nations Secretary General António Guterres launched the UN Sustainable Development Goals "Decade of Action" in September 2020, he left us with more than just inspirational words:

"The science is clear. The people are clear. This is no time to procrastinate. [...] The COVID-19 pandemic, the greatest challenge faced by us since the founding of the United Nations has brought us low. But we will not be beaten. We, too, must look beyond the current crisis and set our sights high, as we strike out for a world of dignity and opportunity for all on a healthy planet. Together, let us make this a decade of action; a decade of ambition; a decade of transformation; a decade of hope and peace."

For many organizations, including Research4Life, the UN Secretary General gave us a mandate to accelerate our efforts to support the research behind the SDGs. For the past 20 years Research4Life, a UN-publisher partnership, has sought to bridge the digital research divide for researchers, librarians, doctors, policymakers, and many others in lower income countries. Together we have worked to equip these important stakeholders with the access and tools they need to find evidence-based research and make robust policy decisions based on trusted, peer reviewed information.

While the pandemic has underscored the critical role that science plays in society, it has also revealed just how rapidly the world in which we operate has changed in the two decades since we founded Research4Life.

This realization has helped us to consider our own role as a public private partnership as we have shaped our new Strategic Plan. After much reflection, many surveys and strategic reviews with partners, users and experts, we believe that it is no longer sufficient for us to focus solely on bridging access.

To truly support a more inclusive and equitable research ecosystem and make progress on the UN SDGs, we must take a more holistic approach, pivoting to a new strategy which will support our community of users as both consumers and producers of research.

And so, on behalf of the Research4Life Partnership, a vibrant community of UN organizations, publishers, universities, and non-profits, I am pleased to share our new Strategic Plan. Our ambition has been to create a clear roadmap to 2030, focusing on inclusion and equity in the global research community and supporting the creation of an even richer body of research which will help to advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Ylann Schemm
Chair of the Research4Life Executive Council
March 2022

OUR VISION FOR
2030

Research4Life exists to cultivate an inclusive, diverse and equitable scholarly communications environment which enables researchers from lower income countries to address societal challenges. Since 2002 Research4Life has played a critical role in facilitating free or low-cost access to vital subscription resources for not-for-profit institutions in lower income countries.

For many years, Research4Life has ensured that its collection includes content published through both subscription models and open access and supported research communities in lower income countries to navigate an evolving publishing landscape. Many hurdles remain in place for researchers in the Global South and there is growing urgency to increase research participation from underrepresented regions in working towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Research4Life's core activities play a vital infrastructural role in the development of evidence-based policies and investment priorities that will maximize the chances of the SDGs being realized, specifically SDG17: Partnership for the Goals.

PURPOSE

Our vision for Research4Life's future direction transforms from one-way donation to reciprocal engagement to enable diverse and rich scholarly exchange. Our aim for 2030 is to significantly increase participation of researchers from lower income countries in the global research community. At the same time, Research4Life remains committed to supporting local research networks in their capacity development.

VALUE

We will realize our vision through close collaboration with our two core constituencies:

- The Research4Life platform and community will enable researchers to contribute to the global knowledge environment by connecting key stakeholders and providing resources.
- The Research4Life communication services will help partners and donors to achieve their mission to contribute to the creation of a genuinely equitable open scholarship ecosystem.

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The program has had an unimaginable impact on the training of the country's human resources. Training with access to frontline information would not have been possible without Research4Life.

**In-country representative
Honduras**

THE RESEARCH4LIFE
CONTEXT

The twenty years since Research4Life was launched have seen a profound evolution in the research communication ecosystem, enabled by the growth of digital networks and the spread of online publishing systems. Subscription-based business models have been joined by 'author or donor pays' models, where the content itself is free to access and repurpose. The transition to Open Access has gathered pace, creating a rising diversity in publishing models, with some experts predicting it will become the dominant form of primary research publishing over the next few years. While this development in many ways solves the 'access' problem which Research4Life was established to address, it presents more challenges when it comes to equity and the production and publication of research results for those without access to funds or without an institutional support system.

At the same time, research from the Global South and the key challenges facing researchers are growing exponentially, and the participation in the countries served by Research4Life has never been more crucial; the need for this Program in ensuring equity is greater than ever.

The Landscape Analysis commissioned by Research4Life in 2020 highlighted the growing need for capacity development within researcher communities to enable full and equitable participation in global efforts to solve the challenges set out in the UN SDGs. The User Review conducted in 2020-2021 clearly identified the changing needs of the beneficiaries of the Partnership. While access to research information remains a top priority, there is also demand for digital skills development and a greater understanding of the evolving publishing landscape.

Research4Life remains a strong and vibrant partnership with five UN Agencies (WHO, FAO, UNEP, WIPO, ILO), two major US Universities (Yale and Cornell), two global technology businesses, many individual experts and over 160 publisher partners, playing key roles in its continuing success. In addition, the International STM Association (STM), sponsors a special Publisher Coordinator and Outreach Director to support the publishers' role in the partnership. Many organizational representatives contribute time and skills to the regular program of activities. Yet the User Review revealed that awareness of Research4Life remains low in some key countries and its value and impact are therefore under-exploited. Historically, the reliance on volunteer effort and in-kind contributions has made scaling-up very challenging. The 2020 launch of Friends of Research4Life as a fundraising vehicle to begin addressing this challenge was a major achievement. We are developing a dedicated fundraising strategy to address the Strategic Plan.

Crucially, the user community will be an active participant in the delivery of this next phase of Research4Life. True equity will only be achieved if our users are at the heart of the Plan with an equal voice in its evolution.

The 2030 Strategic Plan aligns with the UN's "Decade of Action" and builds on previous work to expand content, to simplify criteria for eligibility and access, to extend training and, vitally, to increase outreach and communications so that the benefits of Research4Life can reach a growing audience.

THE RESEARCH4LIFE
OFFER

Over 151,000 journals, books and databases are available through the Research4Life Discovery Portal. Resources are available to more than 10,500 registered institutions in over 125 lower income countries; supporting the SDG call to reduce inequalities and ensure equal opportunities for all. Research4Life does this in partnership with organizations in scholarly communications, technology and international development. The total value of access to the resources available through Research4Life is estimated to be in excess of US$ 48m per year.

Research4Life also offers a Discovery Portal across all disciplines and adds new publishers and new resources every year. For historical reasons, there are deep content collections in Health, Life and Agricultural Sciences, with specialist resources also available in Development and Innovation, Legal and Social Sciences. For users to make the best use of the Partnership, Research4Life offers a number of targeted initiatives:

- **Authors and Librarians Hubs:** Users can access free training materials for librarians, information specialists, scientists, researchers and students to improve their professional skills.
- **Research4Life Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)**: MOOCs help users get the most out of Research4Life. To date, nearly 7000 users have been trained.
- **Virtual Master Trainer Course:** To enhance training skills, 250 users have completed this course after undertaking the MOOC.
- **Research4Life webinars:** Specially developed webinars covering best practices for using Research4Life, as well as improving research skills.
- **Partners resources:** Free resources for librarians and researchers, additional toolkits and learning programs.
- **Institution support:** Support helpdesk that ensures institutional access, resolves reports of content unavailability, and provides regular information about the content and services available.

Research4Life Registered Institutions
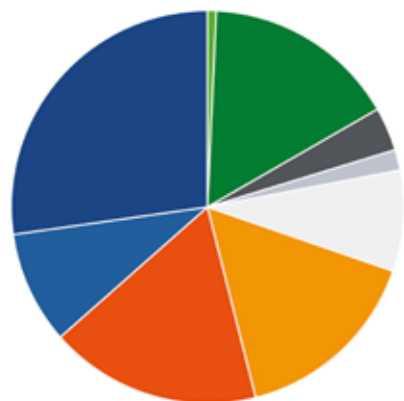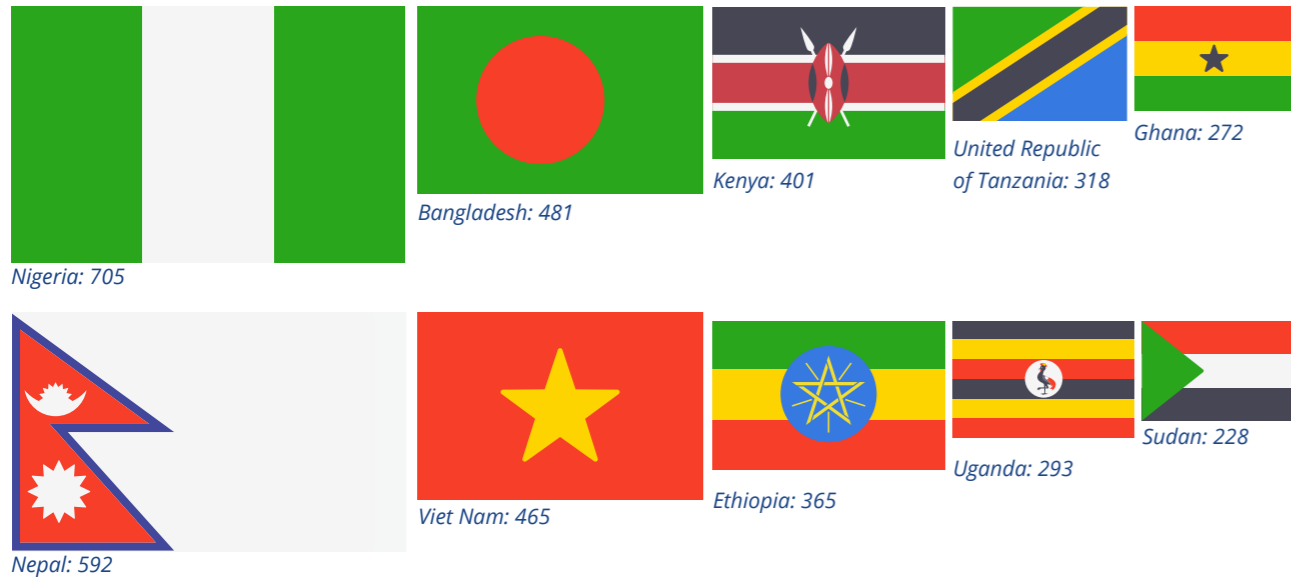
Photo top right

Distribution of Research4Life Institutions registered in 2021.

Photo middle

Top 10 countries for number of Research4Life Institutions registered in 2021.

Photo bottom

Types of Research4Life Institutions registered in 2021.

Institutions registered
- 1-20
- 21-75
- 76-300
- >300
- Country eligible but no registration
- Country not eligible
- Not applicable

Country group
- A
- B

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of WHO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted and dashed lines on maps represent approximate border lines for which there may not yet be full agreement.

Data Source: Research4Life
Map Production: WHO GIS Centre for Health, DNA/DDI
Map Creation Date: 09 February 2022

World Health Organization
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Fig. 1

Nigeria: 705

Bangladesh: 481

Kenya: 401

United Republic of Tanzania: 318

Ghana: 272

Nepal: 592

Viet Nam: 465

Ethiopia: 365

Uganda: 293

Sudan: 228

Fig. 2

- 1%: Agricultural extension center
- 16%: Government office
- 4%: Healthcare service
- 2%: National library / Documentation center
- 8%: National non-governmental organization
- 16%: Teaching hospital
- 17%: Research institute
- 9%: Vocational training
- 27%: University / Faculty / School / College

TOTAL ACCESS VALUE

TO RESEARCH4LIFE RESOURCES

$48,000,000+ USD

JOURNALS *UP TO*

30,000

BOOKS *UP TO*

131,000

RESEARCH4LIFE BOOK GROWTH

Fig. 1

RESEARCH4LIFE JOURNAL GROWTH

Fig. 2

THE RESEARCH4LIFE
PARTNERSHIP

The Research4Life partnership currently comprises the following core partner organizations:
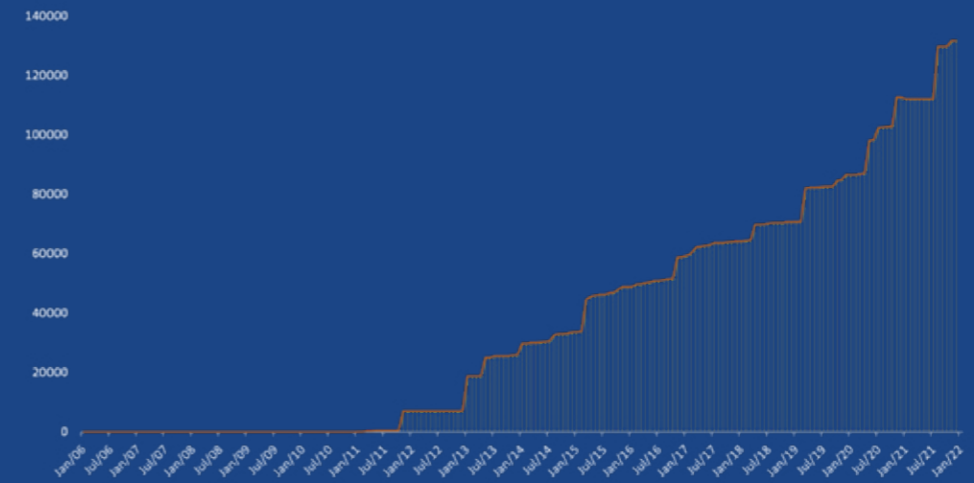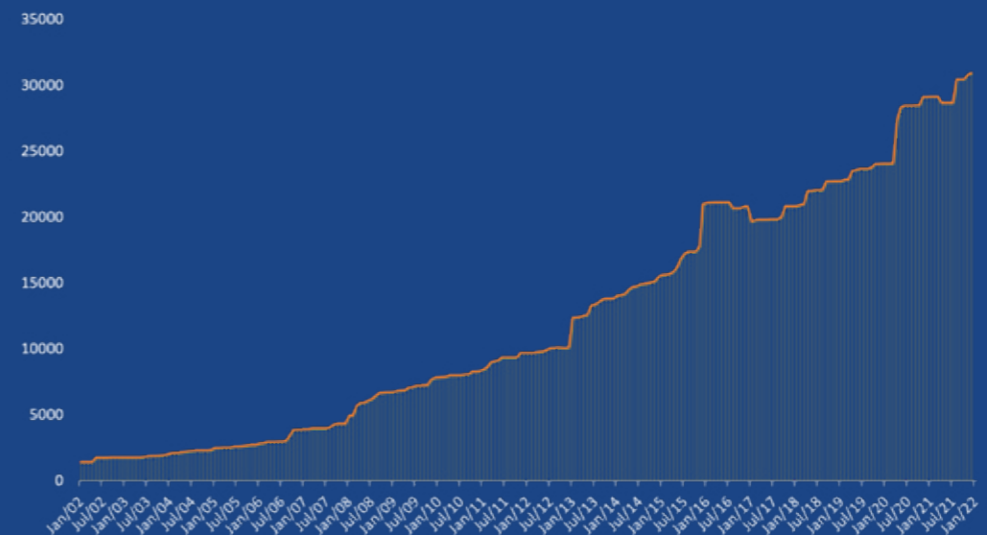
- Content Providers: More than 200 international publisher partners, and the International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers (STM)
- Programme Coordinators: FAO, ILO, UNEP, WHO and WIPO
- University Partners: Cornell and Yale Universities
- Training, Service and Technical: : Information Training and Outreach Center for Africa (ITOCA), ProQuest (Serials Solutions), PortSys and the National Library of Medicine (US)
- User Community: Members of the User Group, champions, advocates, and formal or informal Connectors and ambassadors raising users' voices with Research4Life and beyond.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND MECHANISMS

Governance is as efficiently structured as possible, with progress monitored in committees and future developments formally agreed at partner meetings. There are no formal or contractual relationships between any of the groups of partners involved in Research4Life.

The decision-making body and ultimate authority is the annual General Partners Meeting (GPM), with representation from stakeholders, as well as user groups. Major policy decisions are made at the GPM as well as designating task forces to address strategic and tactical issues. In addition to the GPM, an Executive Council (ExCo) representing the major contributing partners makes ongoing operational choices between GPMs within agreed guidelines. The ExCo oversees the implementation of decisions made at the GPM. The ExCo is managed by a Chair, appointed for a 2-year term. Prior to assuming the Chair role, the candidate serves as a Vice-Chair for the two preceding years. Immediate past Chairs in turn serve an additional 2 years. Chair, Vice-Chair and Immediate past Chair and the Research4Life publisher coordinator form part of an informal "ExCo Group" to ensure the smooth running of the ExCo itself.

The publisher partners designate a representative to undertake the role of Publisher Coordinator for Research4Life. This role, representing all the publishers with involvement in any of the programs, is a member of the ExCo and Finance Oversight Committee. This role is currently funded by and under supervision of STM. Committees, reporting through ExCo, convene as required. These may be permanent or temporary and include:

- Capacity Development: building training materials, supporting trainers' networks, coordinating workshops
- Content Strategy and Policy: assessing content gaps and defining collection development strategy
- Eligibility: defining eligibility of countries and institution types
- Finance Oversight: managing annual income and expenditure budgeting of revenues from Group B institution fees as well as additional funds raised specifically by the Partnership
- Fundraising: seeking funds from external sources
- Marketing & Communications: publicity, public relations and outreach to eligible institutions.
- Technology: defining technology needs and ensuring appropriate functionality for user and staff tools.

DELIVERY AND OPERATIONS

Research4Life is organically embedded in its sponsoring UN entities, and FAO, ILO, UNEP, WHO, and WIPO each have a strong mandate from their member states to ensure equitable access to information resources. The Program offices in the five UN entities ensure sufficient staffing to handle the registration requests, helpdesk and general enquiries as well as metadata entry for publisher content. Operational functions and tasks are distributed amongst the partners:

- User and institution administration, communication, and support
- Technical systems and services: authentication, registration and helpdesk platform, portal platform, unified discovery tool, usage statistics collection, link resolution, and general IT infrastructure
- Content acquisition and management: identification of new publications, cultivating publishers and metadata management
- Advocacy, public relations, marketing and communication
- Accounting and expense auditing
- Resource mobilization
- Monitoring and evaluation.

some of these operations, e.g. technology support, are not well served by the existing decentralized and in-kind contributions of partners, and alternative operations and delivery are being explored.

Research4Life General Partners Meeting. Geneva, July 2019.
Copyright: WIPO. Photo: Emmanuel Berrod. Licence.

FINANCING AND
FRIENDS OF RESEARCH4LIFE

Many representatives of the Research4Life partner organizations contribute time and skills to the program of activities of Research4Life. The 2019 Infrastructure Review was able to quantify that contribution (Table 1) and reveals that in-kind contributions have increased by 12% between 2015 to 2019 to $3.1m. The partners have pledged to continue support through 2025.

Historically, the only source of regular income to cover the operating, outreach and training costs of Research4Life has been from Group B fees paid by specific categories of institution. Over the past five years, this income has hovered around $200k, although 2020 saw this figure fall to $165k due to the pandemic. Each year an expenditure budget is approved by the GPM. However, it is clear that the funds available are inadequate to address the challenges identified in the Infrastructure and User Reviews.

The most recent User Review demonstrated that Research4Life has only reached a small fraction of its potential in terms of awareness, reach, usage and impact due to severe under-resourcing. The Partnership's reliance on volunteer effort and in-kind contributions has made scaling-up very challenging. This has also been recognized in previous Strategic Reviews.

To respond to Research4Life's unmet resource need, we have established Friends of Research4Life, a US-based 501(c)(3) charitable organization with an independent governance structure and Board of Directors. The 2020 launch of Friends of Research4Life as a fundraising vehicle was a major achievement. The Board includes five external members and two ex-officio positions from Research4Life - the Chair of the Financial Oversight Committee and the Chair of the Fundraising Committee.

Friends of Research4Life aims to create more opportunities for Research4Life to expand content collection, extend training programs and, vitally, to increase outreach and communications to reach a growing audience in its target countries. Its establishment will make it easier for funding agencies or individual donors to support Research4Life. Partners interested in supporting Friends of Research4Life are encouraged to contribute to its core fund or to provide ring-fenced funding for specific activities.

A fundraising strategy by Friends of Research4life is under development, designed to foster sustainable fundraising relationships with funders and donors of various types. It will focus on attracting funding from Research4life partners and external funders such as state and private foundations, high net worth individuals and others.

FRIENDS OF research4life

Table 1

Estimated annual value of resources dedicated by partners on Research4Life ($k), comparing the 2019 and 2015 Infrastructure Reviews.

Partner	2015 estimate ($k)	2019 estimate ($k)
Publishers	750	885
WHO	1,060	1,515
FAO	239	275
UNEP	160	80
WIPO	180	150
ILO	—	100
Yale	150	30
Cornell	150	25
STM	110	80
ProQuest	1	7
TOTAL	$2,800k	$3,147k

2015 STRATEGIC PLAN
ACHIEVEMENTS

The landscape in which Research4Life operates has evolved rapidly since we crafted our last strategic vision in 2015: the UN SDGS, the incredible growth of Open Access, the coronavirus pandemic, the rise in research from the Global South and the need to carve out a more equitable space in the scholarly research ecosystem. As we refocus our priorities, it's useful to understand what we've achieved and how far we've come.

Our 2015 plan was developed on the eve of the UN SDG launch, which has since provided us with a new multi-stakeholder blueprint for tackling the world's greatest challenges. At the time, we identified three core objectives: Expanding reach & usage, Program delivery & challenges and External partnerships & funding. We've made progress across the board, but some areas achieved far greater gains than others.

Our efforts to build awareness and raise the profile of the partnership are reflected by some impressive indicators: we've boosted the number of registered institutions by 25% from 8,000 in 2015 to 10,000 in 2021 and our peer reviewed resources from 69,000 to 151,000. We expanded our partnership to include GOALI, the ILO program on the rule of law and developed a far more sophisticated hybrid online training program through MOOCs and masterclasses. To raise awareness for both our users in the Global South and our partners, largely in the Global North, we coordinated social media campaigns, case studies, blogs, white papers, webinars and more.

Our capacity development program has focused on building, upskilling and leveraging communities of trainers in both the Global North and South. Over the past five years, we have developed a much more coherent and streamlined training approach between the different UN agencies, ITOCA and Librarians without Borders (LWB) to deliver a high quality, hybrid learning experience for trainers and users. In 2019, the first Research4Life MOOC was launched by the FAO, proving a real game changer during the pandemic, rapidly transforming into a core element of our training experience, equipping users with knowledge skills and continuity. A total of six MOOCs were delivered by 2021, supported by grants and collaboration from the UN Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries, the Elsevier Foundation, WHO, FAO, UNEP, WIPO, ILO, ITOCA, and LWB.

By commissioning a series of in-depth strategic reviews, we have created a solid evidence base for our Strategic Plan. Creating a viable system to measure usage and impact will be a key priority going forward.

Measuring Research4Life usage and impact proved more challenging. Qualitatively, we sought to demonstrate impact through interviews and case studies, while quantitatively we were able to track a rise in registered institutions, number of users trained and social media engagement. However, we struggled with consistent usage statistics, lacking core expertise and a centralized system for gathering and analyzing data or understanding impact.

Evolving an effective technology platform that is robust, flexible and inclusive has also been one of the partnership's biggest challenges given a lack of structural funding. We were able to establish a much stronger, state of the art authentication system in 2016 replacing the obsolete Microsoft system with Portsys, a trusted supplier and core Research4Life contributor. In 2021, we launched the new Research4Life Discovery Portal — replacing outdated technology to give users a streamlined, user-friendly experience navigating content and programs. The unwavering dedication and focus of the technology team has been a major factor in achieving this goal. As we implement our new Strategic Plan, an ongoing challenge will be to continue providing a good user experience that reflects global advances in technology.

We have also continued to explore different governance models that will foster and fully leverage commitment and engagement from our core partner community. We have had to ask questions such as: how far can we go without any formal secretariat, funding source or agreements? Over the past years, we have bridged some of our structural support needs by bringing in contract positions to support technology, fundraising and communications. However, the central issue of governance remains as the partnership continues to grow and tackle new ambitions to drive greater equity for users from lower income countries.

Finally, the Partnership has made real gains in addressing sustainable funding. In 2021, the Friends of Research4Life was launched as an independent 501c3 with a distinguished external board and the ability to run targeted fundraising campaigns. To date, we've raised several hundred thousand dollars and secured commitment from mainly publisher funders over the next three years—an excellent start which we hope to build on as we develop a dedicated fundraising strategy.

In summary, Research4Life has achieved much and navigated many hurdles since 2015. Looking ahead, we need to strengthen and scale our technology, outreach, training, funding and governance if we want to contribute to a more equitable and inclusive research ecosystem on the path to 2030.

"

The MOOC has long been the missing key needed to unlock the entire resource-wealth of the R4L programme for the benefit of our research and academic communities.

**University
Ghana**

96%

I AM HIGHLY SATISFIED WITH THE RESEARCH4LIFE MOOC

Participants at a Librarians without Borders training, Papua New Guinea, 2019.

EVIDENCE FROM THE
2020 REVIEWS

Two in-depth evaluations of Research4Life were undertaken during 2019-2021: an Infrastructure Review and a User Review plus Landscape Analysis to identify key external factors influencing how Research4Life operates. All three reports are available on the Research4Life website providing important evidence to support our strategic objectives. The Infrastructure Review was carried out by Research Consulting, alongside the Landscape Analysis, and formally adopted by the General Partners Meeting (GPM) in July 2020. Key findings include:

- Research4Life has improved its offering, but usage has declined

- Many partners are unaware of the decline in usage

- Research4Life aligns with partners' mission but lacks external visibility

- Limited awareness of the SDGs among partners

- Governance is seen as effective, but with room for improvement

- Publisher exclusions create large volumes of work

- Partners disagree on the importance of systems development

- Current training opportunities is deemed effective by partners who are aware of them

- Views on OA are mixed, and partners are frequently involved with other access initiatives

- Total costs have increased slightly, but cost per login has more than doubled

- Partners wish to consolidate rather than expand

Le Trong Hieu, Librarian of the Learning Center of Can Tho University, Viet Nam.

The User Review was carried out by International Network for Advancing Science and Policy (INASP) and formally adopted at the GPM in June 2021. The Review consisted of both qualitative and quantitative studies, in-depth user interviews, an online survey and the development of two in-depth case studies. Findings include:

Relevance. Research4Life is a relevant resource for users who are aware of it, have had appropriate training and have access to supporting infrastructure. For these individuals, the absence of Research4Life would leave a significant gap. However, overall usage remains limited. The most significant factor in usage is awareness, while the level of demand and the confidence to use the programs are also factors.

Effectiveness. Most users of Research4Life rate this resource as effective – delivering the objectives intended. Most participants expressed satisfaction with Research4Life on a range of issues, including training, platform and content. However, there are challenges in all these areas because of awareness, reach and technical issues.

Impact. Where Research4Life is used in institutions, it has made significant impact on its users, contributing to the quantity and quality of their work and improving their research skills.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FROM THE REVIEWS

By mapping the findings and context from the Landscape Analysis together with in depth partner and user consultations it has been possible to group the challenges for prioritization in our new Strategic Plan into three focus areas:

- Product and service diversification;

- User experience and marketing communications;

- Funding and operational structure to support Research4Life.

97%
RESEARCH4LIFE IS VERY VALUABLE FOR MY CAREER

86%
RESEARCH4LIFE IMPROVES MY OVERALL RESEARCH SKILLS

78%
RESEARCH4LIFE IMPROVES MY RESEARCH QUANTITY

87%
RESEARCH4LIFE IMPROVES MY RESEARCH QUALITY

WHAT DOES RESEARCH4LIFE MEAN TO YOU?

"

Thank you for the tremendous work you are doing, it has been beneficial to our users. Thank you for your support in accessing quality information from the Research4Life platform.

Research Institute
Kenya

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES
TOWARDS 2030

Research4Life's strategic objectives align strongly with the UN SDGs. The UN has increasingly recognized the importance of making the scientific process more transparent, inclusive and democratic. By making research accessible, we are supporting the achievement of the Goals.

In support of the Sustainable Development Goals, Research4Life new strategic objectives will build off the findings from the 2020 reviews, and develop new measurement frameworks, focusing on:

- **Centricity of researcher lifecycle:** Develop new services to increase publishing output and scholarly communication
- **Content and the SDGs:** Provide content that researchers need across all 17 SDGs areas
- **Continued usage:** Increase usage of content and services
- **Seamless user journey:** Guarantee state of the art technology to serve our communities
- **Equitable participation:** Embed mechanisms for representation throughout the governance structure
- **High-performing structure:** Ensure efficient and professionalized running of Research4Life
- **Sustainable funding:** Evolve new funding streams and strengthen existing ones to create a modern fit-for-purpose organization

I. USER EXPERIENCE AND MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

a. Increase usage of content and services

- Implement a thorough stakeholder communications plan aligned with UN SDG terminology
- Undertake comprehensive usage analysis and develop strategy to improve engagement, both with existing and prospective users
- Engage users through integrated training and communications plan focused on the research cycle
- Develop deeper user collaboration and feedback mechanisms

b. Create a seamless user journey

- Map user journey and deliver an action plan to ensure an enhanced experience with clear and transparent connections between processes and platforms
- Support the development of effective technology tools for a familiar user experience
- Facilitate the user community's ability to undertake platform language personalization

II. PRODUCT AND SERVICE DIVERSIFICATION

a. Develop new services to increase lower-income country research output

- Create a broad training package across the research lifecycle to support the growth of publishing and scholarly communication outputs by lower income country researchers.
- Expand learning resources around Open Access and Open Science
- Boost collaborative community building through 'Country Connectors', networks and partners
- Strengthen librarian capabilities to help institutions raise their local and global research profiles
- Explore potential for preprint and community engagement services

b. Provide content that researchers need across all 17 SDGs

- Develop and deliver a comprehensive content collection strategy offering breadth, relevance and accessibility
- Enhance user and partner value proposition by simplifying the matrix of country offers and content exclusions

III. FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE

a. Equitable participation and representation throughout the governance structure

- Increase user representation in leadership positions and on Research4Life committees
- Create stronger incentives and recognition for lower income country representatives
- Better leverage the interaction with user representative groups in the co-creation of projects, testing, and providing insights, and expand groups to allow language, time zone or topical focuses.

b. Ensure efficient and professionalized running of research4life

- Streamline and increase the efficiency and transparency of the governance structure
- Define a professional team with core functions integrated with the existing volunteer structure, growing positions as needed to fill gaps.
- Establish succession training drawing more insights and representation from our user representative community
- Strengthen and formalize publisher engagement and representation from the Global South

c. Evolve new funding streams and strengthen existing ones to create a modern fit-for-purpose organization

- In association with Friends of Research4Life, develop and execute their fundraising strategy to support core functions and strategic expansion within Research4Life
- Engage senior stakeholders across user and partner communities to leverage networks to improve our funding options and opportunities

RISKS AND MITIGATION
MEASURES

STRATEGIC

Open transformation

Open Access has transformed the landscape in which Research4Life operates. This trend combined with alternative free platforms is a welcome evolution in our overall mission to enhance access for researchers in lower income countries. Though we do recognize a risk in the potential for usage to drop as a result of the increasing volumes of freely available information, the real risk lies in the equity issues that Open Access may pose for our users as authors. Another key risk lies in the considerable publisher exclusions for Group B registered institutions in eligible countries, which have been shown to reduce the overall usefulness of Research4Life and to encourage usage of unauthorized content. However, we would categorize the severity and likelihood of this risk as medium given current trends and our partners' strong financial and content commitments to the partnership. Our risk mitigation strategies include:

- Expanding Research4Life's remit to include access to publishing opportunities.
- Improving user experience through usage optimization and by reducing and simplifying publisher exclusions.
- Broader stakeholder mapping and engagement to include funders, corporations and aid organizations.
- Stronger partner/donor communications to ensure goals and values remain aligned.

Authorship equity

A key risk to equitable participation is that Open Access may raise the threshold for authors from lower income countries who lack funds to pay publication fees such as Article Publishing Charges (APCs). Open Access business models, while potentially creating new barriers for authors in Research4Life institutions, can evolve with waiver policies, clearer eligibility criteria and the development of new models which do not require such author-side payments. Our risk mitigation strategies include the following measures:

- Publishing Best Practice guidelines for publishers to ensure that payment waiver policies are clearly communicated and implemented.
- Developing Open Access skills training, including how to understand different business models and how to avoid predatory journals.
- Exploring the development of a preprint service.
- Partnering with INASP's AuthorAid to broaden opportunities for lower income country authors.
- Developing new metrics for success to align value to key donors/partners.

OPERATIONAL

Technology

We have also identified a risk in Research4Life's technological infrastructure and resilience given the growing number of users and the need to remain fit for purpose. We have assessed this as a high risk because the current system relies on a small number of individuals. However, due to our current funding commitments, the actual probability level is closer to medium. Our risk mitigation strategies include the followung measures:

- Implementing and deploying industry-standard technologies to avoid obsolescence
- Adding funded technical expertise
- Ensuring user experience guides platform development through engagement with registered institutions

Governance

The lack of permanent staff and heavy reliance on volunteers means there can sometimes be a lack of clarity on responsibilities, succession training or the necessary knowledge to perform key functions and tasks. Given the inevitable turnover in key roles as well as the ambition of our Program and Strategic Plan expansion, we view both the impact and probability of this risk as high. Our risk mitigation strategies include:

- Increasing the pool of volunteers and ensuring consistency by formalizing objectives and Governance procedures.
- Securing funding for dedicated staff positions.
- Transparent documentation of all roles and responsibilities.
- Recording institutional knowledge of process and protocols.
- Inviting part-time role donation from partners rewarded with formal job descriptions and cv benefits.

FINANCIAL

Finally, we also recognize the significant risk that financial support we can garner may not be sizeable or reliable enough to realize our ambitions and deliver existing services. Given Research4Life's need for regular, sustainable funding, the impact of this risk would be high. That said, we consider the probability of this risk to be medium, given the recent financial commitments made by key partners to Friends of Research4Life. However, as Friends of Research4Life was only launched in 2021, the scale of income generation is still unpredictable. Our risk mitigation strategies include:

- Prioritizing and phasing the Strategic Plan roll out.
- Reviewing the reserve fund policy.
- Identifying key components for packaging fundraising projects.
- Mapping stakeholders to ensure alignment of priorities with funders and partners.

THEORY OF
CHANGE

2030 GOAL

An inclusive, diverse and equitable scholarly communications environment that enables all global researchers to address societal challenges.

IMPACT

Lower income country researchers are actively participating in research communications by publishing in peer reviewed journals, including Open Access, and are fully represented across editorial roles in publications worldwide, experiencing a level playing field.
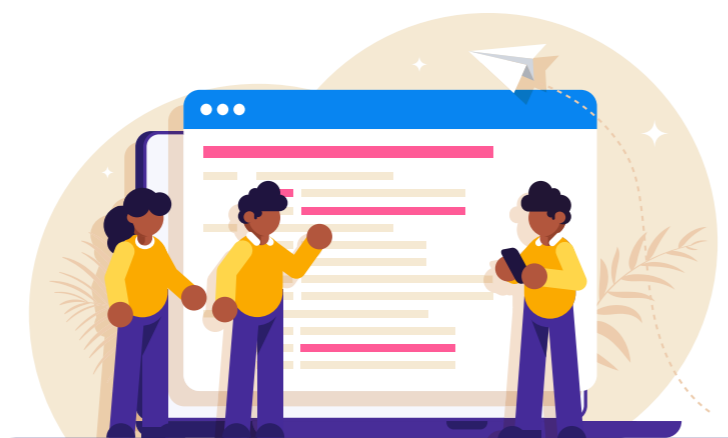
CORE STRENGHTS

- Strong partnerships with publishers, UN agencies, universities, technical donors and user networks.
- Effective technology platform delivering free or low-cost access and user focused training and resources.
- Friends of Research4Life as a fundraising vehicle for donors and partners.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

- Research quality improves through genuine collaboration, diverse and inclusive voices, enabled through the depth and quality of interactions.
- Authorized content should be as accessible for researchers in lower income countries as in other parts of the world.
- Access to research is a key development catalyst, leading to research productivity and informing policy and practice.
- Significant disparities in research output between and amongst lower income countries may require local approaches.
- Transformation to Open Access shifts emphasis to authorship equity for lower income countries.
- Partners can significantly influence publishing outlets to expand diversity of editorial teams, boards and reviewers.
- Partners and donors continue to support lower income researcher challenges.

WIDER BENEFITS

- High quality research access and productivity will build capacity within lower income countries.
- Global research exchange and collaboration (South-North-South) will enrich future research quality and direction.
- Partners and donors will achieve their mission to contribute to a genuinely equitable open scholarship ecosystem, fulfilling SDG17: Partnership for the Goals.

MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

- Increased engagement and high usage of Research4Life resources by lower income country researchers.
- Significant growth and impact of publishing activity, including Open Access, by Global South researchers, evidenced through case studies.
- Profile raising and support for the Global South research publishing industry by Research4Life partners.

STEPS TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE

- Improved user experience, reducing content exclusions and building breadth across books, local publishing and languages.
- Improving clarity on practices to ease Open Access publication, including fee waivers.
- Broader training program for librarians and researchers across the full research communications cycle, involving 'Country Connectors'.
- Community building to support two-way exchange.

CONCLUSION

Our ambition has been to create a new Strategic Plan for Research4Life to contribute to the United Nations Decade of Action for accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals by increasing research participation from the Global South. We believe that we can play a role in the development of evidence-based policies and investment priorities that will help to advance the SDGs, especially in lower income countries.

By 2030, we aim to have significantly increased the participation of researchers as both consumers and producers of critical research, providing the necessary capacity building through local networks and partnerships.

Through our new strategic priorities, we have sought to create a new vision for Research4Life which fully integrates users from the Global South.

We are proud to share our new Strategic Plan with you, which offers our members, users and supporters of Research4Life the opportunity to contribute to the creation of a diverse and inclusive and equitable research ecosystem.

GLOSSARY

AGORA: Access to Global online Research in Agriculture

APCs: Article Processing Charges

ARDI: Access to Research for Development and Innovation

CCs: Country Connectors

Discovery Portal: includes Hinari, AGORA, OARE, ARDI, GOALI collections

ExCo: Executive Council

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GOALI: Global Online Access to Legal Information

Hinari: Hinari Access to Research for Health Programme

ILO: International Labour Organization

INASP: International Network for Advancing Science and Policy

ITOCA: Information Training & Outreach Centre for Africa

LIC: Lower Income Countries

LMICs: Low- and Middle-Income Countries

LwB: Librarians Without Borders

OA: Open Access

OARE: Online Access to Research in the Environment

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

STM: The International Association of Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishers

UN: United Nations

UNEP: United Nations Environment Program

WHO: World Health Organization

WIPO: World Intellectual Property Organization

RESOURCES

Research4Life

Research4Life Strategic Plans

Landscape Analysis 2020

Infrastructure Review 2020

User Review 2021

Friends of Research4Life

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The wealth of information available in Research4Life can transform your research for life. It has worked for me. It will surely work for you.

University
Ghana

research4life