Welcome to the February-March 2016 edition of the ROER4D Newsletter. The year has got off to a productive start with the highlight being the meeting of the group of OER Impact studies for a workshop 11-13 January in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Meanwhile the first set OER Adoption projects are busy compiling and submitting their research reports. We are also looking forward to Open Education Week which runs 7-11 March and wish all researchers and practitioners well for any events they are running to discuss and promote open education.

As well as short updates of key events and a round-up from many of our sub-projects, we are delighted to publish a feature article by IDRC Program Manager Dr Matthew Smith entitled “Open is as Open Does”.

**Impact Studies Workshop**
The Impact Studies Lead Researchers and ROER4D Network Hub members led by Deputy PI Assoc Professor Patricia Arinto, Prof Gajaraj Dhanarajan and PI Assoc Professor Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams met in Colombo, Sri Lanka in early January. The hosting institution, The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), has published an article reviewing the workshop on its website which featured a series of photographs including the attendance of The High Commissioner of Canada to Sri Lanka, Ms. Shelley Whiting. Michelle Willmers’ blog post reflects on the workshop and in particular how the project’s curation and dissemination activities are designed to improve the findability and
reuse of ROER4D’s research. In addition a number of Impact Studies researchers responded to an invitation to share their experiences with Freda Wolfenden from SP10.1 remarking:

“I found the workshop highly enjoyable, deepening connections and stimulating my thinking particularly around what it means to be engaged in Open Educational Practices as an education professional working in the challenging conditions of the global south. The informal format encouraged peer interactions and detailed interrogation of each other’s work, prompting me to revisit aspects of my own project to open the possibility of comparative analysis with other projects.”

SP10.7’s Sheila Bonito echoed some of these sentiments as she reflected on how listening to the progress of others was motivating:

“The meeting was very productive and insightful. It allowed me to think clearly about the contribution of each sub-project to OER impact and to further enhance our research implementation. Reviewing the work of other sub-projects gave me insights on our own project’s conceptual and methodological issues. Sharing each others’ milestones serve as motivation to get on with the research project implementation.”

Lastly, SP10.4’s Lauryn Oates echoed the importance of the network:

“Being part of the ROER4D network is so valuable for us because we are the only organization in Afghanistan working on open educational resources, and I think we would feel more isolated without this network, which also allows us to learn from the OER experiences of our colleagues in other countries, like South Africa, Pakistan, and the Philippines”.

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**ROER4D at Conferences**

A number of ROER4D members and projects will be presenting at conferences in March and April 2016. Deputy PI Patricia Arinto will be the keynote speaker at
the 3rd E-Learning and Distance Education Conference (ELDEC) in Lahore, Pakistan from 14-15 March 2016

Henry Trotter and Sukaina Walji from the ROER4D Network Hub will be attending the OEC Global Conference 12-14 April in Krakow, Poland. They will be joined by Glenda Cox (SP4) and Lauryn Oates (SP10.4) who are also presenting.

Feature: Open is as Open Does
Matthew Smith, IDRC Program Manager

As someone who thinks about and funds research on openness in developing country contexts, I’ve often wanted to ditch the word altogether. It is such a value-laden term, with so many potential meanings that people attribute whatever meaning they like to it – often with great passion. Then we end up in endless debates regarding effectively arbitrary definitions. Given that any application of “open” to a new social innovation (like open educational resources or open government) is really just a social convention, can we really say that one definition is the right one?

I am pretty sure this debate will continue forever – unless, perhaps, we can begin to think differently about it. As a program officer at Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC), a research for development funder, I have seen interesting emerging findings that call into question standard assumptions about openness – and this has important implications for research. But before we get there, let’s visit one recent debate.

Stephen Laster, the Chief Digital Officer at McGraw-Hill Education, wrote a piece entitled The Future of Education Isn’t Free. It’s Open. He argues that openness is a technical feature whereby “technology or content […] can integrate painlessly with other resources.” David Wiley of OER fame, wrote a rebuttal taking issue with Laster’s definition. While agreeing standards are critical, Wiley argues that a “consensus” definition of openness is “free plus permissions”. In other words, openness is a legal characteristic providing 1) free access, and 2) a formal grant of
permissions that “provides users with free and perpetual permission to engage in the 5R [Retain, Reuse, Revise, Remix, and Redistribute] activities”.

At IDRC, we have recently supported research on the adoption and impact of OER in the Global South, alongside other research on Open Science, Open Data, and Open Innovation, which is showing that requiring that narrow, technical or legal definitions are used may actually hinder our ability to really understand the important stuff, i.e., the “open practices” -- sharing, reuse (5R’s), and collaboration that these legal and technical characteristics are intended to enable. OER by themselves don’t do anything – they don’t have an impact just sitting in the cloud or on someone’s Raspberry Pi. It is only when they are used in particular ways that change can happen – and it is this change that motivates most people interested in “open” in the first place. Critically, what the research suggests is that open standards and/or legal permissions are neither necessary nor sufficient for some people to treat the material as open in practice (i.e., engage in the 5Rs practices) to make or do something useful or valuable with that technology or content. This is true particularly in developing country contexts without active copyright enforcement or culture.

What the research in the developing world is revealing over and over again is that “free with permissions” can happen through social rather than legal means – it may be based on norms rather than law. This is not a new realisation:

“‘Legal commons,’ are commons established by law, or with support in the legal system. An example is the case of open content licensing. By voluntary action, and aware of the legal implications, content producers license their works under terms that will allow for the building and management of a commons. … A social commons, by definition, is not generated by intellectual property regimes, such as copyright law … In situations where intellectual property enforcement is either impossible or counterproductive, people frequently behave toward protected content as if it were part of a commons, and as if intellectual property regimes did not
exist, or simply did not matter.” (Mizukami & Lemos 2010)

So, why should we care?
From a definitional standpoint, the legal element is just one of several potential (alongside social and technical) enablers of the “permissions to engage in the 5Rs” that Wiley mentions that are at the heart of openness. Why should we elevate just one of the enablers to the level of the definition?
Unfortunately, however, the consensus definition can be problematic or even detrimental, for several reasons:

1) It can limit or distorts our understanding of reality.

If we are bound to an openness construct that necessarily includes legal openness, we end up missing out on a whole world of open practices around socially “open” (but not necessarily legal) content. From a research and policy perspective, it is useful to understand this whole ecosystem (legal and illegal) of access and use.

When we were setting up the ROER4D project, there were many debates about which definition of OER we would take. The legal (and widely accepted at the time) definition won the day – mainly on the strength of the arguments of the lawyer in the room as well as those that wanted to ensure that the research fit into the larger community of OER research.

Turns out that this perspective meant that we had a blind spot for a lot of really important practices that were having a developmental impact. One of the clear findings emerging from the ROER4D project is that in practice the line between closed, free, and open educational resources is often unclear, if it is even there.

For example, in Karnataka, India, an online community of practice of teacher educators create, share, adapt, reuse and redistribute educational content. However, research undertaken by Gurumurthy Kasinathan of IT for Change found that only ~7% of the educational
content that is created and shared has an explicit copyleft license. How do we benefit by excluding the other 93% from the world of open education or OER? Aren’t the sharing, reuse, and other open practices predicated on the content and technology what is really important here? The presence or absence of a copyright license effectively makes no difference to these teacher educators.

This similar pattern has been found in many different contexts – particularly at the level of small classrooms where intellectual property oversight is not feasible at scale. For example, research by Laura Czemiewicz in South Africa indicates that in many contexts students and educators can’t successfully distinguish between ‘open’ and ‘closed’ educational resources. (It should be said, however, that in many cases universities in the developing world are becoming increasingly worried about being sued for copyright infringements. Such enforcement crackdowns do happen on occasion, reducing access to educational materials, particularly for marginalized populations).

The same finding also emerged from the Open Data Research network. For example, a recent synthesis piece that looked at 17 case studies of open data in developing countries found that, “Very few datasets are clearly openly licensed, and there is low understanding of what open licenses entail. There are mixed opinions on the importance of a focus on licensing in different contexts” (Davies, 2014).

Conversely, there are cases where a government might put data online with an open license, but never publicizes it, effectively hiding it from public view, “some of them even hope that the data will not be discovered in this pile” (Janssen et al 2012).

From strict interpretation of open as legal, the latter would be considered open data (although it isn’t open in any real sense) while the former would not be open data (although there may be real use of that data).

In other words, scoping the concept of openness as legal permissions is an arbitrary boundary that doesn’t
reflect reality, i.e., the practice of openness. A poorly scoped concept can also lead to arbitrary groupings that distract from the real issue at hand. For example, Hilton’s review of OER impact literature included the Carnegie Mellon University’s Open Learning Initiative (OLI). While from the legal definition perspective the OLI’s materials are “open”, it is misleading at best to include it in a study on the “impact” of OER. Rather than its openness vis-à-vis a copyright designation, the impact results from its interactive learning design. Consider the title of the 2012 paper Hilton cites titled, “Interactive Learning Online at Public Universities: Evidence from Randomized Trials”. If openness is really free + permissions, and the free + permissions have no contribution to the impact, is this really an impact of an “open” resource? (If you argue that the impact is just because of increased access, then the impact results from just being free.) My guess is that this is glossed over due to the desire to show that OER can be as good as non OER – and therefore are a cheaper alternative – which is true. However, I believe this is a disingenuous argument for two reasons: 1) the selection of educational resources for any one comparison is (and always will be) arbitrary. For example, one could always select a low quality OER and compare it to a high-quality ER and find the opposite result; and (more importantly) 2) this approach misses out completely on why open advocates like Wiley tout openness: the 5Rs open practices themselves.

2) The consensus definition takes a fairly black-or-white, in or out approach – and might miss out on the benefits of moving towards open.

Strict adherence to free + permissions sometimes can deter people from engaging in open practices in the first place by raising technical and legal barriers. Evidence from the research on open data in developing countries provides stories of officials, “realising the challenges in moving from closed data, to fully machine-readable and openly licensed data, may be deterred from starting if their early steps towards openness are criticised as ‘not open’, rather than recognized as steps on the way towards openness” (Davies, 2014). This approach can
also be seen on the technical side. For example, consider how for some pdfs aren’t open or pdfs are bad for open government.

In the education space this can be most easily seen in the free versus open debate. Consider how MOOCs generate a lot of debate because in many cases “open” in MOOC means “free” but doesn’t include permissions. This makes MOOCs not only a misnomer but also a threat to OER. The argument is based on the assumption that “before long the general public will feel that ‘free’ is good / innovative enough, and no one will care about ‘open,’ permissions, or licensing.” (Wiley 2012)

I’m not sure that assumption has been proven yet – and the opposite might just be true. You could have made a similar argument about America Online (AOL) in the 90s – which tried to create a walled-garden at the start of the Internet. Turned out the when most people got a taste of the broader Internet, they moved on. Indeed, this might also be the case here. Just getting your hands on free stuff might move you to want to reuse, republish, etc., which, it seems, is already happening around the world with stuff that is freely available, although technically open. Perhaps free is a stepping stone towards open. This would make for a really interesting research study.

Furthermore, especially in developing country contexts, free content, like MOOCs, might be enough for many situations, bringing great benefits. Similarly, publishing in pdfs might make life more difficult – but in some contexts something may be better than nothing at all. For example, EngagneNY, a common core curriculum, has had hundreds and thousands of downloads, despite it consisting of pdfs. From a development perspective, perhaps we should appreciate when and where free is sufficient to bring the desired benefits – and where pushing for more openness is necessary.

*In conclusion: a more open open?*

My argument is the following: 1) we care about openness because of the practices the permissions allow, not because of the permissions themselves, 2)
that the ‘consensus’ definition gives primacy to only one of several potential enablers of the expression of these openness practices (missing out on social openness), and as a result 3) doesn’t reflect a lot of the reality of practice on the ground.
Definitions, however, are critical – particularly for research. So what can we do?

One alternative approach would be to take a grounded theory approach to the open definition. In other words, we build up a definition based more on what is happening in practice, rather than pre-conceived theory about open. Given the evidence emerging from IDRC supported research, the conclusion would be to focus on openness in practice, what that looks like, how to do it well, and its benefits – regardless of legal or technical status. I see this as the logical evolution of openness: First we define it (arbitrarily), then we research it, and then based on the new evidence, we redefine it.

The proposed definition above is not to argue that copyleft licenses or technical openness are not highly beneficial or necessary in many contexts. It’s just that it is an empirical question as to the extent the different technical and legal characteristics help encourage open practices in different contexts. We should be asking: for a given context, what are the different configurations of legal, technical, financial and social characteristics that are necessary to enable the types of open practices we are interested to achieve a particular goal? Constraining openness to be dependent upon a legal or technical characteristic risks misses out on this nuance.

One of the potential benefits of this approach is that it could be a more inclusive and welcoming notion that might bring more people into the fold. Perhaps then we can see free offerings and technical interoperability, as stepping stones to increased openness rather than a threat. Then we can really embrace the goal of “a more open, collaborative future [where] we can accomplish our goals by putting students and educators in a better position to achieve theirs” as Wiley wrote.

Round-up from the ROER4D research projects
In this newsletter we feature news from nine of our sub-projects.

**Sub-project 2 early findings released**

Sub-project 2 - OER Differentiation in the Global South - which is led by Prof José Dutra de Oliveira Neto and supported by regional coordinators Ms Judith Pete (Kenya) and Prof Daryono Daryono (Indonesia,) has collected some 5,588 responses from 28 education institutions in nine countries in South Asia, Africa and Latin America and is currently analyzing data with support from statistician, Dr George Sciades. Early findings suggest that the two key motivators of open educational resource adoption across these Global South regions are to reduce the cost for students and to help other educators and students.

Another question explored was whether students used any kind of licences when creating, modifying or remixing educational resources. The findings suggest that across the countries surveyed, with the exception of Indonesia, most students did not use any kind of licence. The research team considers this as an indication of the need to increase awareness of the OER movement and the value of open licences in particular as the current students are the future creators of OER. More findings will be released soon!

**Sub-project 3 releases Attitudes towards OER scale**

Through a systematic process of scale development, the Sub-project 3 research team lead by Dr. Sanjaya Mishra has been able to release the Attitude towards Open Educational Resources (ATOER) scale as a concrete output of their research project. The scale has 17 items within two constructs: Awareness and Sharing and the reliability of these scales has been established (The reliability Co-efficient Cronbach’s alpha for the scale is 0.897 and for the sub-scales, 0.893 and 0.715 for Sharing and Adaptation, respectively). This scale might be useful for other researchers in the field to understand faculty attitudes towards OER. When used in an institutional context, it would help identify the psychological pre-disposition of faculty members towards OER, and institutions can accordingly plan
suitable interventions, including capacity building measures to improve attitudes towards OER, and help mainstreaming of OER. A detailed paper about the psychometric properties and methodologies adopted in developing the ATOER scale has published in the Open Praxis journal.

SP4 team preparing to present and communicate findings
The momentous news from Sub-project 4 is that lead researcher Glenda Cox just submitted her PhD dissertation at the University of Cape Town (UCT). It is titled, “Explaining the relations between culture, structure and agency in lecturers’ contribution and non-contribution to Open Educational Resources in a Higher Education Institution.” She will hopefully hear positive news soon from the external examiners and doctoral degrees board at UCT, so that she can put on the graduation gown and claim her doctorate.

Glenda’s PhD research inspired the focus of SP4’s research, though it deals with a number of different issues, and at different institutions. But this research is now wrapping up as well now that the SP4 team has submitted its final report to the ROER4D Network Hub. For Glenda and researcher Henry Trotter, the research and writing-up process of the report was a joy.

In addition, Glenda and Henry are preparing to present some of their ROER4D research at an upcoming UCT Teaching and Learning Conference in March. Then, in April, Glenda and Henry will go to Krakow, Poland to the Open Education Global Conference where Glenda will give a presentation on her dissertation research, while Henry’s “OER Adoption Pyramid” that was central to SP4’s analysis will be the subject of a research poster to be presented at the conference.

SP5 extends OER co-creation model in professional learning communities to neighbouring State
Sub-project 5, led by Gurumurthy Kasinathan from IT for Change, explored whether and how a bottom-up approach, in which teachers ‘embedded’ within a 'community of learning' actively co-create contextual educational resources, can support effective OER
models. The findings of this participatory resource creation action research study with 67 mathematics, science and social science teachers from the state of Karnataka, South India, suggests that OER adoption models are possible to establish through such communities.

On becoming aware of SP5's research and early findings, the neighboring state of Telangana’s Education Department evinced interest in developing a similar model, and requested IT for Change to conduct workshops for its mathematics and science teachers to create OER. During December 2015, the IT for Change team conducted capacity building workshops for teachers to create digital OER in these two subjects. The OER created are currently being assessed by the state education department officials. IT for Change intends to continue discussions with the Telangana officials to create state wide professional learning communities within which a smaller group can be formed to build an OER access-create-curate-sharing model. OER developed and shared during the SP5 project were shared with the teachers in Telangana as exemplars for their resource creation initiative.

During December 2015, Gurumurthy also presented a paper “Domination and emancipation- a framework for assessing ICT and Education programs” at the sixth Annual International Conference of the Comparative Education Society of India, which had the overall theme of “Education: Domination, Emancipation and Dignity”. The paper argues that such effectiveness of ICT programs in education could be studied with reference to the extent to which they supported or constrained teacher agency and autonomy, and these in turn were influenced by two axes of program structure: 1) Nature of program implementation (centralized versus decentralized) and 2) Nature of program ownership (public ownership versus private ownership). The paper draws on available data on ICT in education projects to suggest that ICT enabled education programs that support public (local) ownership and have decentralized implementation seem to be more effective in eliciting the support and participation of teachers, whereas centralized implementation and private ownership
approaches seem to limit teacher engagement, which is associated with program ineffectiveness. The SP5 project which supports a decentralised approach to OER was discussed as an example of a program that had public (local) ownership and decentralized implementation.

In November, two of the teachers in SP5’s action research study for OER creation participated in a national level workshop for creation of OER for ICT learning. They demonstrated to the workshop participants how to use different free and open source resource creation tools to develop student learning materials. One of these teachers was selected by the Karnataka Education Department as one of the state’s candidates for the “National Award for the best teacher in the use of digital technologies”. In her presentation to the jury the teacher demonstrated various OER which she has created and used for classroom teaching.

**SP 10.3 research suggests educators’ positive view of the open and massive aspects of MOOCs**

Sub-project 10.3 examines the educational practices of educators offering Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and whether and how their practices change in terms of openness. The project team, based at the University of Cape Town (UCT), has used an activity theory heuristic to locate educators’ activities in context (some examples of this approach are in a poster representation [here](#)). They are studying educators in four MOOCs and for each MOOC they interview the educators at three time intervals; before, immediately after and six months after the MOOC has run. At present they have completed all the interviews for the first and second MOOCs and report that educators have taken a positive view of the open and massive aspects of the MOOC mode of teaching. The lead educators have all expressed a desire to either create another MOOC or incorporate a MOOC mode of teaching, via video for example, into their formal practices in face-to-face classrooms, and desire further that the learning materials be made public. What this statement of intention yields practically remains to be seen, but clearly a positive view of open teaching and learning has characterised the lead educators’ responses to questions after their involvement in a
MOOC. All of the lead educators have noted that the MOOC, in particular its openness (understood as lacking entry requirement and fees), has served their educational objectives well.

The SP10.3 team is also engaged in sharing the project’s methods and findings. In March 2016 assistant researcher Michael Glover will present the findings of the first MOOC at three time intervals at the UCT Teaching and Learning conference. In May 2016, Project leader A/Professor Laura Czerniewicz will present the findings on the second MOOC’s lead educator’s practices the 2016 Networked Learning Conference where the paper will be published in the peer reviewed conference proceedings article.

SP 10.4 attending and presenting at Open Education Global Conference 2016
The SP10.4 team led by Dr Lauryn Oates will be presenting at the Open Education Global Conference in April 2016 and have also had a paper accepted. They share their paper’s Abstract as follows:

The Darakht-e Danesh (‘knowledge tree’) Online Library is the first open educational resource (OER) initiative in Afghanistan, established to enhance teacher subject-area knowledge, access and use of learning materials, and to foster more diverse teaching methodologies in order to improve learning outcomes in Afghan classrooms. This paper describes our experience developing this local language digital library, building its responsiveness to our audience of users as we progressed, customizing both the interface and the resources for Afghanistan’s education environment. We innovated methods to devise relevant local content, localized usability, developed different access models to reach different populations of users, integrated impact measurement, and opted to openly license material in the library’s collection. By making digital educational content open from the first introduction of digital repositories of learning objects in Afghan languages, we have an opportunity to establish the principle of openness and to promote open practices in teacher professional development in Afghanistan.
Orientation sessions for teachers in Kabul showing them how to use the DD Library, conducted by Abdul Rahim Parwani, before the team began measuring their use of the resources in the library.

The full paper will be shared following the conference.

**SP10.5 data collection in progress**

The [Sub-project 10.5](#) project team is investigating the impact of OER on Secondary and Tertiary Education in Pakistan. Data is being collected from both secondary schools and from tertiary institutions.

In terms of secondary schools the first phase of the project involved data collection from the administrators of a sample of 500 secondary schools spread all over Punjab to shortlist schools where OER were being used by students and teachers. A detailed analysis of the responses enabled the shortlisting of 32 schools where there were examples of digital/OER resources being used by students and teachers in different subjects and grade levels with almost equal proportions of boys and girls. The data from the school department indicated that there are approximately 8300 students studying in grades 9 and 10 in these schools. However, the actual data collection revealed that the figures to be incorrect as many of the students listed were not attending school or had dropped out. The data collection process is complete, and data has been collected from 5904 students in grades 9 and 10 and 59 teachers who were using OER in these schools. The results of the Administrator’s survey of schools will be shared at the e-Learning and Distance Education Conference to be held in Lahore, Pakistan 14-15 March.
The next phase will see data collection from a sample of 36 universities spread all over Pakistan. Data will be collected from all the first year students of Engineering and Technology, Physical, Social and Management Sciences, Arts and Humanities and 15 faculty members with equal representation from each discipline. Initially faculty members were contacted to request their students to fill in the questionnaire online but due to low student responses, data is now being collected through sending representatives to universities who get the forms filled by the students. Thus far, data has been collected from students of 11 universities with 1414 forms having been completed. The data collection process is planned to be completed by the first week of April 2016.

**SP10.6 – Progressing with Integrating OER in Teacher Education in Sri Lanka**

Sub-project 10.6 is progressing well at the nine Centres of the Open University of Sri Lanka (Colombo, Kandy, Matara, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Jaffna, Badulla, Kurunegala and Ratnapura). The research team, led by Prof Shironica Karunanayaka and Prof Som Naidu, has been actively engaged with Stage 3 of the OER-Integration Intervention programme. A series of evaluation workshops were conducted at all nine centres during January and February 2016, during which changes in teachers’ perceptions and practices were captured via a variety of strategies including surveys, concept mapping, lesson plan observations, focus group discussions and self-reflections. Further, the participant teachers have commenced writing “stories” of their journey in “Integrating OER in teaching and Learning”, reflecting on shifts in their perceptions and perspectives about OER and open educational practices, and impacts on their students.
Teachers attending the Evaluation workshops January-February 2016

Shironica and Som are also progressing with the OEP-Impact Evaluation Index, an instrument that is being developed to capture the perceptions, perspectives and practices of educators as they engage with the adoption and integration of OER in their teaching and learning and how these change over time.

SP 10.7 commences data collection

Sub-project 10.7’s research is premised on the idea that if OER in selected courses were proven cost-effective, there would be a stronger case for steering the university into developing OER-based course materials that are affordable, accessible, and appropriate to the country and the region. Based at the Open Philippines Open University (OPOU) and led by Assoc Prof Sheila Bonito, the study explores the impact of OER on the cost and quality of course materials in postgraduate distance education courses in the fields of health, education and development. The specific research questions are:

1. What are the costs of developing course materials using OER?
2. What are the factors that affect the cost of OER-based course materials?
3. What are the indicators of quality in course materials?
4. What is the impact of using OER on the quality of course materials?
5. What is the cost-effectiveness of using OER?

The study has commenced data collection with a thorough review of all course materials in 24 courses from health, education and development. Every course module was checked in terms of resources and learning activities to determine their quality. Quality was measured according to: 1) disciplinal fitness of resources selected; 2) alignment of resources with course objectives; 3) variety of resources by type of media catering to different types of learners and facilitating scaffolding of learning; 4) resource use and learning activities fostering engagement and collaboration. Faculty members and students were
asked to complete a survey asking them about these dimensions to determine the quality of the course materials. Course authors are due to be interviewed about the process of development of the materials to determine cost. The research team hopes to finish data collection by end of March 2016 and start analysis of findings by April 2016.

Research into educational expenditure in South Africa (SP11) comes to a close
Sub-project 11 entitled “Public funding for basic education in South Africa: Are open educational resources being funded?” submitted its final research report earlier this month, bringing this one-year, exploratory project to a close. Led by Sarah Goodier, the study aimed to develop an understanding of the funding allocation of government money into educational resource acquisition, development and dissemination in basic education in South Africa (the equivalent of K-12 primary and secondary education system in the United States).

As claims have been made about the potential cost reductions that come with using OER, this study aimed to investigate whether any public funding was being channelled specifically into OER; and, if so, whether it is possible to calculate any potential cost savings that have been realised thus far. To do this, the project consisted of two phases: 1) a desk review and document analysis; and 2) interviews and case studies. The first phase of the project was dedicated to a desk review and document analysis process in which official information sources on South African basic education were reviewed to develop a conceptual understanding of funding allocations the South African government uses for educational resources. The second phase of the research was comprised of an interview process, in which requests were submitted to various members of the South African Department of Basic Education and Provincial Departments of Education in order to uncover additional information.

Looking forward, the results of the study will be made available in the project’s final output scheduled to be released in 2016/2017. The SP11 references spreadsheet containing the educational expenditure
reference for the project has been made available as a tab of the ROER4D bibliography and may be useful for other researchers working in this area.

**The ROER4D website turns two!**
The current iteration of the ROER4D website is two years old, and as part of a review of the effectiveness of the website and preparation for entering the dissemination of findings phase of the project, the ROER4D Communications Advisor Sukaina Walji has been working with the Network Hub team to conduct a review and analyse the different current and anticipated needs users of the website have. This activity has been supported by the ROER4D Evaluation Advisor Sarah Goodier who, as part of the ongoing evaluation work, monitors the Google Analytics for the website. This has provided a broad baseline of website access analytics, including which pages are most popular and where these hits are coming from, from the launch of the website to the current analytics data. Sarah has created a short process report on how ROER4D has gone through the process of setting up this facet of the evaluation, including the data collection process which may be useful to other projects interested in collecting and analysing Google Analytics data. As a result of these activities, a number of design changes will be implemented focussing on moving the website from one which informs users about what the project’s research plans are to one which communicates the findings, outputs and tools according to regional and thematic clusters while maintaining informative and dynamic aspects such as the blog. While the general look and feel of the website will remain the same, the navigation and menus will be restructured as well as a new Home page and sub-project pages layouts. Watch this space!