Stewarding African Social Science Research Data

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The drive towards improving e-infrastructure and an increase in e-research has resulted in a "data deluge". This provides an extraordinary opportunity for social scientists to use research data in new and innovative ways to better understand and contribute to the improvement of lives on the African continent. Social Science research has also matured in that data is seen as a valuable, expensive output that has to be generated according to acceptable standards, be preserved, evaluated, aggregated into collections, shared and re-used. This trend is supported by an increased awareness of data curation issues in the research community, a drive towards open access visible in the proliferation of institutional repositories in South Africa and various other established data curation initiatives.

In the light of this, we would like to emphasise a collection of requirements that should be met in order to ensure that Social Science research data is properly curated. These requirements will be used as a framework to explore the existing landscape of entities involved with Social Science research data in South-Africa in terms of producing, preserving and disseminating quantitative and qualitative data. This audit provides the basis for identifying the role that a Social Science Data Archive can play in actively developing, managing and providing research data that contributes towards solutions for the challenges facing developing countries.

The opportunities and challenges facing such an archive will be highlighted and suggestions made to capatilise on existing initiatives and opportunities and to minimise risks. This will be done in order to show how such an archive can contribute to improved adherence to domain specific standards in dealing with data, develop unique and valuable data collections, provide preservation and dissemination services across institutional boundaries and provide linkages with other relevant disciplines and Social Science research organisations globally.