OUR VISION FOR 2020 AND BEYOND
Research4Life's Strategic Plan

research4life

WHO /Stephenie Hollyman

OUR VISION FOR 2020 AND BEYOND

Research4Life is a collaborative public-private partnership. The initiative, designed to support research conducted in lower income countries, provides free or low-cost online access to an extensive range of online scientific publications in key areas related to improving quality of life. The publications include subscription-based and open access resources.

Through the four subject portals that make up Research4Life, the initiative provides research materials for academics, students, practitioners, and government personnel. The goal of Research4Life is to help researchers in educational, research, and policy institutions in more than 100 lower income countries participate fully in the global scientific community.

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THE RESEARCH4LIFE CONTEXT

Researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, students and teachers working in lower income countries have historically suffered from a lack of access to up-to-date scientific literature essential for furthering studies, discovering evidence, sharing findings, teaching, practising, and developing public policy.

While the publishing landscape is evolving, subscription-based journals remain the largest source of high quality scientific information for the research community, presenting budgetary challenges to libraries and research organizations in lower income countries. The Research4Life initiative plays a critical role in facilitating free or low-cost access to vital subscription information resources for not-for-profit institutions in these countries. Research4Life also incorporates open access publications in its four subject-based programmes to help institutions manage their resources for users.

Higher education, the work of practitioners, and public policy decisions require access to scientific research. Many see higher education as a critical frontline in improving the development environment in lower income countries, where tomorrow's leaders in the public and private sectors are trained and new ideas are advanced. Education is the forum where people interact with their peers around the world, especially in the age of the internet.

New opportunities for international collaboration are available and there is growing recognition of what lower income country researchers have to offer to their peers in other countries (so called "south-to-south" and "south-to-north" exchanges). Improving the quality of and capacity for rigorous local research is a key aspect of advancing higher education opportunities and outcomes in lower income countries.

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THE RESEARCH4LIFE OFFER

Currently, Research4Life comprises four programmes:

- Hinari: Access to Research for Health
- AGORA: Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture
- OARE: Access to Research in the Environment
- ARDI: Access to Research for Development and Innovation

Other Research4Life programmes may be adopted in the future as thematic areas with appropriate partnership support emerge.

Most of the world's leading scientific journal publishers participate in the programmes, and the total value of access to the four collections is estimated to be in excess of US$ 10 million per year. Prior to Research4Life, these valuable collections had been confined mainly to institutions with the ability to pay, with access in lower income countries being very limited.

Hinari

The Access to Research for Health programme, led by the World Health Organization (WHO), was launched in July 2001. It includes some 60,000 biomedical and related social science information resources from 180 publisher partners.

www.who.int/hinari

AGORA

The Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture programme, led by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) was launched in October 2003. It includes 11,000 agriculture, food, fisheries and related sciences information resources from 70 publisher partners.

www.fao.org/agora

Up to 69, 000 journals, boks and databases are available through the four Research4Life programmes.

FAO, Tom Pietrasik

OARE
Research in the Environment

OARE

The Online Access to Research in the Environment programme, led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), was launched in October 2006. It includes 25,000 journals and other resources in environmental science literature from 65 publisher partners.

www.unep.org/oare

ARDI
Research for Innovation

ARDI

The Access to Research for Development and Innovation programme, led by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), was launched in July 2009. It includes 25,000 journals and other resources on innovation from 20 publisher partners.

www.wipo.int/ardi

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

Group A – free access

The Research4Life programmes provide free access to users in eligible not-for-profit institutions in some 72 countries, areas and territories which meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Inclusion in the United Nations (UN) list of Least Developed Countries (LDCs)
- A Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.50 or less
- Total Gross National Income (GNI) of US$ 150 billion or less where:
    - HDI is 0.63 or less and/or
    - Gross National Income per capita (GNIpc) is US$ 1600 or less

These countries, areas and territories are collectively known as Group A. Participating publishers are encouraged to offer access for institutions in each of these less developed countries, areas and territories.

Group B – highly discounted access

In a further 45 countries, areas and territories that do not match at least one of the above criteria but which meet at least one of the following criteria:-

- Total GNI of US$ 1 billion or less
- Total GNI of US$ 20 billion where GNIpc is US$ 10,000 or less
- Total GNI of US$ 180 billion or less where:
    - HDI is 0.67 or less and/or
    - GNIpc is US$ 5000 or less

Access to Research4Life content is provided to eligible institutions for an annual fee of US$ 1500. These countries, areas and territories are collectively known as Group B. Participating publishers are encouraged to offer access for institutions in as many as possible of these more developed countries, areas and territories.

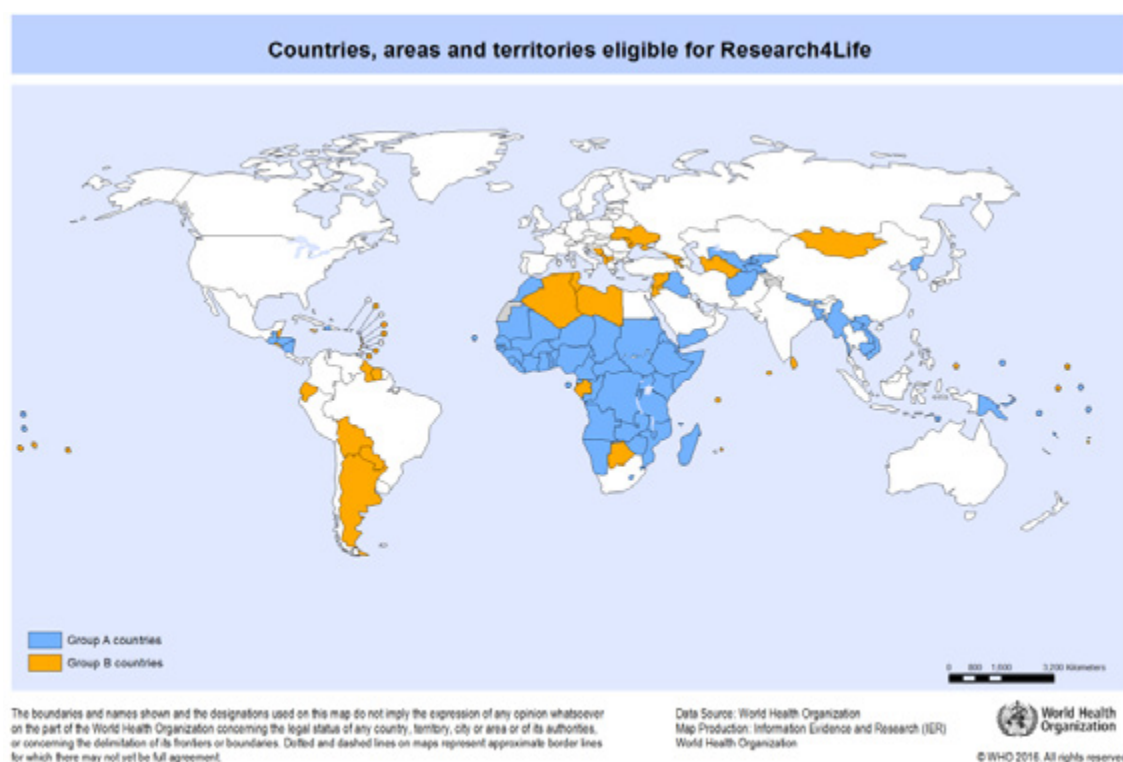No country is eligible for Research4Life access, however, if it has a Total GNI over US$ 1 trillion.

A list of all the beneficiary countries, areas and territories can be found at www. research4life.org/eligibility/.

The publisher partners have agreed that all fees collected in Group B countries, areas and territories will be remitted back to the Research4Life partnership for use in core support activities such as training, outreach and infrastructure expenses.

Who benefits?

The extensive roster of Research4Life beneficiaries comprises education, research, and government/policy and service institutions from the public sector and civil society in lower income countries, areas and territories across the world.

Currently more than 5,700 institutions have registered for Hinari access, more than 2,800 for AGORA access, more than 2,800 for OARE access, and some 700 institutions for the newest programme ARDI. Users include researchers, academics, students, practitioners, government officials and policy makers.

Countries, areas and territories eligible for Research4Life

Group A countries
Group B countries

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the World Health Organization 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: World Health Organization
Map Production: Information Evidence and Research (IER)
World Health Organization

World Health Organization

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THE RESEARCH4LIFE PARTNERSHIP

The Research4Life partnership currently comprises the following core partner organizations:

- Content Providers: Individual Publishers (of varying types and levels of engagement beyond content contribution), and the International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers (STM)
- Programme Coordinators: FAO, UNEP, WHO, and WIPO.
- University Partners: Cornell University (Mann Library), Yale University (University Library).
- Training: Information Training and Outreach Center for Africa (ITOCA), "Librarians without Borders®" (Medical Library Association, USA)
- Service and Technical: ProQuest (Serials Solutions) and the National Library of Medicine (US).

Research4Life Governance Structures and Mechanisms

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

The highest level structure is the annual General Partners Meeting, with representation from all types of stakeholders, as well as user groups. This is the governing and authoritative body of Research4Life, and decisions on major policy issues are taken at this Meeting. The Meeting designates temporary task forces to address particular strategic and tactical issues.

In addition to the General Partners Meeting, a small Executive Council representing the major contributing partners makes ongoing operational choices between General Partners Meetings within guidelines agreed by that Meeting. This Executive Council oversees the implementation of decisions made by the General Partners Meeting.

Research4Life General
Partners Meeting July 2015.
WHO, Geneva

The publisher partners designate a representative to undertake the role of Publisher Liaison in Research4Life. This person, representing all the publishers with involvement in any of the programmes, is a member of the Executive Council and the Group B Revenue and Finance Team (see below). This role is currently funded by and under the supervision of the International Association of STM Publishers (STM).

Several Teams, which are assigned particular responsibilities by the Executive Council, convene as required and report back to the Council. These may be permanent or temporary and at present include:

- Alliances (defining and inviting engagement with kindred organizations)
- Communications (publicity and public relations)
- Marketing (outreach to eligible institutions)
- Fundraising (seeking funds from external sources)
- Group B Revenue and Finance (manages the annual income and expenditure budgeting of the revenues from fees of registered institutions in Group B countries, areas and territories)
- Training (building training materials, supporting trainers' networks, coordinating workshops)

DELIVERY AND OPERATIONS

Research4Life leverages resources and the engagement of partners, sometimes as separate activities for its individual subject programmes, but more usually in a collaborative environment which supports all four programmes. Each programme is organically embedded in its sponsoring UN entity, and FAO, UNEP, WHO, and WIPO each have a strong mandate from their member states to ensure equitable access to information resources. The programme offices in the four UN entities ensure sufficient staffing to handle collectively the registration requests received to any Research4Life programme. In addition, each office supports separately its programme website updates, helpdesk responses and general inquiries. The nature of the unique subject matter covered by each programme also necessitates specialized approaches to selecting content, subject categorization, and related activities, and the programmes leverage significant partner engagement in this regard.

The programmes have unity of vision and approach in almost all regards, for example in the guidelines for publisher engagement, in the standardized offerings such as the list of eligible countries, in shared systems architecture for user access to content (authentication, search, and content portals), and in the administration of records of both institutions and content.

Beyond the direct operations of the UN and university partners, the service and technical partners provide subsets or tailored versions of a link resolver, indexes and discovery services.
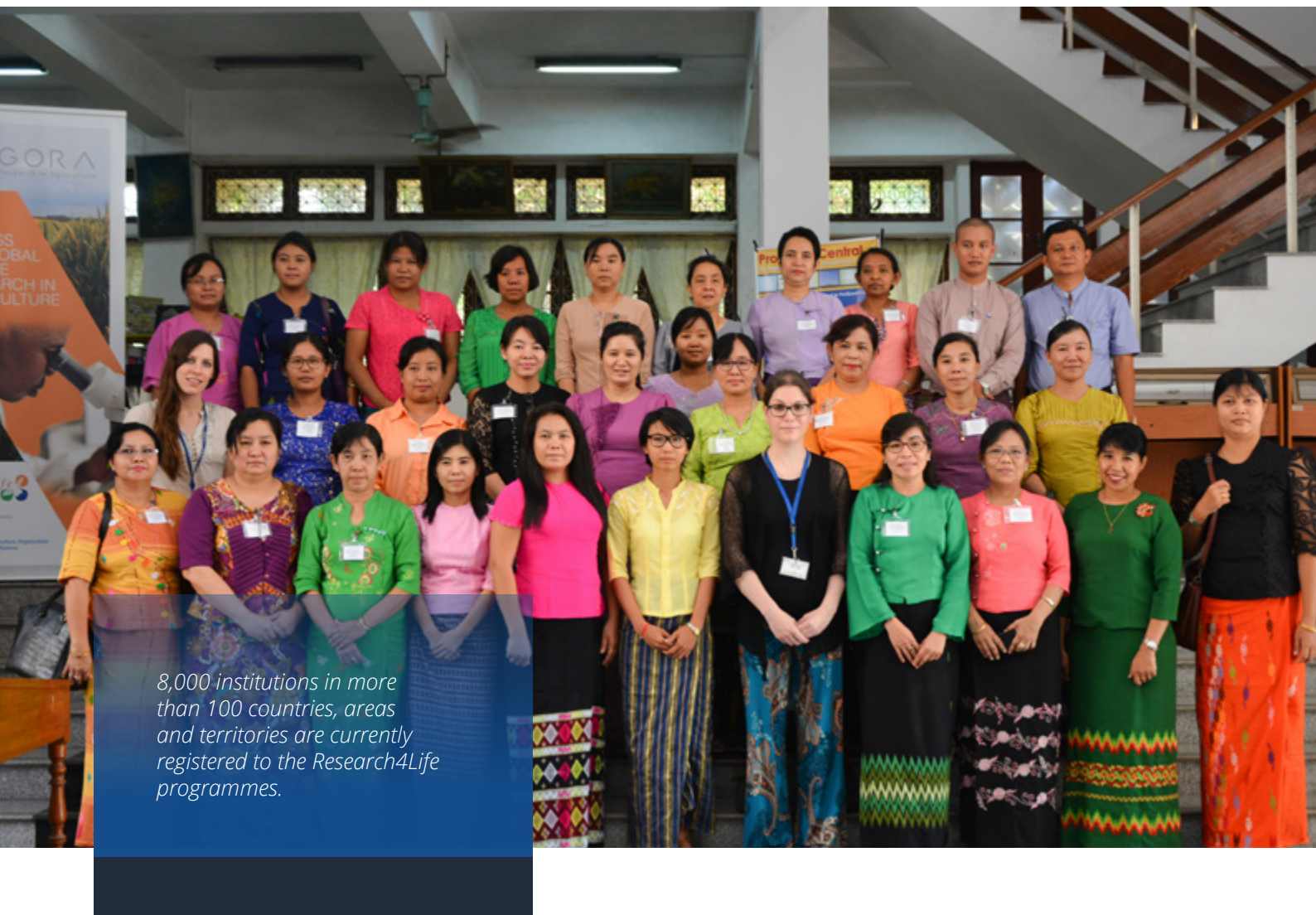
Operational functions and tasks

In summary, the operational functions and tasks for the Research4Life programmes that are distributed amongst the partners are:

- User and institution administration, communication, and support;
- technical systems and services (development and maintenance of authentication, registration and helpdesk platform, portal software systems, unified discovery platform, usage statistics collection, link resolution, and general IT infrastructure);
- content acquisition and management (identification of new publications,

negotiation with publishers, and metadata management);

- advocacy, public relations, marketing and communication;
- accounting and expense auditing;
- resource mobilization;
- monitoring and evaluation.

Some of these operations, in particular technology support, are not well served by the existing decentralized and in-kind contributions of partners, and alternative means of operations and delivery will be explored for these activities. The areas mostly likely to be targeted for a more systematic approach would be: (a) technical systems and services; (b) user and institution administration, communication, and support; and (c) content addition and management.

8,000 institutions in more than 100 countries, areas and territories are currently registered to the Research4Life programmes.

FINANCING

Research4Life's finances support its first two Strategic Objectives, namely:

1. to ensure the visibility and reach of the services, and

2. to enable a range of activities promoting accessibility and use of the content within eligible organizations.

Core partners' contributions/costs

The total annual value of the resources dedicated by the various partners on the core activities of Research4Life is around $2.8 million per annum (2015 Infrastructure Review), as shown in Table 1. The partners are pledged to continue these inputs for the foreseeable future. The International Association of STM Publishers, which has borne the cost of coordinating the publishers' input into the programmes, has reconfirmed its support of the programmes through at least 2020.

Table 1: Estimated annual value of resources dedicated by partners on Research4Life ($ 000) – from the 2015 Infrastructure Review

WHO	1060
Publisher partners	750
FAO	239
WIPO	180
UNEP	160
Cornell University - Mann Library	150
Yale University Library	150
International Association of STM Publishers	110
ProQuest	1
Total	**2,800**

The first two Strategic Objectives have considerable potential associated costs, and funding is not assured by the partners' themselves. The Research4Life partners have identified priority activities in the Strategic Plan such as technical developments and outreach including communications and training, and advocacy. For the most part, the partners' own activities in these areas can be scaled up or down according to the resources that are available, although core technical developments must be maintained by Research4Life at a minimal level for the programmes to continue functioning at all.

The one reasonably reliable source of revenue to cover these costs is the Group B revenues as mentioned above, which the publishers have agreed can be used for training, outreach and other core activities. This revenue amounted to around $198,000 per annum in 2014 and 2015. Group B revenues are being used to partially support ITOCA's activities on behalf of the partnership in Africa, as well as outreach and training activities in other regions, communications activities, and some basic running costs of the technology architecture.

More recently, useful sums have been raised from external sources of funding, such as grants from USAID and the Elsevier Foundation, as well as donations to the Research4Life programmes from Springer authors and other individual donors, but such sources are transitory, can be one-time and are inherently unpredictable.

In 2015, the partnership agreed to explore the establishment of a Friends of Research4Life to make it easier for funding agencies or individual donors to support Research4Life, and hopefully create a more stable funding source from these ad hoc contributions.

THE 2015 REVIEWS: INFRASTRUCTURE AND USER EXPERIENCE

During 2015, two reviews of the Research4Life programmes – one on infrastructure and the other on the user experience – were undertaken and completed[1].

Positive findings

During the infrastructure review, it was discovered that the programmes had experienced significant growth across several key elements from 2010 to 2015:

- The number of participating publishers increased by 60%
- The number of journals accessible through the programmes had doubled
- The number of institutions that had registered to participate in the programmes had grown by 25%
- The number of accessible books had increased from 0 to 33,000.
- Overall levels of usage had also risen, but only to a very small degree when compared to those in high-income countries.

The user experience review confirmed that Research4Life is a highly valued provider of access to research publications in those institutions that subscribe and use it and that the programmes are the primary means of access to research publications in lower income countries for a majority of users:

- 78% of respondents state that access to research information is "extremely important" to their work
- 74% of respondents state that the internet is their most-used means of accessing information, with a slight majority (60%) of these respondents stating that they access resources via independent internet use rather than through their institutions

Surprisingly, many aspects of local infrastructure and economics—electricity, computer/internet access and cost—are not primary concerns of researchers in Research4Life-eligible countries even though internet bandwidth remains problematic.

Challenges and recommendations

The reviews overlap in highlighting challenges facing Research4Life, and these can be grouped into three major areas:

- training and outreach,
- technical infrastructure,
- structure and governance.

Training and outreach

In terms of training and outreach, more must be done to increase the visibility of the programmes in order to ensure that potential users across lower income countries are aware of their existence, which in turn should lead to increased use. The user experience survey clearly shows that 87% of respondents who participated in training reported success in accessing full-text articles, whereas only 51% among self-taught respondents reported success.

Technical infrastructure

Given the frustration with the technology that Research4Life uses, including login and password issues as well as the overall complexity of the site itself, it appears that consideration must be given to fixing/updating the infrastructure before embarking on a coordinated campaign to raise awareness.

Despite the significant advances and improvements to the technical infrastructure since 2010, both reviews advocate an overhaul of the current technical infrastructure which has reached the end of its effective life. This includes, but is not limited to:

- new and efficient login procedures,
- an update of the platform itself, and
- possible integration with a discovery service to facilitate seamless authentication and access to both Research4Life and other licensed resources.

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[1] Research4Life Infrastructure Review, carried out by Research Information Network, April 2015 and 2015 Research4Life User Experience Review, carried out by The Natoma Group, June 2015.

Governance and structure

Governance and structure issues are also mentioned as challenges in both reviews. Since their inception, the programmes have been run not only by appointed individuals at the UN entities, publishers, university libraries and technical partners, but also by enthusiastic volunteers from all of the above-mentioned partners, with both fundraising and governance relying significantly on ad hoc activities. The lack of a formal structure, including a legal personality, for the programmes is seen as a barrier for more formalized and effective fundraising, but also as a factor that impedes a more professional governance.

A further and very important issue that has been addressed in the infrastructure review is the dichotomy in terms of long-term goals. Whereas some publishers view the ultimate goal as moving from "access provided under philanthropic terms to what they would regard as a more normal commercial relationship, … the UN entities desire on the other hand to see access provided as widely as possible and to enhance the impact of that access." A more formalized structure and improved governance would also likely lead to improved usage, and would impose more focus on Research4Life's activities – both widely discussed subjects during the Research4Life Strategic Review meetings held in Boston in October 2015.

For an insight into the practical impact that Research4Life programmes have had in the field, a series of Case Studies have been published.

Making a Difference highlights the benefits for researchers and practitioners in the developing world. **Unsung Heroes** looks at the contribution that librarians have made to facilitating and promoting our programmes.

For a broader view of the impact of our longest running programme, Hinari, see the extensive. independent **online survey** of known and potential users of the Hinari service.

RISKS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

While the Research4Life programmes offer unprecedented access to some of the world's foremost scientific journals, the effective promotion, delivery and use of these programmes is subject to various risks and challenges, which are identified together with possible mitigation measures.

Strategic

Alternative channels of access

Alternative initiatives may come to provide a better value proposition to certain current and potential beneficiaries, reducing the overall attractiveness of the service offered by the programmes and thus the level of uptake and retention of this service. The impact of this risk can be considered high, given that it would affect the programmes' basic justification and continued existence. The probability of the risk can be considered low, since few alternative initiatives exist, substantial investment has been made into the service provided by the programmes e.g. in terms of infrastructure, and significant experience has been gathered by the programmes in implementing the programmes. This risk will be addressed by continuously reviewing and improving the value proposition provided by the programmes from both the value and cost sides, e.g. improving the user-friendliness of the service offered by the programmes to institutions and their stakeholders and reducing the amount of effort required by institutions to integrate the Research4Life service into existing information services.

Development of sales channels

Alternative initiatives including regular sales channels may come to provide a better value proposition to current and potential publisher partners, reducing their incentives to contribute content to the programmes in a comprehensive set of countries and therefore the value to beneficiary institutions of participating in the programmes. The impact of this risk can be seen as medium to high, since a reduction in the contributed content would variously affect the value of the programmes to beneficiaries depending on the scope of this content. The probability of the risk can be understood to be high, since publisher partners obtain no financial benefit from contributing content to the

programmes and certain publisher partners have already reduced the set of countries in which they contribute. This risk will be addressed by ensuring that the programmes understand and maximize non-financial incentives to publisher partners and expand the available options for publishers to participate in market segments where there is no sales impact for them. The dedicated Publisher Liaison appointed by the programme partners will liaise with publisher partners and gather information on their evolving situations and interests.

Operational

Technical infrastructure

The technical infrastructure used by the programmes may not be able to support or be adapted to support new technologies used by beneficiaries and publishers, reducing both the functionality for beneficiaries and the content that can be made accessible from publishers. The impact of this risk can be considered medium, given that a certain level of functionality and content could likely be maintained in any event. The probability of this risk can be considered medium, since technologies are rapidly developing but certain standards are widely adopted nonetheless. This risk will be addressed by ensuring that the technical infrastructure used by the programmes complies with standards existing at the time it was developed to the greatest extent possible and that the technical infrastructure is updated in such a way as to continue to take into account new and future standards. For this purpose, the programme partners plan to appoint a dedicated technology coordinator who will monitor potentially applicable technical standards and new technologies being adopted by beneficiaries and publishers.

Human resources turnover

Turnover in human resources among the programme and publisher partners may diminish the retention of institutional knowledge, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the programmes for the beneficiaries. The impact of this risk can be seen as medium, since institutional knowledge can be rebuilt, though at a significant cost in terms of time and effort. The probability of the risk can be considered medium, since turnover remains relatively low in scope and frequency. This risk will be addressed by improving knowledge management, in particular through systematic documentation of operations and redundancies among knowledge holders and by developing an annual online introductory briefing aimed at a wide audience in all participating partners.

Financial

Scope and reliability of financing sources

Financing sources available to the programmes may not be sufficient in scope or reliability to ensure the maintenance of existing service offerings. The impact of this risk can be considered high, given that certain assets critical to the operation of the service offered by the programmes require substantial and continuous financing. The probability of the risk can be seen as low, since essential operational assets, e.g. human resources and network infrastructure, are financed out of the regular budgets of programme partners, though many functions, e.g. training, are financed out of discretionary funding. This risk will be addressed by establishing a reserve fund as an emergency financing source to be reinforced through an active drive to increase take-up by eligible institutions in Group B countries, areas and territories and by additional dedicated initiatives to attract direct funding from external donors and to leverage efforts in areas of mutual interest such as training and outreach by partners and external organisations with shared goals.

RESEARCH4LIFE STRATEGIC PLAN

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE I:

EXPANDING REACH AND USE

Goal A): Widespread awareness and use of Research4Life and its programmes amongst all stakeholders by effective marketing and publicity.

A.1: Increase awareness and use of the Research4Life programmes by their intended beneficiaries.

A.2: Increase awareness and support of the work of the Research4Life programmes among all stakeholders.

A.3: Promote Research4Life as an umbrella brand, and ensure continued visibility of associated brands/identities for the programmes (i.e. Hinari, AGORA, OARE, and ARDI).

Goal B): Trusted education services that enhance information use in higher education and research settings.

B.1: Enhance the access to published scientific literature and use of Research4Life by providing different forms of capacity development, from virtual to in-person.

B.2: Strengthen and support existing communities of trainers, evaluators, or coordinators to leverage the collective knowledge base of experiences on training with particular emphasis on supporting influential 'champions' for Research4Life at national and/or regional level who guide and facilitate Research4Life activities in countries.

Goal C): Measurement of usage and impact of the Research4Life programmes.

C.1: Measure and report on various ongoing key metrics of the programmes' activities and impact from users' and partners' perspectives.

C.2: Commission User Experience and Infrastructure Reviews in 2020.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE II:

PROGRAMME DELIVERY AND CHALLENGES

Goal D): Seamless, uninterrupted access to discoverable collections of research information through leveraging technological innovations.

D.1: Ensure appropriate robustness and flexibility for discovery and enable efficient user interaction and discoverability wherever the user searches.

D.2: Achieve efficiency for Research4Life staff by streamlining the processes and tools in the areas of institution management, helpdesk support, and content management and metadata.

D.3: Permit all users and all publishers to participate in Research4Life by adopting a form of authentication that is seamless and transparent.

Goal E): Efficient, focused governance that fosters and leverages commitment and engagement from the core partner community.

E.1: Achieve the best balance between efficiency and nimbleness and between partner buy-in and participation in decision-making.

E.2: Re-envision Research4Life as a holistic programme for both users and publishers, minimizing the separations and gaps stemming from the separate subject origins of each programme.

E.3: Manage judicious expansion of content (new information resource formats, languages, and types) available through Research4Life's subject programmes.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE III:

EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS AND FUNDING

Goal F): Beneficial partnerships with organizations having shared interests.

F.1: Proactively reinforce current partnerships while seeking new partners who share our ideals regarding access to scientific literature and capacity development, with the aim of collaboratively leveraging our respective communication channels, technology (ICT), training and outreach activities

F.2: Integrate the Research4Life programmes into the in-country activities of UN entities, thematic networks, development assistance agencies, etc.

Goal G. Fundraising and Financing.

G.1: Increase the effort dedicated to raising the funding necessary to resource activities outlined in many of the preceding Goals and to build a contingency reserve.