

The CSE Global Theme Issue initiative: a collaborative information environment to promote public health\*

Federica Napolitani<sup>1</sup>, Maria Cristina Barbaro<sup>1</sup>, Alessandra Fuglieni<sup>1</sup>, Laura Radiciotti<sup>1</sup>, Ilaria Palazzesi<sup>1</sup> and Scilla Pizzarelli<sup>2</sup>

(1) Publishing Activities;  
(2) Documentation Service, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy

Abstract

The Global Theme Issue initiative of the Council of Science Editors (CSE) is a successful example of a strategy to create a collaborative information environment and increase international cooperation. The initiative will be described and evaluated in this brief paper. Similar projects developed in recent years will also be reported. A possible application of this strategy will be suggested for health librarians and information specialists.

Key words: international cooperation; publishing; libraries.

The CSE Global Theme Issue Initiative

Among the many different services, innovative projects, virtual communities aimed at creating a collaborative information environment, the CSE initiative is certainly to be mentioned as a valuable tool to increase international cooperation and will certainly have a promising future.

The initiative consisted of the simultaneous online publication of original articles, reviews, editorials, perspectives, news, and other types of contributions relating to a specific subject. In the last edition of the initiative, this subject was: Poverty and Human Development (1).

The aim was to raise awareness, disseminate information, stimulate interest and research on these topics of worldwide concern and also to foster international cooperation and develop a synergy of strengths.

The participants:

- 37 countries agreed to participate;
- 238 science journals were involved;
- 750 research papers were published;
- 111 countries were examined within the published papers.

Table 1. List of countries of publishers participating in the CSE Global Theme Issue initiative, grouped by Human Development Index

High	Iceland, Australia, Canada, Switzerland, Japan, USA, Spain, UK, New Zealand, Italy, Germany, Hungary, Argentina, Croatia, Cuba, Mexico, Malaysia, Brazil, Puerto Rico*
Medium	Venezuela, China, Lebanon, Fiji, Iran, Palestine, Egypt, South Africa, India, Ghana, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Iraq*
Low	Nigeria, Tanzania, Malawi, Mali

\*Predicted Human Development Index (2)

\*This brief note was presented at the 11th European Conference of Medical and Health Libraries (EAHIL) "Towards a new information space: innovations and renovations", 23-28 June 2008, Helsinki (Finland) as a poster.

On the common date of Monday 22 October 2007, all the papers were made freely available online. Each participating journal was asked to render its own articles relating to the Global Theme Issue freely accessible online which was a small but important step towards open access. Some commercial publishers had to change their access policy for this particular occasion.

A big event was also held at the National Institutes of Health (Bethesda) on the same day to promote this initiative and highlight some of the best research published. These involved the following topics: childbirth safety, HIV/AIDS, malaria treatment, food insufficiency and sexual behaviour, environmental and nutritional interventions to improve child survival, physician brain drain from the developing world, and altered immunity and influenza's impact on poor children.

Table 1 lists the countries participating in this initiative. The authors grouped them according to the classification of the UNDP Report (2) where each country in the world is classified as having a high, medium or low human development index (HDI). HDI is an index which combines measures such as life expectancy, literacy, education and GDP (gross domestic product) per capita and ranks countries by level of "human development". This determines whether a country is developed, developing or underdeveloped (3).

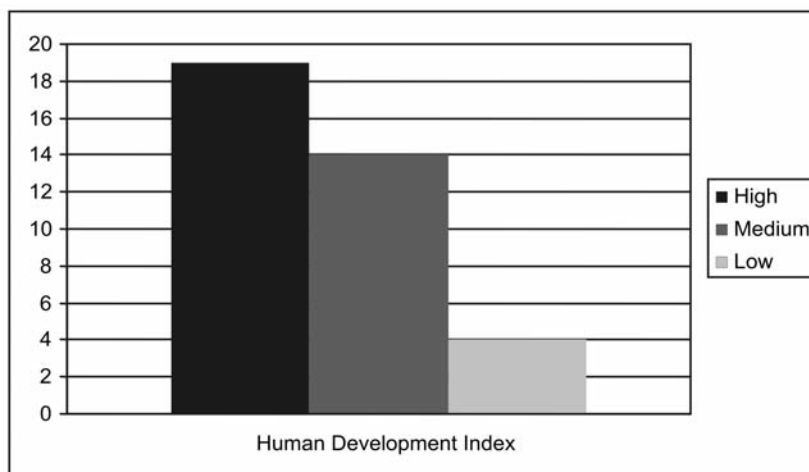
## Contribution of the ISS official science journal

*Annali dell'Istituto Superiore di Sanità*, the official peer-reviewed science journal of the Italian National Institute of Health, was one of the 238 science journals throughout the world that agreed to participate in this international collaboration. Among them: *British Medical Journal (BMJ)*, *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, *Nature*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (PNAS)*, *Science*, *The Lancet*, *Health Information and Library Journal* and many others published in developing and in underdeveloped countries.

*Annali* contributed four papers (4):

1. Inequalities in health: access to treatment for HIV/AIDS. *Marina Giuliano and Stefano Vella*
2. Extensively drug-resistant (XDR) tuberculosis: an old and new threat. *Lanfranco Fattorini, Giovanni Battista Migliori and Antonio Cassone*
3. Poverty, human development, environmental and health risks: the role of precaution and cautionary policies. *Carlo Petrini*
4. Infectious diseases and governance of global risks through public communication and participation. *Nico Pitrelli and Giancarlo Sturloni*

As we can read in the Preface "Only the combined effort of international cooperation and synergy of strengths, policies, intents, researches, institutions – governmental



**Fig. 1.** Human Development Index of the 37 countries of publishers participating in the CSE Global Theme Issue initiative.

Figure 1 shows that the majority of the participating countries (as listed in Table 1) had a high HDI which is probably due to the fact that most science journals are in fact published in developed countries. But it also highlights the great interest and the commitment given by publishers and editors worldwide.

and non governmental, both from developed and developing countries – could have an impact on the betterment of social life conditions, the improvement of public health, the survival of the ecosystem (threatened by an ever-growing world population) and the decrease of health disequities" (4).

### Other global health initiative

The age in which we are living is characterized by a growing integration and interdependence of people, which have brought about the progressive increase of cooperative actions and initiatives which aim at improving health conditions throughout the world, transcending national identities and boundaries.

In this context, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2005 established a Global Communications Center (GCC) to provide a “CDC’s message portal to the world for emergency and ongoing broadcast communication” (<http://www.cdc.gov/gcc/>). Since the same year the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CDSH) has been gathering prominent scientists and practitioners from 20 geographic areas of the world, to collect and analyze evidence on policies improving health, within the goal “to help build a sustainable global movement for action on health equity and social determinants, linking governments, international organizations, research institutions, civil society and communities” ([http://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/about/en/](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/about/en/)).

In Europe we are moving in the direction of more coordination between national research programmes. Within the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) of the European Community, in fact, collaborative research is one of the main points of the Cooperation programme, which supports all kinds of research activities carried out in trans-national cooperation, with the objective to develop joint programmes and actions between the Member States ([http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/cooperation/home\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/cooperation/home_en.html)).

The need to fight health disparities and inequalities between countries, has been addressed with various activities promoting the dissemination of timely and up-to-date information on health topics in resource-poor countries, as the access to relevant and reliable

information is essential to policy makers, healthcare providers, practitioners, and all those having to make well-informed decisions on health. Among many similar initiatives, the AED Satellite Center for Health Information and Technology (United States) is bringing together over 100,000 persons in 120 countries involved in the delivery and sharing of knowledge, through multiple approaches (newsletters, free email publications, chat groups, etc.), in over 130 developing countries (<http://www.healthnet.org/>).

Also in the field of education in life sciences, major changes are occurring in response to the increasing interconnection of the world. A large number of American universities, in fact, provide a new Certificate in Global Health which, by means of field experiences and academic and professional partnerships with colleagues in foreign countries (especially resource-limited ones) help students to understand public health issues in a new interdisciplinary and international dimension.

### Conclusions and perspectives

The progressive increase in the number of participating journals registered from the first Global Theme Issue experience in 1996 (on Emerging and Re-emerging Global Microbial Threats), to the second in 1997 (on Ageing), to the third in 2007 (on Poverty and Human Development) shows a promising future for these kind of projects which could find an application also in other fields related to the scientific community, for instance the health information and libraries’ environment.

With the collaboration of other library associations worldwide, publishers, organizations and the CSE, a new global theme issue could eventually be launched by librarians and information specialists. There are many themes which could be proposed, but one might be the objective: to translate health information into a practical application for the benefit of all.

### References

1. Council of Science Editors. Global Theme Issue on Poverty and Human Development. <http://www.councilscienceeditors.org/globalthemeissue.cfm>.
2. United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report 2007/2008. Fighting climate change: Human solidarity in a divided world*. New York: UNDP; 2007.
3. Human Development Index. *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia*. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human\\_Development\\_Index](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index)
4. Alleva E, Napolitani F (Ed.). The Council of Science Editors’ Global theme Issue on Poverty and Human Development. *Ann Ist Super Sanità* 2007;43(4):309-43.