



Our Journal in 2021: The year that was

The mission of our Journal is to *promote the visibility and impact of South African and African research* by publishing high-quality original research from Africa or on African-relevant issues that will be of interest to readers in any discipline and for the benefit of scholars, educators, the general public and policymakers.

Each year we gather data on the previous year to see how well we are doing in achieving that mission, as well as how well we are performing as a journal globally.

Publishing original research with African relevance

In 2021, a total of 490 original research and review articles were submitted to the Journal (down from 550 in 2020) – 43% of these submissions were from South Africa, and 24% were from elsewhere on the continent. We published 80 peer-reviewed articles across the six issues published in 2021. About 75% of the published authors were from South Africa, with only 10% from the rest of Africa. Most of the published articles (70 of the 80) were multi-authored. Our overall rejection rate in 2021 was 91%. The rejection rate is typically high because of the criterion of African relevance, as evidenced by 50% of desk rejections being submissions from outside of Africa, with about 25% each from South Africa and the rest of Africa.

Our average turnaround time from submission to final decision (which includes revision rounds) was 133 days in 2021. As is the case with many other journals, we struggle to find reviewers to review for us – on average per submission in 2021, we approached six reviewers to secure at least two peer reviews; on occasion we approached many more than six. In total, 870 reviewers were approached in 2021, of whom 228 completed a peer review and 8 completed two peer reviews. Of those reviewers who completed reviews, 60% were based in South Africa. A list of reviewers who reviewed for our Journal in 2021 can be found [here](#). We are grateful to every reviewer who completed a review, as well as to those who, if unable to review, responded and recommended others. One of our biggest challenges in improving turnaround times is the high number of reviewers invited who do not respond, either to accept or to decline a review invitation.

In addition to publishing the Journal, we participated in initiatives such as [Peer Review Week](#) and held a very well-attended virtual workshop on writing for a scholarly journal. We host a monthly open forum on Zoom for any early career authors to raise questions about the publication process; this is for all authors and not only those hoping to publish in our Journal. We are planning more support and training activities in peer reviewing, both as a capacity-building service and to broaden and further diversify the pool of reviewers we call upon.

Promoting the visibility and impact of African research

There were 113 000 visits to our website in 2021 (based on Google Analytics), with 57% of visits coming from readers in South Africa. Although the Journal is read in almost every country, 15% of our readers in 2021 were based in the USA, and under 10% were from the rest of Africa. There were 320 000 article downloads from our website in 2021. The 2021 article with the most views in 2021 (12 500 views) was co-authored by researchers in South Africa and Madagascar.

The Web of Science Journal Impact Factor from Clarivate released in 2021 is 2.197. Based on this impact factor, the Journal ranks 39/73 multidisciplinary science journals and 3/33 South African journals in the Science Citation Index Expanded of the Web of Science.

For the benefit of scholars, educators, the general public and policymakers

Before each issue is published, we compile and send a media release, which includes the table of contents and abstracts of each article, to local mainstream media. Media reports on articles published in the Journal can be viewed on our website [here](#). In 2021, there were 129 such media reports on articles published in the Journal, with a global online reach of almost 11 million.

We also have an active and growing social media presence, and we encourage our readership to follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) and to engage with us through these platforms.

The articles published in 2021 contributed to 14 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with SDG13 (Climate Action) and SDG15 (Life on Land) being predominant.

Writing a journal article for a broad audience is more difficult than writing an article for specialist readers. In 2021, we introduced an annual Outstanding Article Award for an outstanding peer-reviewed article published in the Journal that advances the mission of our Journal, makes an important contribution to knowledge in its field, and is eloquent and accessible to the broad readership of our Journal. The [winning article](#) was announced this month.

How did we do?

The *South African Journal of Science* was established in 1905 and is still going strong, thanks to the support of our authors and readers, and, in recent years, our becoming part of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf). We are committed to continuing to produce a multidisciplinary African journal of high quality. We would like greater participation in the Journal from African countries outside of South Africa, as continental debates are important. We are committed to supporting constructive debate across the spectrum of science and research disciplines, and hope to continue to provide a platform for discussion. Diversity and access are important issues for us, and we are working in a range of ways to widen participation in the Journal. Readers will hear more about this in forthcoming issues.

As always, we are dependent on feedback from our authors and readers about the things we are doing well but also, crucially, about where we can do better. We are fortunate that our Journal is funded from the public purse in South Africa – the Journal belongs not only to the science community but to the community more broadly, and we are aware of the responsibility that comes with this. We are happy with the growth and interest evidenced in the statistics gathered about our Journal (for space reasons we have shared just a few), but we can always do better. For this, we need your help. It is also important to note that every achievement of the Journal is attributable in large part to our authors, reviewers, associate editors, and readers.

Thank you.

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