



Engaging Researchers with Data Management The Cookbook

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1.1. Are You a Research Data Superhero? One Person Making a Big Difference at Makerere University

*Author: Joanne Yeomans
Contributor: Joseph Ssebulime*

Makerere University demonstrates how one person can start engaging with researchers about data management before any formal institutional resources or services are in place.












No of researchers	No of PhDs	Target audience	Main drivers	Ease of implementation
		  		
FTEs for RDM	Costs Materials	Costs Infrastructure	Costs People	
				

Table 1.1, CC BY 4.0.

In September 2017, Joseph Ssebulime interviewed research staff at Makerere University about their views on sharing their research data. Every one of them saw sharing or even storing their data anywhere but on their own computer as a loss of control over their work and an unwelcome interference, so they were far from ready to discuss the possible implementation of a university policy for research data management. Less than two years later, Joseph is thinking about speaking to them again to see if their views are still the same. What has happened in that period that might have changed their mind?

Changing the Mindset of Researchers

After graduating in Records and Archives Management from Makerere University in 2015, Joseph was working in the university library as a Reference Librarian and searching for a topic for his Master's study. He explained how his interest came about:

I came across Research Data Management (RDM) as a concept and realised that Makerere was lacking these services so I decided to research what RDM support meant, and then investigate the views of Makerere researchers about data sharing. I thought they would be interested in how their data could be looked after and re-used

Joseph sought out individuals who had published research papers in the previous five years and recorded interviews with them. 'I was really surprised that they had no interest in changing their data management habits,' he admitted. Astonished at the lack of enthusiasm for RDM services, he was unsure what to do next.

Luckily, an opportunity arose to speak with the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) for Academic Affairs and, upon proposing that Makerere University needed to implement a data management policy, Joseph found in him a strong ally. They both believed that it is essential to start with a research data management policy as a foundation.

With the support of the DVC, Makerere University is at the beginning of its RDM policy journey. Maintaining engagement with the

researchers is an important priority as this will help to ‘change their mindset’ by addressing their concerns and then finding infrastructure solutions that work for them.

Never Overlook an Opportunity to Speak about RDM

Joseph takes advantage of every occasion he can find to discuss the need for good RDM with researchers. He seeks opportunities at conferences and other university events to approach Makerere research staff and start a conversation about their data. His aim is to sensitize them to the need for good practice, so that the introduction of a policy and its associated procedures becomes easier. His personal enthusiasm drives him to continually look for opportunities to raise awareness about RDM whilst carrying out his job as a Reference Librarian.



Fig. 1.1.1 Conferences offer a great way to network with researchers: Joseph Ssebulime discusses data management with a conference participant at the University of Pretoria, August 2018. Photograph by Anthony Izuchukwu, CC BY 4.0.

At Makerere University there is no network drive, meaning that most researchers rely on their personal computer to store their work. A training session on ‘Backing up information online using Google

Research Data Management Services

The Role of an Academic Library in Africa

Makerere University Library offers various services to the university community and to other users. Researchers in the university generate large volumes of research data, which is primarily managed and controlled by the researchers themselves using different devices. The library is therefore tasked to play a leading role in developing and implementing RDM Services.

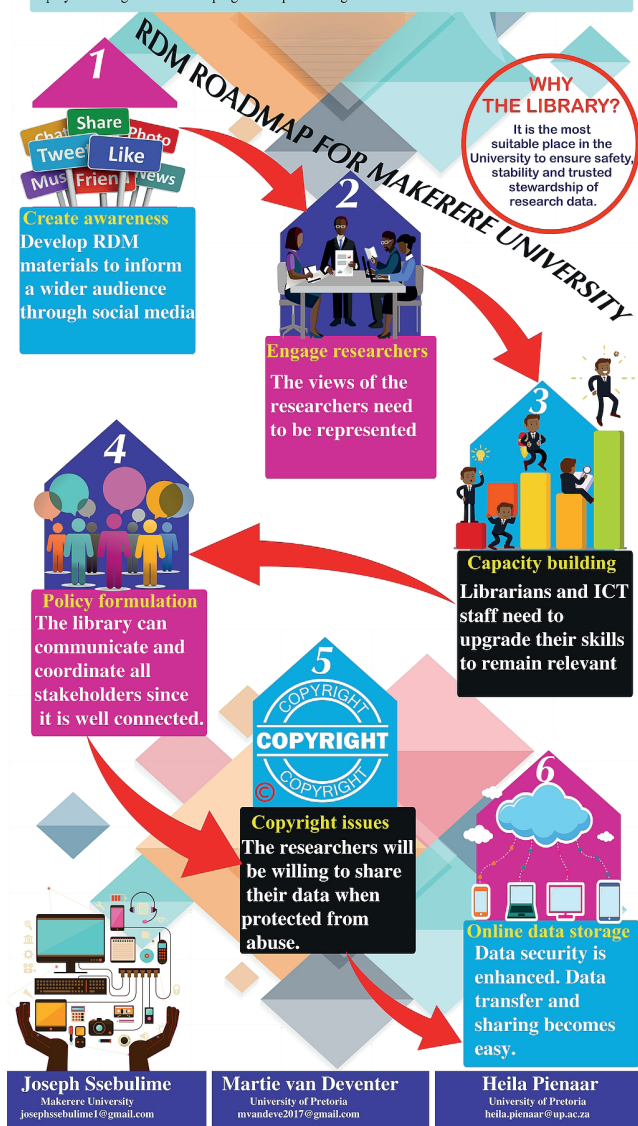


Fig. 1.1.2 Poster showing a visual representation of the RDM Roadmap for Makerere University used to raise publicity and start discussions with research staff and senior university managers at meetings and conferences.¹ By Joseph Ssebulime, CC BY 4.0.



- 1 Poster submitted to the 2018 IFLA Library and Information Congress: Joseph Balikuddembe Ssebulime, Martie Van Deventer and Heila Pienaar, 'The role Academic Libraries could play in sensitizing researchers about research data management: a case of Makerere University Library', Session 153 — Poster Session, IFLA WLIC 2018 — 'Transform Libraries, Transform Societies', Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 27 August 2018, <http://library.ifla.org/id/eprint/2297>

Drive’ provided a valuable service for researchers as well as an ideal opportunity to talk with them more generally about RDM.

Another such opportunity arose during training on how to use the institutional preprint repository. ‘Open access’ is a well-known and accepted concept at Makerere University so it was natural to run training sessions on uploading articles to the repository, and these sessions are well-attended. Because some publishers now also require authors to publish the data underlying their article, Joseph can include some data management topics in this training session and use it as another chance to talk about RDM.

Social media is another obvious way to reach people at the university, and Facebook posts are effective in helping to raise awareness about RDM.

How Fast Do Things Change?

Joseph believes that the impact of his activity on driving cultural change is ‘a little bit slow but very steady’. It’s useful to have an ‘elevator pitch’ ready for when an opportunity arises, and he advises anyone interested in driving data management awareness to ‘start by having conversations with as many stakeholders as possible across the university; this can begin with a brief discussion whenever there is a chance to talk to a senior official;’ if they are convinced, these conversations pave the way for more formal approaches and proposals. It’s clear that having a confident personality is beneficial for success, but with the right people in place Joseph believes that ‘every academic institution across the country’ can implement this activity. Are you the person who can do it?

Additional Resources

Ssebuline, Joseph, Van Deventer, Martie, and Pienaar, Heila, ‘The Role Academic Libraries Could Play in Developing Research Data Management Services: A Case of Makerere University Library’, [Preprint], 5 July 2018, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326208493>

