Building Editorial Capacity through Mentorship in Diamond Open Access Journals: Lessons from Africa

Professor Clinton Aigbavboa

Journal of Construction Project Management and Innovation

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

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Appreciation

- Iryna Kuchma
- Edvaldas Baltrunas
- Entire EIFL Team

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The Problem Landscape

- Weak editorial infrastructure in many African journals
- Limited reviewer pools and overburdened editors
- Inconsistent manuscript quality and formatting
- Lack of structured training in peer review
- Limited exposure to ethical publishing standards
- Fragmented scholarly communities

EIFL Project Overview

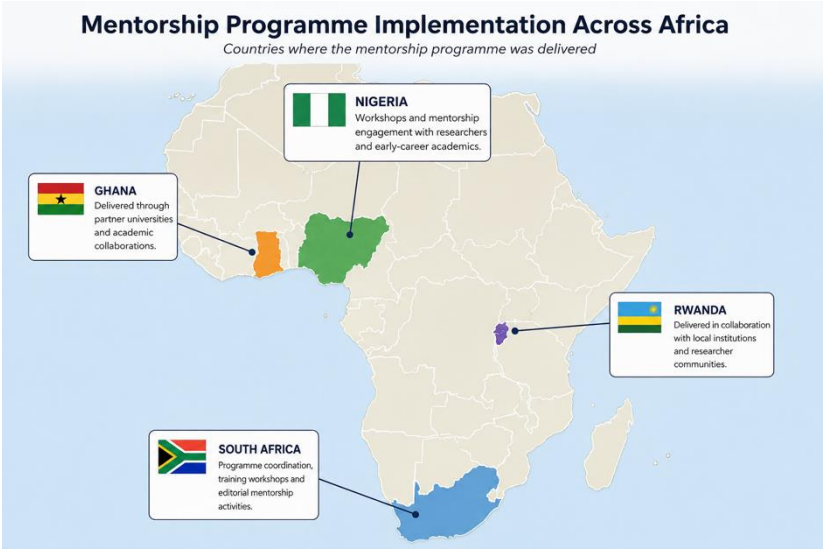
- Project: Strengthening research capacities and community engagement in construction management and innovation across Africa
- **Countries: South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda**
- Integration of training, mentorship, and publishing
- Multi-institutional collaboration model
- Hybrid delivery approach

EIFL Project Overview

- JCPMI as a Diamond Open Access journal
- No fees for authors or readers
- Platform for African scholarship visibility
- Focus on construction and built environment
- Integration of editorial capacity development
- Alignment with global publishing standards

EIFL Project Objectives

- Enhance community engagement across Africa
- Train emerging researchers in publishing skills
- Strengthen editorial workflows and systems
- Improve manuscript quality and review processes
- Expand reviewer and author base
- Promote sustainable scholarly ecosystems



Training Modules Developed

- Academic writing and manuscript structuring
- Peer review principles and processes
- Research ethics and publication integrity
- Grantsmanship and proposal development
- **Use of AI in academic writing & Career pathing**
- Strategies for publishing in high-impact journals

How the Programme was Delivered

- Hybrid engagement model combining physical and virtual participation
- Workshops conducted across **South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, and Rwanda**
- Collaboration with partner universities and scholars
- Integration of training modules with editorial mentorship
- Continuous interaction beyond workshops
- Direct participation in editorial support activities after training

Programme Reach

- More than 750 participants engaged across four countries
- Strong participation from postgraduate students and early-career academics
- Increased interest in reviewing and scholarly publishing
- Expanded regional engagement with Diamond Open Access publishing

How the Mentorship Programme was Set Up

Programme design principle

- Structured mentorship rather than informal support
- Integrated directly into journal editorial workflows
- Practical and hands-on learning approach
- Supervision by experienced editorial leaders
- Continuous engagement rather than one-time training
- Alignment with journal sustainability objectives

Areas of editorial exposure

- Manuscript screening and editorial triage
- Reviewer identification and allocation
- Communication with authors and reviewers
- Ethical publishing and plagiarism screening
- Workflow management using OJS
- Understanding editorial governance systems

Impact of the Mentorship Programme

Editorial and Operational Impact

- 10+ Editorial Associates formally trained
- Over 60+ New reviewers recruited into the journal system
- Over 120 new manuscript submissions from workshop participants
- Improved workflow consistency and manuscript screening
- Faster reviewer allocation and communication processes
- Reduced operational pressure on senior editors

Performance Improvements

- Turnaround time reduced from 8–10 weeks to 4–6 weeks
- Initial manuscript screening improved to 1–5 days
- Stronger editorial governance and workflow management systems

How the Programme Supports Future Editorial Capacity

Long Term Benefits

- Creation of structured reviewer pipelines
- Development of future editorial contributors
- Reduced dependence on a few senior editors
- Improved institutional memory and workflow continuity
- Increased confidence among emerging researchers
- Stronger understanding of ethical publishing systems

Broader Ecosystem Benefits

- Expanded regional scholarly collaboration
- Increased engagement with Diamond Open Access publishing
- Better preparation for international indexing ambitions
- Stronger institutional partnerships and networks

SURE-Built Conference in Editorial Capacity

- Established as a complementary scholarly platform
- Over 300 participants engaged globally
- Representation from 18 countries and 70 institutions
- Pipeline for high quality journal submissions
- Platform for mentoring authors and reviewers
- Reinforces research quality and academic integrity

Lessons Learned from the Programme

- Mentorship must be integrated into editorial systems
- Practical exposure is more effective than theoretical training alone
- Editorial Assistants can become strategic operational multipliers
- Reviewer development should be linked to mentorship systems
- Continuous engagement is critical for sustainability
- Strong workflows improve both efficiency and learning outcomes

What Worked Well

- Hybrid engagement model
- Multi-country collaboration approach
- Progressive responsibility allocation
- Direct participation within real journal operations

Advice for Journals Interested in Similar Approaches

Recommendations

- Start with structured but manageable mentorship systems
- Integrate Editorial Assistants into real workflows early
- Combine technical training with practical editorial exposure
- Build reviewer and editorial pipelines simultaneously
- Strengthen workflow systems such as OJS and plagiarism screening
- Develop long-term institutional collaborations and support systems

Advice

- Treat mentorship as editorial infrastructure
- Focus on sustainability rather than short-term activities
- Continuously review and improve workflows
- Build systems that outlive individuals

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Conclusion

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Conclusion

Editorial capacity must be intentionally developed

Mentorship strengthens both people and systems

Editorial Assistants can support long-term sustainability

Diamond Open Access requires strong human infrastructure

Collaboration and continuity are essential for growth

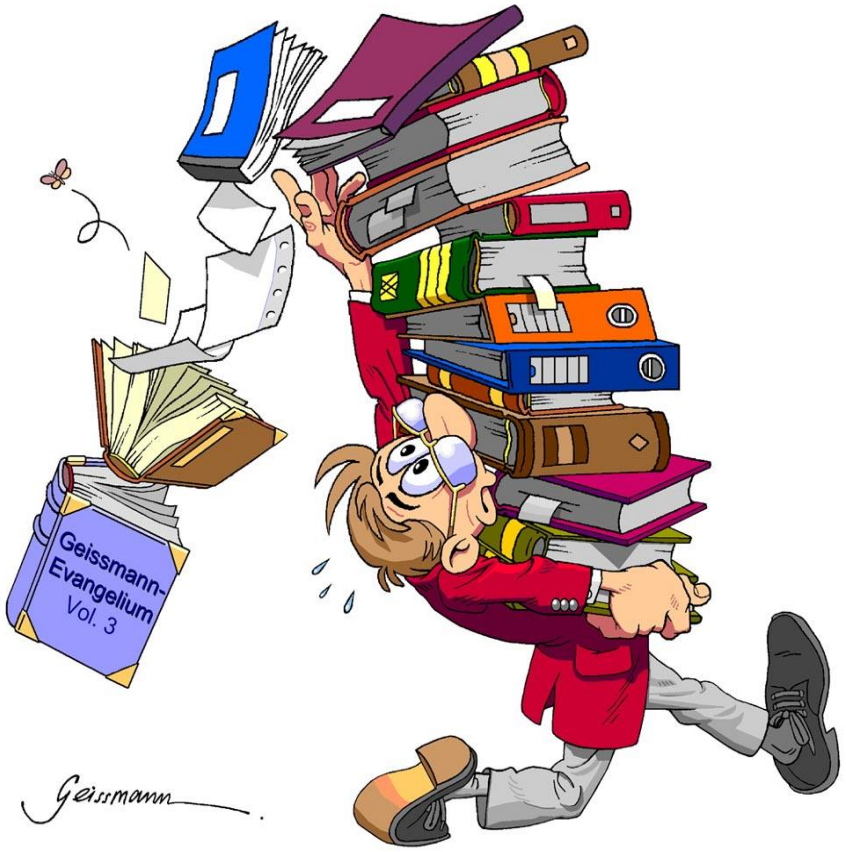
Africa can lead innovative editorial development models

The best way to predict the future is to create it.
Peter Drucker

“Always believe that something wonderful is about to happen.”

- Xiaomi Mantra -

Thank you For Listening



Clinton Aigbavboa

Professor of Construction Industry & Sustainable Human Settlement

Director:

- **DSI/ NRF Research Chair in Sustainable Construction Management and Leadership in the Built Environment**
- **cidb Centre of Excellence**
- **Gauteng Department of Human Settlement Research Chair**

Department of construction management & quantity surveying

Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment

House No 6 | Research Village | Bunting Road Campus

Tel: +2711 559 1862| Cell: +27 78 795 8231

Email: caigbavboa@uj.ac.za | clinton@aigbavboa.com

University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, RSA

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