

## Strategy, sustainability and quality: how INASP and its partners are strengthening access to research in Africa

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### Abstract:

*INASP is an international development charity working with a global network of partners to improve access, production and use of research information and knowledge, so that countries are equipped to solve their development challenges.*

*INASP has supported the African research and higher education system for many years, working with partners in a number of countries to (i) improve access to online journals and other e-resources, (ii) respond to requests for training and advice from librarians, (iii) support researchers in the production of quality research, and (iv) support the visibility of African research through the Journals Online platform.*

*In 2013, INASP embarked on a new phase of work, adjusting some of its approaches in response to changes in research and higher education, scholarly communications and the international development sector. In this paper we will share the learning, underlying principles and new approaches associated with this new phase of work.*

*In the area of information access, three important aspects stand out:*

*1. Strategic planning*

*To ensure that the support we offer fits our partner countries longer-term needs, and so that they are able to incorporate this support into their own strategic plans, we have worked with each partner country to agree a two-three year strategic action plans.*

*2. Sustainability*

We work within national structures to ensure that the capacity that our partners develop, and that INASP seeks to support, is sustainable and effectively embedded in the existing system. In many cases this is a national consortium of higher education and research libraries; in other cases it is another national level body responsible for e-resource access.

3. *Quality.*

To ensure that the training we deliver is effective, and that it builds genuine and enduring capacity, we have increased our emphasis on quality. To do this we have reviewed our training materials, improved approaches to participant selection and developed new ways of monitoring training outcomes. We are also training facilitators in pedagogical skills.

**Keywords:** Insert up to five keywords here, Times New Roman font, 11 point size, left-aligned.

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## Strategy, sustainability and quality: how INASP and its partners are strengthening access to research in Africa

### Introduction

INASP is an international development charity working with a global network of partners to improve access, production and use of research information and knowledge, so that countries are equipped to solve their development challenges.

INASP has supported the African research and higher education system for many years, working with partners in a number of countries to (i) improve access to online journals and other e-resources, (ii) respond to requests for training and advice from librarians, (iii) support researchers in the production of quality research and (iv) support the visibility of African research through the Journals Online platform.

Over the last 12 years INASP's programmes have been built around the concept of a research communication cycle, (outlined below) in which our programme addresses different stages of the cycle:

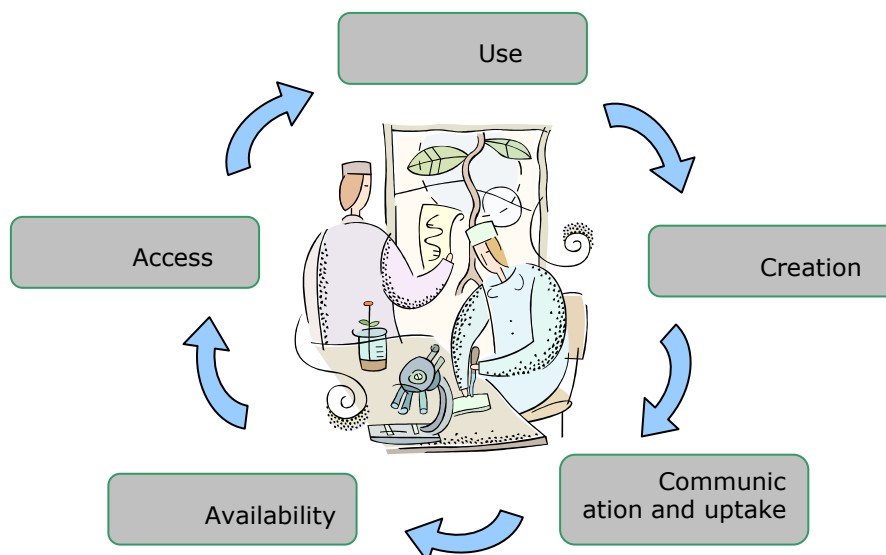


Figure 1: Schematic of research communication cycle.

**Availability:** working with editors, publishers and librarians to ensure that credible, timely and relevant research is available to researchers. This includes research published in

subscription based and Open Access journals and books, and in institutional repositories. In 2012, negotiations for deeply discounted or free licenses to research information were undertaken on behalf of 22 partner countries (twelve in Africa, five in Asia and five in Latin America). This resulted in the choice of over 40,000 full text journals, 10,000 full text books, 10,000 reports, and 25,000 abstracted journals from 50 international publishers and aggregators.

**Access:** working with publishers, librarians, ICT professionals and policy makers to ensure that the IT infrastructure and institutional policy and practice enabled researchers to access the information they need for the work. In 2012, 1,785 universities and research institutions received access to e-resources through PERI, with a 300% increase in their usage (3.4m article downloads) over 2003 figures. A contributing factor to this was our work in developing and strengthening library consortia whom purchase electronic journals, books and other resources and train their members to manage them.

**Use of e-resources:** working with librarians and researchers to ensure that researchers develop the necessary information literacy skills.

**Research production and visibility:** working with researchers, editors and publishers to build and strengthen skills to write, publish and communicate research. Almost 800 journals from the South made their content available online via the Journals Online platforms in 2012, with some “born digital” titles even being launched there. There was a fourfold growth in the download of articles from those journals from readers across the world.

**Uptake:** working with parliaments, government departments and civil society to provide the skills needed to use research in policy making departments. Our current work in this area includes developing a series of courses to be offered at the civil service school in Ghana on how to use research evidence, developing a mentorship programme for policy researchers in Zimbabwe and running a series of public policy dialogues on key national development priorities also in Zimbabwe.

INASP’s new phase of work has seen an adjustment to some of its approaches in response to changes in research and higher education, scholarly communications and the international development sector. As a result, INASP continues working with its partner countries as they strive to create:

- effective enablers of information access who will ensure that both researchers and policy makers are informed by the latest research generated within their country, region and globally;
- a vibrant research community that can generate, publish and disseminate new research and knowledge and contextualise existing information to their local and national needs; and
- skilled users of research information and knowledge who are able to understand and evaluate research information and articulate their research information and knowledge needs.

The programme continues:

- the negotiation of free and low-cost online resources from a wide range of publishers across many disciplines;

- the support of librarians and IT staff to ensure researchers, lecturers and students can access and use the research literature (see our activities section);
- improving the accessibility and visibility of developing country journals through the Journals Online projects; and
- training and mentoring for developing country authors through AuthorAID.

From mid-2013 we have expanded our work with:

- library consortia and equivalent national bodies in countries, to equip them with greater capacity to enable them to take greater control of the purchasing and management of research literature and of the training needed by their members;
- library schools in a select number of countries, to update their postgraduate curricula in order to produce a new generation of librarians who can manage digital collections;
- national research and education networks (NRENs) to help develop affordable Internet access for their member institutions and to support training to improve campus IT networks
- universities, to embed training in academic literacy, writing and publishing skills as standard for early career faculty members;
- librarians, IT staff and researchers in some of the poorest countries, in collaboration with Research4Life, to help them make effective use of the resources already available to them; and
- scholarly associations and other national bodies to take on full management of their own Journals Online projects.

This paper focusses on support to library consortia to develop access to and availability of research information, in particular the aspects of strengthened capacity, strategic planning, sustainability and quality.

### **Strengthening capacity to manage e-resources**

The primary aim of this work is to strengthen the capacity of INASP partner countries to secure and manage access to electronic resources<sup>1</sup> (e-resources), ensuring that researchers, students and other users have access to the research literature that they need.

For countries to successfully manage access to e-resources, and to ensure they can secure these at an affordable price, it is important that they have a nationally mandated and representative body that can coordinate the management of these resources (from selection and purchasing to promoting and monitoring usage) on behalf of universities, research institutes and other research-using organisations in the country.

In many countries these bodies are national library consortia; in others a national higher education council or other organisation may play this role. This entails supporting both organisational and individual capacities. At an organisational level, INASP will support library consortia or equivalent agencies as they develop their management structures and processes in order to manage subscriptions and licensing for e-resources at national level. At the individual level, INASP offers training to library professionals, selected by the consortium, so that they can both serve their individual institutions and, through their institution's membership of the consortium, provide a source of expertise for the country as a whole, as future trainers or peer experts.

In 2014, INASP began working with the countries which have been participating in our programmes since 2002 to develop a three year strategy of training activities to support the

management of e-resources. In addition to an online licensing tool (made available openly on the INASP website) and at least two representatives from each country receiving training in negotiation skills, countries, through their consortia or equivalent national bodies, were invited to select five of the workshops or activities below:

1. E-resource management and access
2. Information Literacy: IL Strategy and IL into the Curriculum
3. Pedagogical Skills training
4. Working Together to Support Research (WTSR)
5. Marketing and promotion of electronic resources [not including marketing of library services]
6. Monitoring and evaluation of e-resource usage (MEERU)
7. Consortium strengthening activities
8. Training for Systems Librarians
9. Library marketing and advocacy [this workshop focuses on marketing and advocacy at library / consortium level]

Each of the workshops has clearly defined expectations, which the consortium can tailor to suit its needs. For example, the Marketing and promotion of electronic resources workshop has the expectation that a marketing plan will be developed by each participating institution, to increase e-resource usage. The consortium managing the workshop can determine when this plan should be developed, how plans can be shared between the workshop participants and what reports on the effectiveness of the plan should be submitted to the consortium.

A challenge we have recognised around workshops is the need to identify the correct participants, in an environment where participation in a workshop is occasionally seen as a reward. We have clearly defined the ideal participant for an INASP workshop to avoid a situation where a participant may already have the skills being further developed by the workshop. For example, for the monitoring and evaluation of e-resource usage, we state that “librarians will get most benefit from this workshop if they have an M&E role in their institution, an interest and ideally some experience in downloading publisher usage reports.”

We have introduced pre-workshop assessments and post-workshop assessments to determine changes in confidence, knowledge and skills as a result of the workshop. Assessments have been used for five of the library skills workshops so far, with more in development for our future workshops. Before the workshop, they have been used to inform the selection of participants and for making adaptations to meet the specific needs in that context. The findings from the assessments have been used to adapt and update our training materials and processes so that they are improved for future workshops.

In addition to the training, INASP is planning to develop several “Communities of Practice” where members of the consortia or equivalent national bodies and institutional representatives can share their experiences. These are likely to address issues affecting libraries, as they address negotiation and access, information literacy and campus networking. In any discussion group, the challenge is in balancing the contributions, to ensure that the level of interest is maintained, without overwhelming participants with large numbers of emails. We plan to manage this by moderating the group and planning to seed the discussions with topics we see coming up as being relevant to a number of our partners.

### **Ensuring sustainability by working within national structures**

We work with national structures to ensure that the capacity that our partners develop, and that INASP seeks to support, is sustainable and embedded. In many cases this is a national consortium of higher education and research libraries; in other cases it is another national level body responsible for e-resource access. Where such a body does not yet exist, or where it is newer or weaker, we work with country partners as they develop it.

INASP recognises that sustaining this capacity in the longer term requires that library consortia or equivalent agencies not only develop specific skills and expertise amongst their member institutions, but that they also develop in organisational terms. This means that they are able to identify their current and future needs, develop organisational strategies to address these, and plan for their own long term future. INASP will therefore support consortia or national agencies as they do this – offering tools to assess their current capacity and to track progress annually, ensuring they receive the support needed to incorporate this assessment into their own strategic planning processes.

INASP is still developing its approach to organisational capacity support. As a first step we have designed – with advice from experienced consortium leaders – a checklist to assist consortia and equivalent national bodies to assess their capacity in seven areas: their mandate; strategic development; management structures; membership and financial base; communicating and influencing; supporting development of member institutions; and ability to provide and manage access to e-resources. This checklist enables INASP and its partners to build a picture together of organisational development needs, and to enable these to be reviewed annually to track progress and identify areas for future or continuing support. As well as providing an assessment of capacity we anticipate that this approach will also support partners to think and plan more strategically, and thus make better use of the support that INASP and others are able to offer.

### **Taking a strategic approach**

In order to ensure that the support INASP provides follows the needs and priorities defined by each country, and to ensure that consortia or equivalent agencies are able to take a longer term and more strategic view, we have worked with the consortium or national agency to develop a two-three year strategic plan; this replaces our previous annual agreements. Plans have been developed following a strategic planning process, through which partners identified their needs and priorities, and selected five areas for support from an INASP training offer of 10 workshops. In addition to detailing a series of activities (predominantly training workshops) which INASP will support, the plans set out what the consortia or equivalent agencies expect to achieve as a result, and define clear expectations of the individuals who participate – and by extension, their institutions who select them for training – to ensure that what they learn is ultimately incorporated into their day-to-day work.

The planning process encouraged consortia to look ahead to where they would like to be in five years' time, as well as undertaking an analysis of current strengths and weaknesses. Member institutions were asked to provide feedback - not just on training needs but also skills and expertise that could be shared with colleagues and ultimately benefit the consortium.

### **An emphasis on quality**

To ensure that the training we deliver is effective, and that it builds genuine and enduring capacity within library consortia/equivalent national agencies, we have increased our emphasis on quality.

Training will include workshops on management, monitoring and evaluation and marketing of electronic resources, information literacy and pedagogic skills, systems librarianship and library advocacy.

The majority of the training workshops will be delivered in country, by local or regional facilitators, and will be designed in such a way that they can be cascaded to expand the reach of this training. To ensure that this training is high quality and supports genuine capacity development we will progressively improve our training materials, focusing on appropriate pedagogical approaches as well as subject expertise. We will work with consortia to tighten participant selection processes (to ensure that the right people are trained) and ensure that skilled facilitators are employed and that we support their own professional development as trainers. In addition, we will ensure that our training is effective by assessing what participants have learnt as a result of each workshop.

### **A commitment to learning as we go**

Ongoing learning, and communicating this learning, is an important process to ensure we are constantly improving our programme strategies and approaches, that participants are benefitting the most from our networks and that we have the evidence that we and our partners need to underpin our work. This will be achieved by (i) piloting new programme approaches, (ii) undertaking and communicating learning around our programme strategies, (iii) fostering active communities of practice, and (iv) using this knowledge to enable INASP and our partners to influence key stakeholders in the research system.

There are a number of key strategies and approaches used within the INASP Strengthening Research and Knowledge Systems programme. These strategies and approaches, such as approaches to training quality and organisational capacity development, will be analysed and reviewed through the programme, with findings used to make adjustments. These lessons will be shared and published to aid others in the sector.

One of the pilot projects is to take our work to Sierra Leone and, in collaboration with Research4Life, engage in activities to increase awareness of and demand for scholarly online literature. Building on our learning from other countries, we realise that the provision of online literature is not sufficient to ensure its use, there is also need to work with researchers to develop their research writing skills and to work with institutional managers to give them the background knowledge to understand the reasons to develop national and institutional ICT and library networks. This project will continue to change shape as it moves along, responsive to the needs of Sierra Leone and also drawing on further learning from other countries.

### **Sustainable access to vital research**

Information and knowledge is vital for development and, in order to overcome development challenges, countries need to have the capacity to access, use and share this information and knowledge for themselves. INASP works to ensure that its partners are able to provide the best possible access to research literature and, as a result, can help improve the essential knowledge base needed for effective national development efforts. To achieve this it is

essential that not only the skills but also the structures, systems and relationships needed to manage access are developed at national level, and can be strengthened and sustained in the future.

Like any development project, our work, and that of our partners, is influenced by prevailing political and economic factors in the country. These can range from university strikes to conflict around elections. Many of the people we are working with are taking roles at national level within consortia and other bodies on a voluntary basis, combining this with their day jobs as university librarians. Many consortia are emerging organisations which are still developing management processes and systems, to enable them to handle this work. Balancing of workloads, staff turnover and lack of succession planning are all potential issues. Nevertheless, the success of our partners in KLISC<sup>ii</sup> (Kenya Library and Information Services Consortium), CUUL<sup>iii</sup> (Consortium of Uganda University Libraries) and CARLIGH<sup>iv</sup> (Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries, Ghana), to give three examples, are a testament to what can be achieved.

Over time, INASP and our partner countries will have a clearer understanding of common challenges as well as factors for success. One example of the latter is an agreed strategy for top-slicing a small percentage of member contributions to fund a member of staff able to undertake administrative duties and troubleshooting. This is one of the successes of (the Ugandan library consortium) CUUL, who have a part-time Consortium Administrative Assistant. Management structures that include a chair-elect and past chair contribute towards both succession planning and continuation of knowledge as the new executive is voted in. Active working groups or functional committees also have an important role to play, not just in sharing the workload but also bringing a greater engagement and so sense of commitment / ownership for those involved. They enable the consortium as a whole to benefit from the experience and expertise amongst the members. If those groups are following realistic work-plans that flow down from an overall strategic plan, then all are contributing towards shared goals. CUUL, for example, has five standing working groups. Each strategic objective is assigned to one or more working group and is represented in the group's work plan.

Consortia, of course, are only as strong as their member institutions. While there are many positive examples of greater investment in higher education, many universities and research institutions are still operating under significant financial resource constraints while serving growing numbers of students. Whilst many of these are external factors, the consortium can play an important role. Strategies include: working with the national HE accreditation body so that new institutions have to join the consortium and so benefit from e-resource provision; having clear infrastructure requirements that have to be met before institutions can join, enabling the library to make a case for investment; sending a consortium representative alongside the local librarian when approaching a new institution's Vice Chancellor.

In representing multiple institutions with a single voice, the consortium can be a powerful advocacy tool (not only in terms of access to e-resources, but also potentially institutional budget, staff training, hardware and shaping institutional policy). In Kenya, KLISC has developed a number of strong relationships. These include collaborating with Kenya Educational Network (KENET) on strengthening ICT infrastructure, and with the Commission of University Education (CUE) to ensure new institutions join the consortium. Both measures improve access and availability of e-resources. In Ghana, CARLIGH has built a financial reserve. This provides some buffering if institutional payments for e-resources are



delayed; it also enables the consortium to self-fund some training each year to meet member needs.

With over 10 years of experience behind us, and taking these challenges into account in our planning, we are optimistic that progress can be made as INASP and the country consortia adapt to meet the changing information environment.

## References

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.inasp.info/en/network/publishers/>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.klisc.org/>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://cuul.or.ug/>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.carligh.org/>