

An integrated response to the needs of developing countries

PERI: Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information

Over the past ten years the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) has facilitated or managed a wide portfolio of activities in response to requests from colleagues and institutions in developing and transitional countries. Despite these efforts there continues to be concern that the gap is widening between those who have access to information and those who do not. A number of countries have called upon INASP to work with them in developing a coherent programme to access international information, provide access to local and regional research results, and provide training in 'internet' use and in strengthening local publishing. A two-year period of consultation and a pilot testing led to the development of the Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI). Preliminary evaluations indicate that the Programme is meeting in-country needs and has already exceeded expectations. However, providing access is only a first step and there is a need for continued training and expanded network bandwidth to accommodate increased use.



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Background

During the late 80s and early 90s, conference participants in such fields as the environment, rural development, and global change perceived a need for better information sharing and collaborative working. The International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) was born subsequently as a programme of the International Council for Science (ICSU) in association with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), UNESCO and the Third World Academy of Sciences (TWAS).

With a mandate of 'worldwide access to information and knowledge', the immediate objectives for INASP are to:

- map, support and strengthen existing activities promoting access to and dissemination of scientific and scholarly information and knowledge;
- identify, encourage and support new initiatives that will increase local publication and general

access to quality scientific and scholarly literature;

promote in-country capacity building in information production, organisation, access and dissemination.

INASP acts as an 'intermediary' between the research and information communities, NGOs and professional bodies in the 'South' and their counterparts in the 'North'. For the past ten years it has facilitated and/or managed a significant number of programmes and activities in response to requests from colleagues. These include INASP-Health: <http://www.inasp.info/health>, INASP-Rural Development: <http://www.inasp.info/south/>; Library Support Programme: <http://www.inasp.info/lsp/>; Publishing Support Initiatives: <http://www.inasp.info/psi/>; and most recently the Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI): <http://www.inasp.info/peri/>.

Learning how to make best use of information on the internet: delegates at the INASP ICT workshop, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, October 2002

Photo: INASP



The Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI)

The 1990s saw a proliferation of information and communication technology (ICT) connectivity programmes in developing countries, supported by agencies within the United Nations, NATO Science, and the World Bank. Catherine Nyaki Adeya¹ (2001) reviewed a number of those playing a significant role in Africa, complementing and updating the personal accounts of introducing new information technologies in the publication *Bridge Builders*² (1996). Neither work was able to cite many examples of activities or programmes providing relevant and affordable literature. Although there have always been a number of ad hoc efforts, both from individual publishers and from a host of externally supported research projects, few have been affordable and sustainable. Access to national and regional research has been very limited though researchers have found that the internet provides a surplus of 'free' information of dubious authority.

In 1999 INASP was invited to work with research partners in the 31 countries involved in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Danida programme ENRECA (Enhancement of Research Capacity in Developing Countries). This effort led to the development of the Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI). A pilot to test logistics and further assess needs ran throughout 2000/2001. Since then the Programme has been facilitated by INASP and implemented locally by PERI Country Co-ordinators or Teams.

Aim

To build capacity in the research sector of developing and transitional countries by strengthening the production, access and dissemination of information and knowledge.

Objectives

- The immediate objectives of the programme are to:
- facilitate the acquisition of international information and knowledge
 - strengthen and provide access to national and regional journals as a medium for the dissemination of local information and knowledge
 - provide awareness or training in the use and/or evaluation of electronic ICTs
 - enhance skills in the preparation, production and management of publications

These objectives are being met by four inter-related and complementary activities to deliver a uniquely relevant, well-planned and comprehensive service to publishers, librarians and researchers alike.

Component I: Delivering information

In facilitating the acquisition of full text online journals, current awareness databases and document delivery INASP has been working with individual publishers, 'packagers' of information and consolidating subscription agents. The goal is for resources available

through PERI to be affordable so that their acquisition is sustainable in the long-term. To date, INASP has been successful in negotiating differentially-priced country-wide access licenses at between 90-98% discount. Although some content is available at no cost (at the request of the individual publishers concerned), INASP's policy is not to provide 'free' information but to encourage developing country partners to recognise that information and knowledge are valuable commodities, and that someone, somewhere has to pay for the many added-value services provided by publishers. Information providers joining PERI are therefore encouraged to make a nominal charge for content if they do not want to develop a specific pricing-model for low-income countries.

In December 2002, PERI provided access to over 8000 full text online journals and many of the world's leading bibliographic and reference databases, including those from Blackwell, CABI, EBSCO, Emerald, Gale, Institute of Physics Publishing (IoPP), Oxford University Press, Ovid (SilverPlatter), Springer, the Royal Society and Update Software. Agreements with several more publishers were expected in January 2003. In addition, many resources are available without cost to researchers in developing countries: <http://www.inasp.info/peri/free.html>. Document delivery is available through the British Library Document Supply Centre (BLDSC). INASP will continue to involve publishers as they express an interest in participating in PERI or as requests for their products are received.

Component 2: Access to national and regional research results

Dramatic changes are taking place in academic and library communities. The trend towards access rather than ownership has serious implications for publishers everywhere, but scholarly journals in emerging regions are particularly vulnerable, and moving into electronic publishing has not yet been an option explored by many developing country publishers. It is, however, important that both researchers and publishers benefit from the exciting opportunities offered by the internet. A successful model has been developed through African Journals Online (AJOL): <http://www.inasp.info/ajol/>, and INASP is now assisting the establishment of

institutional, national and regional online services to enable the results of research undertaken and published locally to become more widely known and accessible. Hopefully this will both strengthen the local scholarly and publishing sector and also increase worldwide knowledge of indigenous scholarship.

Component 3: Enhancing ICT skills

For university and research communities throughout the world, finding high quality, relevant information is becoming increasingly difficult and, at times, frustrating. The pilot phase of PERI confirmed requests from librarians and researchers for quality training in order to use the internet, to utilise information available to them to its full potential, and to help them identify and evaluate other information sources. Extensive experience with partner institutions has led to the adoption of a locally facilitated travelling workshop: <http://www.inasp.info/training/travelling-methodology.html> whenever possible. This methodology has the following key characteristics:

- expertly produced training materials developed with appropriate sector, subject and environmental knowledge and experience. The end result is a resource bank of high quality training and support materials

- 'Travelling workshops' with regional and local facilitators building local skills and capacity in both the subject area and training programme development and delivery

- single site in-country training to help build a critical mass of trainees in each location who can ensure effective follow-up, support and training.

The following workshop series are presently available through PERI:

- Using the Internet* (3-5 day hands-on workshop): <http://www.inasp.info/training/internet/>

- Electronic Journals and Electronic Resources Library Management* (4-5 day hands-on workshop): <http://www.inasp.info/training/ejournals/>

- Web Page Design and Authoring, leading to Library Web Pages* (5 day hands-on workshop): <http://www.inasp.info/training/web-authoring/>

- ICT Troubleshooting for Librarians and Information Personnel* (1-2 day workshop)

Component 4: Strengthening local publishing

This component provides training and support for researchers, publishers and editors to enhance publishing skills, and includes:

facilitation of in-country or regional workshops to assist researchers and publishers to improve their publishing operations, through preparation of individual papers, monographs or journals. Most especially the training aims to provide exposure to the options available in utilising ICTs. For example, following discussions with journal publishers in Africa, INASP developed a pilot project to assist African titles to publish full text on the web. Initially, ten journals are being supported in the African Journals OnLine Publishing Project (AJOPP): <http://www.inasp.info/psi/ajopp>. An inception workshop (facilitated by John Haynes of the Institute of Physics Publishing) covered all issues in e-journal publishing and provided the necessary knowledge to allow journal publishers to decide their best option in moving forward into electronic full text publication. Each journal produced strategic and action plans of how it intended to mount full text on the internet, and is being assisted to follow through its preferred method of going online.

a Publishing Partnership and 'Mentorship' Programme where PERI provides support for study visits ('South'-'South', 'South'-'North' and 'North'-'South') and has arranged journal partnerships and 'mentoring' (in collaboration with the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP).

development of resource materials including handbooks, and manuals such as *A Guidebook on Journal Publishing for Agriculture and Rural Development*³ and *Book Marketing & Promotion: A Handbook of Good Practice*⁴.

Features and benefits to publishers, librarians and researchers

PERI has now been fully operational for over a year and feedback from publishers, librarians and researchers has been extremely positive.

Publishers have an opportunity to learn about new markets and expand their presence at nominal expense. Benefits reported by publishers include:

positive PR in existing markets – an opportunity to distinguish their organisation as one which is contributing positively to developing and transitional countries, leading to good media coverage and enhancing their public profile;

positive presence in new and developing markets: a raised profile for publishers who may be less well known in certain developing or transitional countries – invaluable in forging future relationships; encouraging a positive view which may stimulate demand for further content e.g. textbooks, individual journal articles, cd-rom and database content and further journal interest/use; a means to gain valuable knowledge and experience in countries and markets about which they may know relatively little, without the expense of investing in a local infrastructure (offices, management, staffing, travel etc.);

a positive experience of products: encouraging 'discovery' of new products which may then become favoured; availability/use encourages word-of-mouth product recommendation; training develops confidence and product familiarity which leads to increased usage;

improving relations with major stakeholders: increased customers' approval – librarians and scholars tend to uphold values concerned with the dissemination of scholarly information to the widest possible audience; improved international reach and accessibility directly addresses a pressing concern of existing authors and editorial boards; increased visibility may lead to an increase in author submissions from researchers within participating countries. This may enhance the international reputation of certain journals which in turn may enhance their value.

Access has been complemented by INASP providing hands-on, high quality training to help ensure that products are well-promoted and utilised to their fullest potential.

Other opportunities that have been cited include:

PERI presents the opportunity to experiment with pricing models (and possibly licensing models)

where bandwidth limitations discourage use of



Online journal management for librarians: delegates at the INASP ICT workshop, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, October 2002

Photo: INASP

PDF, PERI provides a good shop window for HTML/XML formatted content (and the additional features and functionality these languages can deliver).

Librarians have increased their visibility and commented that PERI has provided:

significant new resources for patrons which has encouraged the use of library services;

increased resources has led to a reappraisal of the role of their library within its Institute leading to improved support and budget allocation. For example, the University of Makerere Library gained support from Senate to triple its bandwidth; the University of Nairobi Library gained support from their Vice Chancellor, who is taking it upon himself to market the facility, ordered a Workshop to work out a Strategic Plan for sustainability and made provision of additional computers for the library;

deeply discounted prices and country-wide licenses make acquisition affordable. For example, through utilising research support funding in-country Tanzania and Uganda were able to cover the cost of all information available in PERI in 2001 and 2002. Arrangements are already in place for covering costs in-country or cost-sharing with INASP for 2003 for Bolivia,

Ecuador, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Uganda. [Countries may also apply to INASP for grants to cover costs where necessary.]

high potential for professional development through exposure to new products and experiences

excellent opportunity to learn more about ICTs and online capabilities.

The above have all helped to strengthen the librarian's role as a key facilitator in information resource assessment, access, use, management and development

Researchers enjoy improved access and have commented that:

use of national licenses means authorised users can log on from any library work station, campus (and in some cases home-based) PC; radically improves access and usage

PERI provides 24x7 access to a growing library of well-funded, high impact research – which enhances accessibility and opportunity access to high quality results from Europe, US, Asia, Latin America and Africa informs local research

exposure to web-based information enhances skills in browsing, searching, retrieval and navigation

cross-disciplinary searching gives results ranging across related fields (e.g. medicine and bio materials or organic chemistry and molecular biology), expanding context of research access to high Impact Factor publications enables researchers to gauge their own research efforts and helps connect LDC users to the wider community of learning.

Conclusion

INASP partners with networks of highly qualified information professionals and researchers based within leading institutes and organisations in each country to help ensure efficient and effective penetration of all activities and programmes with which it is associated. INASP's own staff come from publishing, educational training, library and/or development backgrounds and many have extensive in-country experience.

Despite its own commitment to PERI, INASP is also promoting and collaborating with other programmes providing opportunities for access to information. In 2000, the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) developed the eSAP (electronic Supply of Academic Publications) programme; the Open Society Institute developed eIFL Direct (Electronic Information for Libraries) based on EBSCOHost; in 2001 WHO launched HINARI (Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative) and in 2002 the FAO started to discuss an agricultural focused programme. All the activities raise important considerations:

providing access to information is only the first step

there is a continued real need for extensive, hands-on, high quality and effective training
high quality content increases demand for network resources – in many countries the external network speeds are now failing to

meet demand and more work needs to be done on increasing the bandwidth but also on effective use of existing bandwidth⁵.

Most of all, it is hoped that 2003 will provide greater opportunities for, and more commitment to, sharing of information between the programmes, and for working collaboratively in both the development and implementation of activities.

References

1. Adeya, C.N. *Information and Communication Technologies in Africa: A Review and Selective Annotated Bibliography 1990-2000*, 2001, Oxford, International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP).
2. National Research Council. *Bridge Builders: African Experiences with Information and Communication Technology*, 1996, Washington DC, National Academy Press.
3. Youdeowei, A., *A Guidebook on Journal Publishing for Agriculture and Rural Development*, 2002, . Oxford: International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP).
4. Zell, H.M., *Book Marketing & Promotion: A Handbook of Good Practice*, 2001, Oxford: International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications
5. N.B. INASP has been invited to undertake a research study *Bandwidth Management and Performance Optimisation: Case Studies and Information Sharing* from January-April 2003

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