How can we ensure capacity endures beyond the end of projects?

Exploring sustainability in INASP's Strengthening Research and Knowledge Systems programme

INASP's five-year Strengthening Research and Knowledge Systems (SRKS) programme aims to equip national-level institutions, universities and research institutes in developing countries to provide access to online research literature, train people in research-writing skills, and manage online journal platforms. At the half-way point of its five-year implementation, INASP assessed the progress and sustainability of SRKS.

Sustainability is integral to all of INASP's work. Programmes are designed and implemented in a way that strengthens local partners to continue activities well beyond the end of a project.

Over the course of SRKS, services and activities that are provided by INASP as part of the programme – and through INASP's earlier Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information - are being handed over to in-country partners. As INASP reached the half-way point in the SRKS programme, the work was assessed for its potential for lasting impact and how that could be improved in the second half of the programme. The assessment asked: what are the changes we expect to see beyond the end of funding in 2018 and are we on track to achieve this vision?

SRKS comprises three main projects: AuthorAID, Journals Online, and support to library consortia to manage online research literature. INASP envisaged what these projects would look like after SRKS formally ended if sustainability had been achieved. Gradations of targets were identified for each of the projects: what would be expected; what INASP would like to see; and, finally, what it would love to see over the long term.

This publication highlights key findings from a systematic appraisal of the sustainability of the SRKS programme. It also sheds light on the unique process that INASP used to measure sustainability in a meaningful way. The first section describes the three main projects that comprise the SRKS programme. The second section discusses the factors that influenced sustainability across all of the projects, and

A framework for common ground

Sustainability outcomes might be the continuation of the benefits of an activity or the continuation of the activity itself. While there was general agreement amongst INASP staff about the importance of sustainability, much less agreement existed about what it actually meant. For each programme, sustainability was linked to different aspects.

In order to analyse systematically the potential sustainability of different aspects of the SRKS programme, a sustainability framework describing factors that lead to different sustainability outcomes in the context of health interventions (Scheirer and Dearing, 2011) was adapted and used as a framework to analyse INASP's work. The resulting model formed the basis of interview guides for partners and INASP staff.

The information presented in this study is a result of group or individual interviews with INASP programme staff and representatives of partner organizations for each of the SRKS programme strands (AuthorAID, Journals Online and library consortia). The framework helped to ensure a shared understanding and language.

The framework by Scheirer and Dearing was an important tool for approaching the ambiguous topic of sustainability. It provided a structure by which to analyse the different streams of the SRKS programme, which are quite stand-alone and distinct. It was not a restrictive framework: it was adapted and built on during the course of the study.

factors that differentially affected sustainability. The concluding section pulls out the main findings and lessons learned about sustainability from this research.

AuthorAID

INASP's AuthorAID project works to embed courses on research and proposal writing within universities, research institutions and professional societies.

How it works
AuthorAID's embedding work is demand-driven. A prospective partner university or research institution usually emails an expression of interest or speaks directly to INASP's AuthorAID team during a conference or country visit. Prospective partners are then asked to develop a project proposal which outlines a scope of work for an initial start-up period of two years, followed by a mid-term and longer-term plan. The AuthorAID team carefully reads this and gives feedback to ensure a good fit and that expectations, goals and activities are specific, appropriate and achievable.

Partner institutions receive a grant for the first two years of the programme. The grant is based on a budget developed by the partners that also specifies their own financial contributions to the project.

Once the proposal is finalized, the partner and INASP agree and sign a contract, and prospective facilitators from the partner organization participate in one of AuthorAID's online courses in research or grant-proposal writing. This is followed up by a face-to-face training of trainers course with a focus on pedagogy.

On the completion of a training of trainers course, prospective course facilitators in the partner organizations get a package of AuthorAID training materials and resources, including the ready-

AuthorAID embedding partners met with INASP staff and associates in Sri Lanka in November 2015

made course and guidelines on monitoring and evaluation (which includes pre- and post-course quizzes and participant selection criteria). The trainers can decide if they want to adapt course materials to their institutional needs. Partners also receive general support and guidance for running a course.

If the institution plans to implement the course in an online or blended learning environment, AuthorAID is beginning to help embedding partners with IT systems so that they can run courses on their own platforms with their own facilitators.

At the end of the first two years of support, AuthorAID reviews achievements and discusses the next steps towards the mid- and long-term plans for embedding the training. This includes discussing future funding and inclusion of the course into staff development programmes and university curricula where applicable.

Progress so far
The universities and institutes are at different stages in the embedding process. Some have completed the initial two-year support period; others are mid-way through the process; others are just beginning. Some of the institutions have run the courses at a basic level in terms of time and resources committed. Others have developed their research-communication training into more comprehensive

programmes. AuthorAID is convening embedding partners in yearly networking events so that they can learn from each other: For example, the University of Colombo's Research Promotion and Facilitation Centre (RPFC) in Sri Lanka developed a mentoring programme and quarterly writing club to provide ongoing support for individuals to prepare manuscripts for publication, following their attendance on the training course.

What sustainability would look like

Online and face-to-face research-writing courses are institutionalized in universities and research institutes in Ghana, Tanzania, Sri Lanka and Vietnam

Expect to see...
A pool of trainers that the organization can draw on for their research and proposal writing trainings, which will be run at least twice a year

Like to see...
Training activities finding their way into staff development programmes and university curricula where applicable

Love to see...
Training up-scaled and extended to other departments, institutions and countries due to the initiative of the organization

This proved to be very effective: at the time of writing this article, among the first cohort of 30 mentees, seven submitted papers, three published papers, and 20 were at the final draft stage. The RPFC is now developing an online component to its research-writing training package with support from INASP.

Journals Online

Researchers in low- and middle-income countries often struggle to publish in journals in high-income countries. There are several reasons for this. For example, international audiences sometimes consider research conducted in the Global South to be of lower quality

Nepal Online journals editors discussed improvements to journal quality and met with members of the local media during a workshop in Kathmandu in January 2016

What sustainability would look like

National and regional online journal platforms in Nepal, Bangladesh, Central America, Mongolia and Sri Lanka are managed in-country, such as by university libraries and national science foundations, which take over the job of communicating with journal editors and uploading articles

Expect to see...
All of the Journals Online (JOL) platforms are uploading all of their content by the end of 2017

Like to see...
The communities of practice for JOL managers take over the mentoring support that INASP provided

Love to see...
The JOLs fully integrated into their host organizations so that they are managed, do communications, raise funds and gain reputation without INASP support

than that produced elsewhere. Also, there are costs associated with publishing in international journals that are often prohibitive to researchers in developing countries. Yet research from the Global South is often as important or valuable, if not more so, for addressing national development issues.

For these reasons, INASP believes that locally published journals in the Global South are important in their own right, as a medium that makes local research and knowledge visible and accessible to those who need it.

INASP's Journals Online (JOLs) project supports the development of local journal platforms in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mongolia and Latin America. These online platforms host national or regional journals from varying disciplines and make their academic articles freely available for download.

Handing over platforms to in-country partners
INASP created and managed these platforms, and is now in the process of handing them over to in-country host organizations. The host organizations are at different stages in the handover process, partly because handover started at different times and partly because the host organizations

have different levels of capacity in terms of their ability to take on the management responsibilities.

While African Journals Online (AJOL) is no longer part of the SRKS programme, it is an excellent case study of success. INASP handed over the hosting and management of AJOL more than 10 years ago to a commercial publisher in South Africa, and it soon become an independent organization. Today, 30% of AJOL content is open access, and half of its reading audience is from outside Africa. AJOL functions as an important African knowledge hub and a gatekeeper for quality in research publishing. It builds the capacity of editors, and, together with INASP, it is in the process of assessing the quality of its journals according to international standards.

Sri Lanka Journals Online (SLJOL) was handed over to the National Science Foundation in Sri Lanka at the beginning of 2016. The Tribhuvan University Central Library in Nepal, on the other hand, still does not have sufficient capacity to independently manage the Nepal Journals Online platform (NepJOL), and will require ongoing support in the short term.

Services to support the handover process
INASP offers a number of services

Members of Zimbabwe's library consortium met with INASP staff in February 2016

to support host organizations involved in the JOL handover process. In the short-term, this includes providing technical know-how and infrastructure to set up an open online journal website and back-end system. This is accompanied by technical advice and mentoring, updating on publishing practices and services, and holding training and annual meetings that bring JOL managers together, all of which support the immediate demands while building the capacity for future management of the platforms. INASP also provides communications support to its partners in Sri Lanka and Nepal to promote the JOLs platforms and the research published in the JOLs journals. INASP plans to extend this service to Bangladesh and Latin America.

Progress so far
In the medium term, INASP is encouraging the creation of online 'communities of practice', which will take over INASP's one-on-one mentoring and technical advisory service. This will help to develop an inclusive peer-to-peer support community, where the managers of more advanced JOLs can help managers of platforms that are at an earlier stage in the handover process.

INASP also offers face-to-face training, which teaches journal editors how to ensure journal quality, and teaches JOL website managers how to administer the JOL websites through content loading, trouble shooting and record keeping. The courses help journal editors and managers to improve the quality of their publications and the day-to-day running of a journal. In the near future, as part of INASP's progress towards supporting the longer-term sustainability of the JOLs, face-to-face training will be replaced with a stand-alone online course in journal quality and short videos to help JOL managers in their work.

National access to online journals

INASP's Research Access and Higher Education (RAHE) team negotiates with publishers across many disciplines to provide researchers in developing countries with the journals, books and databases they need at affordable prices. This is done in partnership with library consortia, which are groups of libraries that join together to coordinate activities, share materials and combine expertise.

As part of the SRKS programme, the RAHE team has been preparing library consortia in Latin America, Asia and Africa to take over the work of managing online research information and negotiating access to these resources.

What sustainability would look like

Library consortia facilitate access to discounted online journals and books for universities and research institutes in developing countries, including negotiation with international publishers and managing the payment process

Expect to see...
Several consortia can take over from INASP and manage access, so as to sustain the 'service' INASP offered, as long as there is funding to purchase journals and books

Like to see...
Half of the consortia can take over — sustain the 'service'— and have become more effective organizations, so are more likely to be able to keep on providing this service in the future

Love to see...
These consortia can do more than take over the basics — they have built relationships and made a case, so that future funding is more likely, and they are part of a conversation at national level about strengthening research/ higher education and their role within that

The library consortia were created and supported as part of a previous programme. The aim under SRKS is to strengthen the consortia leadership and structures so that they can carry on work once INASP withdraws support. These library consortia are taking on quite a challenging task: negotiating with commercial publishers as a collection of volunteers, who often lack professional training and experience in this area.

Over the past three years, the RAHE team has been working to develop the skills and capacities of some library consortia through training workshops, mentoring and sharing of learning. Capacity checklists have been developed to capture and track the progress in the changes of the organizations in areas such as communications, ability to negotiate with publishers, strategic development, marketing and advocacy. The RAHE team and the consortia use these checklists to identify areas of weakness and track progress. The capacity checklists are therefore useful tools for revealing the extent of organizational development at this mid-stage of the SRKS programme.

To support the direct capacity building work with consortia in country, INASP's Publishers for Development initiative works to influence the practice of publishers as they develop business in developing countries. We encourage them to recognize the longer term sustainability of the national consortium model, to keep prices affordable, and to take time to understand local needs.

Progress so far
Progress has been made but there is still some way to go in ensuring that consortia are robust enough to continue their work successfully. For instance, in some cases, working groups to support consortia leadership have been created, but are not yet active. These working groups are designed to enable the consortium to develop some of their key functions under dedicated teams or committees. However, consortia have reported that inactive working groups are a major challenge. In recognition of this, the RAHE team has designed a new approach for the remaining two years of the SRKS programme. It will take a more holistic, in-depth approach, with a focus on supporting the

> **"I am doing a rework of our help-documentation, to make sure that the guides needed for partners to take over more of this process are in place at the end of SRKS."**
>
> **Team member, Research Access and Higher Education (RAHE)**

seven strongest consortia in: Ghana, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador. The RAHE team will also focus more intensely on developing the organizational capacity of these seven consortia by working with their leadership boards (executives). Progress will still be checked using the capacity checklists, and complemented by regular Skype calls between the RAHE team and consortia representatives.

Issues affecting sustainability

The previous sections described the different streams of the SRKS programme and how sustainability is woven into each of them. In particular, this has involved embedding research-writing courses within institutions, handing over management of national online journals to local organizations, and handing over negotiations with international publishers to in-country library consortia. While there has been

clear progress, there have also been challenges.

This section takes a deeper look into the mechanisms underlying the progress towards sustainability in the SRKS programme, and the challenges. It draws out the main factors that have influenced sustainability, which emerged from the sustainability appraisal. First, it looks at factors that influenced sustainability in all three projects; then it addresses factors that affected the projects to different degrees.

Factors that influence sustainability across all three SRKS projects

Dedicated staff time
Relying on volunteers or on staff to spend extra time beyond their normal work may be an inexpensive way to run projects, but it can lead to sporadic or irregular commitment compared to dedicated, paid staff. For example, in the AuthorAID project, there was a discernible difference in the quality of work by facilitators and course organizers who had allocated time for it compared to those who did the work in addition to their day-to-day jobs. The same was true among Journal Online managers: the handover process was much more advanced among hosting organizations that had dedicated staff time to online journal management.

Work for library consortia is done in addition to individuals' day-to-day, income-earning work as library consortia members are professionals with paid jobs who take on these project roles as part of their professional interests. While not all members of consortia executive committees cited this as a problem (some were even averse to the idea of paid staff), others referred to the absence of 'dedication' and 'motivation', and this may be a symptom of the

voluntary nature of the positions.

Overall, INASP cannot influence how partners run projects and embed activities. It is their own decision if, and how many, staff get granted dedicated time within their working hours to these activities.

The legacy of internal champions

Internal champions are crucial to the initial success of many project activities, but if or when these individuals leave an organization, it can threaten sustainability. A champion is usually considered INASP's key contact person in an institution, and to avoid the risk of a project ceasing because a champion leaves, INASP provides support for more than one champion whenever possible. This means, for instance, that a group of people is trained rather than just one individual. For AuthorAID, champions are particularly instrumental in the early stages of embedding, when important structural changes and persuasion are needed to get the project underway. However, as the work progresses, they can get overburdened with administrative

senior positions —secured buy-in and financial and human resources support for the JOL platforms. However, if these champions leave their position or institution, it complicates the process of handing over management of the platform from INASP to the partner. Thus, it is important to have several people involved in the JOL project.

Among library consortia, the champion is usually the Chair or other senior member of the executive committee. However, there is also an interest in sharing responsibility and expertise within consortia, and this is part of the rationale of setting up working groups. This can mitigate against the risk posed by key individuals leaving the consortia. INASP has been strengthening the capabilities of leaders, for example working with the African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AfLIA) to promote leadership skills among the next generation, by sponsoring a year-long mentorship programme. The leadership capacity of consortia members is one of the areas that INASP is directly addressing through its work, and plans to do

and advancing in their careers as this increases the reputation of the organization

JOL platforms are set up after interest is expressed by researchers and journal editors, i.e. they are demand-driven. There is a notion of individual prestige connected to this but also the need to make local research available online. Articles published on the local platforms can be accessed through free-to-use search engines, such as Google. This means that individuals, who access the research, may not always be appreciative and aware of the JOL platform itself. This is one reason why INASP provides the JOL managment with mentoring and support for communications.

Library consortia are usually motivated to secure online research literature for members under favourable terms and conditions, and member organizations are aware of the importance of access, as well as the added value of consortia. Demand also comes from users, as researchers request access to journals and this motivates libraries

"NepJOL promotes the glory of Nepal in the horizon of education."

INASP NepJOL Partner

work, management tasks, and training facilitation, when, in fact, their day-to-day jobs are as researchers or lecturers. This is overcome when there is a team of trainers that the institutions can draw from and when the management of the programme is not just with one person.

Internal champions were often involved in the creation of the JOL platforms, and many had a relationship with INASP even before the SRKS project began. Champions — especially those in

more of in the remaining two years of the SRKS programme.

Demand for services can influence future funding possibilities

In the context of AuthorAID, there is significant demand for courses on research- and proposal-writing within universities and research institutions, because new staff and students have to be trained on an ongoing basis. There is also a big demand from the embedding organization's management, that their research staff is publishing

to address the demand through involvement in a consortium.

However, not all member or potential member organizations recognize the need for the consortium and the role it can play in negotiating better deals with publishers and providing expertise. So consortia need to build their skills in advocacy, monitoring and evaluation, which are important for sustainability in terms of usage, and recognition from membership, national bodies and funders.

The right partner organization
Many of the institutions involved in AuthorAID are strong and financially independent, have existed for many years, and receive government funding. But AuthorAID often does not have full knowledge about organizational and decision-making structures. How would the training courses fit into the objectives of the organization? To what extent would senior management staff support continuous allocation of staff time and money? These questions could only be answered through experience and by forming strong relationships with partner organizations. Smaller organizations seemed to make a greater difference when embedding research-writing courses. This might be because, for example, smaller organizations are more dependent on AuthorAID's (financial) support and hence more motivated to showcase success. Also, decision-making processes are less complex and easier to influence in smaller organizations. For bigger organizations, on the other hand, AuthorAID's influence is lower beyond the departments that it is directly working with. In addition to this, the writing courses in big organizations are a few among many other courses and hence make less of a difference.

For the JOL platforms, partners have to be impartial, national and reputed scientific institutions with a commitment to taking on the JOL platform. Many universities were disqualified because of the risk they would support their own research journals more than others. This left a very limited choice of host institutions. In addition, as with AuthorAID partners, it was not always clear from the beginning how organizational decisions would be taken and how much actual support there would be for the JOLs from the institutions. This became clear only after working together. When working with just a small part of a bigger organization, decision making is difficult to influence. Having senior-level champions to advocate for the JOL on the top level helped a lot. An institution's technical knowledge and management of the online platforms were also crucial factors, and often these skills had to be gained over time.

In contrast, library consortia were initiated, developed and supported by INASP and EIFL, inspired by models of successful library consortia in other countries. INASP supports consortia to develop their structures and to become more effective organizations, but essentially, these organizations already have the mandate to run the access to e-resource services for the country. This mandate is directly linked to the activities that INASP is handing over. This link is more indirect for the JOL and AuthorAID partner organizations.

Institutions that are tasked with taking over the management of AuthorAID activities or JOL platforms also have many other responsibilities. For instance, universities have research departments and study courses,

not just a course on research writing. In contrast, the main remit of library consortia is very closely linked to the activities that are currently being handed over: negotiating with publishers on behalf of member institutions to gain access to online research resources and to train member institutions' staff. This means that library consortia are much more dependent on INASP, and do not necessarily have other activities that would help to absorb the costs associated with purchasing online research literature.

As well as encouraging fee-paying membership, library consortia are investigating alternative sources of income. For example, one consortium has acquired land to build offices, conference facilities and hotels for future income generation.

The future of the library consortia is significantly dependent on the successful handover and sustainability of activities. For the consortia, being able to provide the service sustainably requires the organization to become stronger and more sustainable. This is not the case for AuthorAID and JOL hosting partners, which would not cease to exist because they did not institutionalize the respective SRKS activities.

Factors that affect sustainability differently across the three projects

> *"The licensing and negotiations trainings that have been conducted by INASP have enabled the Consortium to … handle e-resources subscriptions. There is no doubt that we have a pool of members that are able to see these activities through."*
>
> **Former Chair of a library consortium**

Financial commitment

It is relatively inexpensive for the AuthorAID partner organizations to include research-writing courses in their curricula or staff development programmes. For instance, some institutions raise a small fee to participate in the courses so that they can continue to run the courses and pay course facilitators. Library consortia, on the other hand, need financial input to continue their work – they buy a product (i.e. e-resources) to be able to offer a service. The cost model and ability to secure funding from members is extremely important. Consortia that have successfully set up an equitable cost-sharing model (i.e. sharing the cost among member institutions) have improved their financial situation, and therefore have been able to improve what they offer. One consortium was able to add a new publisher package to its subscription list for the first time in many years after introducing a cost-sharing model.

A similar commitment is needed from the JOL hosting organizations, albeit on a smaller scale. The national science academy in Bangladesh has imposed a fee on individual journals, which helps it to pay website hosting charges and technical support costs, while also enabling it to clean out inactive journals.

The political-economic environment

Among AuthorAID partners, although they compete in a competitive environment for government and donor funding, the success of embedding research and proposal-writing courses does not seem to be directly affected by the political environment. The JOL hosting organizations, on the other hand, depend on government funding, so it is vital to showcase the importance of the JOL platforms to governments. This is why INASP is providing communication support to the JOLs in Sri Lanka and Nepal. This includes website improvements, communication of new issues and articles through Twitter, as well as press releases on policy-relevant research published in journals on the JOLs.

Among library consortia, the political climate and financial situation in which they operate strongly influence their status, membership and ability to successfully negotiate with publishers. The national agenda can either aid or hinder them. For example, the Kenyan Government, through the Commission for University Education, has developed standards for university libraries. Among them is provision of electronic information resources, which all institutions must adhere to for accreditation. In practice they can only do this by joining the Kenyan Consortium (KLISC). This has encouraged the growth of the consortium and prompted member institutions to pay their dues. The consortium in Zimbabwe, on the other hand, is facing uncertainty as the government plans to cut grants to state universities by one-third and then one-half in the coming years.

Confidence

Confidence among library consortia is a key factor in their ability to negotiate favourable and sustainable deals with publishers. For some consortia executive committee members, the idea of working independently from INASP causes trepidation, with some voicing fears that publishers will increase prices once INASP withdraws. Other consortia members, however, have expressed much more confidence.

As the consortia begin to take on activities on their own and are provided with more in-depth, tailored support, confidence levels should rise. It may also be that confidence will come with 'doing'.

Summary: are we on track?

At the mid-point in the SRKS programme, it is difficult to make a final judgement about whether INASP has met its sustainability goals in terms of what it expects to see, would like to see, and would love to see. However, there are signs that some institutions and partners are more likely to achieve the sustainability goals than others. This is dependent on many factors, but paramount among these are the following:

- *Organizational fit:* there needs to be a good fit between the activity of interest, and the partner organization's vision and mission and its existing or planned activities.

- *Size of partner institution:* within larger institutions it can be harder to get buy-in and ownership from senior management, but these institutions can usually absorb activities more easily, and their business model does not solely depend on INASP support.

- *Champions:* there need to be advocates for the projects and services within partner institutions. In the mid- and long-term, a broader support base in the organization for the activity is needed.

- *Demand for services:* an institution's customers or users need to demonstrate a desire for a service and to acknowledge its benefits.

Conclusions

As explored in the earlier sections of this article, INASP's primary aim is to build durable capacity — the knowledge, skills, attitudes and in some cases digital infrastructure that will be needed over many years, and especially after a programme ends. This is why INASP seeks to embed training and

skills development within existing organizations rather than just training individuals.

However, sustainability remains a vague concept; it can mean different things to different organizations, and even among staff within organizations. Additionally, sustainability is often measured after a programme has ended. INASP sees value in assessing the potential for sustainability before a programme ends, so that the findings of the assessment can feed back into the existing programme, and ensure a greater chance of sustainability in the future.

Through this iterative process, the Monitoring and Evaluation Team helped programme teams' thinking around sustainability while at the same time taking their views into account. This generated invaluable information that has been used to focus remaining time and resources. In this way, the SRKS programme will continue to deliver benefits and to meet the changing needs of partner organizations far beyond 2018.

This process also taught some key lessons about how to ensure sustainability. These will feed into future planning for other INASP projects, and could also be helpful to other organizations seeking to implement programmes that continue to deliver benefits over the long term.

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1. Scheirer and Dearing, 2011, American Journal of Public Health, Vol. 101, No. 11, pp. 2059-2067. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2011.300193

Key lessons learned

1. Sustainability is a dynamic process
The greatest learning was not from the actual outcomes of the study, but from the experience of applying the framework and discussing it with staff and partners. As noted in the introductory section, the framework by Scheirer and Dearing was adapted to meet the specific needs of INASP's work. In applying and testing the framework, the INASP Monitoring and Evaluation Team used a participatory approach, involving INASP colleagues from the start. It introduced the framework and cross-checked sustainability outcomes and factors; shared results from partner interviews with programme managers, which challenged some of their approaches and invited their comments and reactions. This process allowed programme staff to reflect on their approaches to sustainability and make necessary changes.

As a result of these discussions around sustainability and feedback from partners, the programme managers have changed some of the ways they approach sustainability during the final two years of the SRKS programme. For example, the library consortia work is now focused on just a handful of countries rather than every country. This is recognition that successful handovers and sustainable outcomes are more likely where there is intensive and tailored support rather than more generic, widespread efforts to develop capacity.

Similarly for AuthorAID, INASP has encouraged partner institutions to think more strategically about the embedding work, developing specific targets and outcomes they hope to see as a result of the embedding work. This allows a better monitoring and support to partners in terms of their progress towards sustainability.

This participatory approach brought benefits to the project activities. As a tool for adaptive programming and integrating learning into programmes as they are implemented, this was a success. It did however mean that the process became very lengthy—it took more than 12 months to conduct and draft the study findings. This was partly because programme colleagues and partners were changing their approaches as a result of the study findings, therefore altering the situation that the study sought to describe and analyse. As mentioned above, this led to more effective and sustainable activities, but was a challenge in terms of capturing a static picture.

2. Agreeing on definitions is not crucial
One of the main findings was that, contrary to prior assumptions, improving a programme is not dependent on programme staff having a shared definition of sustainability. An adaptable framework such as the one used for this research can help to organize the thinking of those doing the evaluation. In this case, the framework, supported by the participatory process, stimulated thought and encouraged colleagues to reconsider their work according to their own understanding of sustainability.