

Building communications capacity of Journals Online in-country teams

INASP support integrated into management handover process

INASP is providing communications support to some of the Journals Online (JOLs) in-country teams as part of the process of handing over management of the platforms. This support is taking the form of: visits and mentoring by communications experts; arranging suitable and cost-effective long-term local support; agreeing key messages and audiences; assistance with media engagement; and organizing networking and sharing events for JOLs staff.

INASP's Journals Online (JOLs) project works to improve the accessibility and visibility of developing country research. By providing a cost-effective and secure platform for online journals, along with advice, resource guides and links to suitable technologies and hosting organizations, the JOL platforms enable easy searching of the wide range of journals and research published.

JOLs in Africa, Bangladesh, Latin America, Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam have been set up by INASP since 1998 and are undergoing phased handover to local management. The African, Vietnamese and Philippine JOLs are now managed in-country and the Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Mongolia and Latin America JOLs are in the process of being handed over. As part of its handover process, INASP has identified a need for communications advice, support and mentoring to help achieve the JOLs' primary goal - facilitating worldwide access to each country's excellence in academic research - by publicizing them more widely both locally and internationally.



Some of the communications materials developed to promote the Sri Lanka Journals Online platform

"The Journals Online platforms have a great story to tell and we want to help them tell it, in their own ways, to their key audiences," said Dr Siân Harris, INASP's Communications Coordinator. "Through our in-country communications support, we are helping our partners develop their own communications strategies, build links with media and establish local communications support to assist with the long-term sustainability of the JOL platforms."

Building capacity in Sri Lanka for local JOL management

INASP started the communications support and mentoring process with Sri Lanka Journals Online (SLJOL) at a key point in its development. SLJOL was started in 2008, initially under INASP management, in association with the University of Colombo and the National Science Foundation (NSF)



of Sri Lanka. A phased handover of management of the JOL to the NSF has been in process since 2013.

Communications support to SLJOL began with an intensive week-long visit to Sri Lanka by INASP communications consultant Emily Marlow in Sri Lanka in July 2015. The aim of her visit was to build the capacity of SLJOL staff to better promote the platform in the future, in order to encourage more journals to register with SLJOL and increase downloads of articles.

Emily collaborated with local SLJOL staff member Amila Tennakoon, Information Officer at the National Science Library & Resource Centre (NSLRC) within the NSF, to agree key audiences and dissemination routes and develop bespoke marketing materials. A briefing sheet on SLJOL for a Sri Lankan audience was developed and sent to all existing member editors, and a letter of invitation was sent to target journals.

A general communications training session was also held

with all staff in the department and another half a day was spent working directly with key staff to discuss branding and improving the website. A new web platform for SLJOL was soft launched in February 2015 in collaboration with Ubiquity Press, an Open-Access publisher of peer-reviewed academic journals, books and data. The change of host enabled a major site upgrade, enhancing integration opportunities with social media and introducing more advanced ways of analysing visits to and use of the website. The site has also been optimized for low bandwidth connections, vital for many developing country users.

SLJOL also became the first of the Journals Online platforms to use the CrossCheck iThenticate system, giving editors the opportunity to scan submitted articles for plagiarized content. These new developments meant the communications support visit came at an ideal time to intensify promotion of the Sri Lankan platform.

of communications activities and following up after initial contacts made with prospective partners and journals. By setting up new tools and mechanisms to promote the work of SLJOL, bringing on board additional communications support and drawing up a schedule with key objectives and actions, the team aims to make the promotion of the platform less work-intensive. In parallel, work has been ongoing within the INASP Journals Online project to train editors and then give them access to the platform to upload and update their own content, which should also relieve pressure on the SLJOL staff.

“A huge amount was achieved in terms of creation of materials and development of key dissemination routes. Many communication abilities were already evident; it was really a case of teasing out, pulling together and adding to some existing ideas and developing capacity”, Emily said.

Despite her increased workload, Amila has done presentations on the platform at a seminar on biodiversity, to researchers attending an Effective Research Proposal writing course and to an undergraduates’ awareness programme, and has organized distribution of SLJOL materials at universities. SLJOL was officially relaunched at the start of a workshop for journal editors and other staff on use of the platform in March 2016 (see Sri Lanka JOL relaunches after handover).

About the Journals Online

There are now eight JOLs, of which three are managed in-country and the remaining five are in the process of being handed over to local management. They host a total of 346 journals and over 36,000 articles, of which 94% are Open Access. The accessibility and popularity of the JOLs platforms have increased steadily, with a total of over 28 million downloads since 2007. To find out more visit www.inasp.info/en/work/journals-online.

Time pressures for staff

Planning for future activities needed to take account of the constraints experienced by the Sri Lankan team. “Some of the key challenges we examined included problems of staff time capacity, and also the difficulty of government-funded institutions in forward planning and budget allocation,” said Emily.

Since the visit, Amila has been seconded to be Acting Director of her department, and therefore has had less time than anticipated for promotion of the SLJOL platform, such as monitoring the impact

Sharing strategies and approaches through JOL collaboration

The JOL communications support model was extended programme-





JOL Managers from MongoliaJOL and LAMJOL networking and sharing experiences at the Journals Online Managers Meeting in Vancouver in August 2015.

wide during the JOL Managers' Meeting in Vancouver in August 2015, which it is hoped will produce long-term networking and marketing collaboration between different countries. Sixteen members of Journals Online project management teams from nine countries met for the first time to share experiences and strategies for the growth and development of the JOLs in the future. The JOL representatives were able to discuss the challenges they face and share knowledge and ideas so that they could learn from each other's

approaches. For example, SLJOL described the difficulties they had with journals not publishing in a timely manner, and asked the other JOLs to share their strategies for managing this.

During the meeting the managers developed three key objectives for their own JOLs for the next year, which ranged from improving journal coverage to fundraising for sustainability. They also brainstormed actions they could implement themselves and other areas where they would require assistance from INASP, such as

fundraising and communications support.

Building links between journal editors and the media

Another communications support approach is working to gain local media attention for the JOLs platforms and research published in their partner journals. In January 2016, as part of a wider training workshop for editors, INASP offered specialized communications support to Nepal Journals Online (NepJOL) to address the issue

“During this two-day meeting, we have learnt so many things regarding policies, website functions, communication and fundraising... we will return to Nepal with renewed commitment and plans [for] further development of NepJOL.”

Lal Bahadur Chouhan, Library Officer, Tribhuvan University Central Library, Kathmandu (JOLs Managers Meeting, Vancouver)



that scientific research is not widely covered in the general media and therefore only finds a limited audience. Sharing findings more widely will lead to greater understanding of why evidence is important and how it can inform decision making, as well as enhancing public knowledge of key issues facing their countries and the world in general.

The session on media engagement for journal editors and local media contacts, which was organized and facilitated by INASP Communications Officer Dr Sangita Shrestha, gave journal editors an opportunity to meet local media professionals and discuss how research findings could achieve a wider audience. In return, local media professionals were able to obtain contacts for interesting news stories in Nepal. Discussions were lively, indicating an enthusiasm for further interaction and dialogue.

The event itself drew attention from national media, generating coverage in the Annapurna Post, Nagarik News Daily and The Rising Nepal, among others, and was also featured on Mero FM.

Transferred learning

Experiences from the session in Nepal helped in the planning for media involvement in the SLJOL launch event in March 2016, which took place at the start of a workshop for member journal editors on using the platform. Recognizing, however, that there are differences between Nepal and Sri Lanka and between the organizations responsible for the two JOLs, the media involvement was adapted to the local context and cultural considerations. Sri Lankan journalists were invited



Making the links between research and media

In their study of nearly 7,000 articles published online by the New York Times, Milkman and Berger (2014)¹ point out that scientific discoveries can improve people's health and well-being, but for these discoveries to change behaviour or policy, they have to be widely shared with the population at large. The shortfall in this type of research reporting can be traced to a number of factors: lack of contact between journal editors and news editors; the academic format of journal articles not being accessible to the non-scientific reader; and lack of understanding of what makes research findings newsworthy.

As part of the Nepal Journals Online journal editors' training workshop in January 2016, Ghamaraj Liutel, Head of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Madan Bhandari Memorial College in Kathmandu, gave a presentation on communicating research and publishing in the news media. He suggested that bridging the gap between published research and a wider audience required more interaction and networking between journal editors and the media, so that journalists would see academic research as a source of news relevant to the general public, and would be able to access information more easily.

Journal editors for their part, he said, need to understand media requirements and respond by presenting journal content in a media-friendly format – using simple language and organizing the information with the most useful and interesting facts first. The media, he concluded, could act as a valuable intermediary between the general public and academic journals, extending the reach of research findings by reporting on issues such as health, education, the environment, economics and politics.

1. Katherine L. Milkman and Jonah Berger, The science of sharing and the sharing of science, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, published online September 2014: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4183177



to the launch event and given an opportunity to network with journal editors during the tea break. Acknowledging the limited capacity within the NSF team for communications activity, INASP also worked with SLJOL to identify a local communications expert, Sharanya Sekaram, who was integral to the planning of the launch event and is intended to provide ongoing support to the NSF. She brings a wealth of media contacts, social media expertise and writing skills to the role. In advance of the workshop, Sharanya shared information with journalists about the research available on SLJOL and during the event she hosted a session for journal editors on how to engage with the media.

A learning point from this activity was that, if possible, it would have been more effective to have engaged Sharanya earlier to allow for more media liaison in advance of the event.

Reflections on communications support activity

INASP's work on supporting JOL communications in these different ways has helped address multiple factors limiting the awareness of JOLs and their role in disseminating valuable research findings to the wider community. INASP communications support

visits followed by further mentoring and building links with local communications consultants, such as the collaboration with SLJOL, form a vital part of the handover process to those JOLs still being managed by INASP. Many of the common elements such as audience identification and planning should be transferable, whilst messages and

channels will be tailored to the local context, needs and priorities and Unique Selling Points (USPs) of each JOL.

Emily Marlow is now planning a visit to Bangladesh in summer 2016 to work with Bangladesh Journals Online (BanglaJOL). Although BanglaJOL has already brought on board an impressive

Sri Lanka JOL relaunches after handover

The launch of SLJOL, at the start of a two-day workshop in Colombo on 10-11 March 2016 for over 55 journal editors, was attended by Hon Susil Premajayantha, the Sri Lanka Minister of Science, Technology and Research, Professor Sirimal Fernando, Chair of the NSF, INASP Programme Manager Sioux Cumming and Brian Hole, CEO of Ubiquity Press. Professor Fernando said, "This is a great opportunity to bring Sri Lankan research to the world".



The workshop introduced journal editors to Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) and discussed copyright, plagiarism and the legal issues and permissions involved in the publication of a journal. The programme also covered the role of the media in promoting research in Sri Lanka and an introduction to a community of practice that will enable journal staff to share their experiences and collaborate on training, mentoring and website development.

“Helping JOLs to build links like these will help them extend the reach of journal content and promote journals as vital sources of information that is of interest and importance to the general public and policymakers.”

Dr Sangita Shrestha, INASP Communications Officer

136 journals listing over 16,000 articles, it has limited human resources and needs support to produce promotional material and implement activity aimed at growing membership income and attracting funders to ensure the long-term sustainability of the platform.

Whilst in Bangladesh, Emily will also meet with local communications and media consultants to explore ways to boost the capacity of the BanglaJOL in-country team in the longer term, and work with existing journal editors to enlist their support in promoting the

platform at conferences and other events.

INASP is also approaching other JOLs such as Latin America JOL (LAMJOL) to assess its needs and determine whether the approaches used with SLJOL and NepJOL are of use and interest on a wider scale. ●

Key learning to date

- Communications support of this kind is most effective when planned as part of the overall process of handover to local management, to ensure that sufficient resources are available and that staff are at a point where the activity will be welcome and worthwhile.
- External support from a communications expert needs to be sensitive to the needs and limitations of each specific JOL, but can be very effective in taking a 'big picture' approach, mentoring local staff to increase their confidence in trying new communication methods and strategies, and focussing activity on key messages and audiences.
- A country visit is an effective starting point for communications support, followed by remote mentoring. Learning points from the remote mentoring work suggest that, for staff without Skype facilities or the time to write reports, telephone conversations can be the best way to support them in the longer term.
- Early involvement of ongoing local communications support is important as part of the handover, to take advantage of additional skills and contacts and increase working capacity. Setting the local consultancy fee at a level that the JOL management team can maintain after the end of INASP's involvement is also fundamental to sustainability.
- Planning for promotional activity must be bespoke to the country involved, to take account of the constraints experienced by staff within individual JOLs, relating to workload, available resources, cultural considerations and the political landscape. It must also be flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances, such as the amount of time JOL staff have available for communications activity. However, the support is designed to achieve the same objectives, with similar audiences and messages, and should therefore be translatable to other JOLs.
- Events such as the media interaction session in Nepal can work as a standalone activity, by building a strong basis for further networking and relationship building. There seems to be appetite for further interaction between the media and journal editors and facilitation of this could be practised more widely. Since the session in Nepal, INASP introduced elements of the media workshop into the programme for the relaunch of SLJOL.
- Interaction between JOLs working in different countries is valuable in sharing learning from activities, communication strategies, material and international contacts. "The group work in connection with the marketing plan to promote the JOL and sustainability plans was extremely important," commented Ruth Velia Gómez Centeno, Director of CENIDA and one of the participants in the Journals Online Managers Meeting in Vancouver in August 2015.

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