

Library leadership enhanced by consortia-led approach

Stronger teams and strategic focus help African library consortia plan for long-term sustainability



Members of CARLIGH in Ghana warm up for their first Leading in the Library forum with team members from INASP and Caplor Horizons

Information access underpins Southern research and its ability to solve development challenges. However, securing access to essential academic information can be challenging and requires strong national-level organizations that can act on behalf of universities and research institutions within their countries. In 2016 a new project called Leading in the Library was launched in partnership with Caplor Horizons to strengthen the organizational effectiveness of library consortia in Ghana, Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Strengthening Southern library networks – or consortia – has been an important component of INASP’s work for many years – and an important component of strengthening research in the Global South.

Library consortia have a key enabling role by ensuring that research is available, accessible and used in their countries. They provide a common voice for their members, and enable them to be more effective and efficient by sharing resources and expertise and negotiating and licensing affordable, sustainable access to online research literature. They also provide professional development for library and ICT professionals in making research available and accessible and build capacity to train researchers and other end users to access, evaluate and use research. In addition,

they are well placed to advocate for more and better services for researchers and other end users.

However, these consortia also need a wide range of organizational structures and capabilities if they are to be effective and, crucially, self-sustaining. Developing organizational capacity can be particularly complex for library consortia because they are composed of networks of individuals and organizations rather than single entities with well-defined internal structures. They are also predominantly run by volunteers doing this work in addition to their day-to-day librarian jobs rather than staff with dedicated paid time for this work. In addition, consortia members are geographically dispersed and members rarely meet face-to-face.



Boosting effectiveness

Each year during INASP's five-year Strengthening Research and Knowledge Systems (SRKS) programme, which comes to an end in March 2018, consortia

“We welcome the intervention because it's not as though it was imported wholesale; we had input into the areas that we wanted addressed... so it felt like it was built to match the consortium's needs.”

evaluated their own effectiveness using the consortium capacity checklist (see box: Consortium capacity checklist). This self-assessed checklist indicated progress to date and provided a guide for what needed doing for consortia to be strong and sustainable in the future.

Building on this process and the self-reflections, at INASP's regional conference in Ethiopia in July 2015 seven of our African consortia partners discussed the challenges they encountered and the key needs of their consortia. Together, they agreed on five critical areas (or streams) that are critical for organizational effectiveness:

- 1. Strategic development**
- 2. Managing access to online literature and services to members**
- 3. Negotiations handover**
- 4. Demonstrating value, advocacy and influencing**
- 5. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)**

Streams 2 and 3 were already well established with ongoing work including help documentation, communities of practice, online and face-to-face training, support for attendance at key industry events, advocacy with publishers, mentoring and peer exchange. Work on monitoring and evaluation the use of online literature (an aspect of stream 5) had been underway for several years.

Streams 1, 4 and the M&E of consortium performance in stream 5, however, were identified as areas where there was a need for some new work to meet the needs expressed by consortia.

A new partnership

In 2016, INASP teamed up with Caplor Horizons, a not-for-profit network of experts in organizational change, to help four library consortia to strengthen their leadership, strategy and influencing skills, recognizing the relatively short time frame – two years remaining of INASP's SRKS

Consortium capacity checklist

The self-assessed consortium capacity checklist, supplemented by INASP's interactions with partners, was used during the course of the SRKS programme to understand the progress consortia are making and how best to develop and target INASP support.

The checklist covered seven areas in which the consortia or equivalent national bodies need to strengthen their capacity in order to manage access to e-resources and negotiate with publishers:

- Whether they have a national mandate to provide and develop this service
- The ability to plan and implement work strategically, and to manage and monitor progress
- The development of effective management and decision-making structures
- The development of a strong membership and financial base
- The ability to effectively communicate their work, and the value of this to the national research system
- The ability to support their member institutions to make the most of the access they have to online journals and books
- The ability to fully manage the provision of access to online journals and books, from negotiating with publishers, to handling invoices, payments, technical set-up, promotion and eventually monitoring of usage

All four consortia in the Leading in the Library project reached the highest level on the checklist. This signifies a group of people working as a team towards a shared vision, mission and set of clearly defined organizational aims and objectives.



programme. The four consortia partners were: Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Ghana (CARLIGH); Kenya Library and Information Services Consortium (KLISC); Consortium of Uganda University Libraries (CUUL); and Zimbabwe University

Librarians Consortium (ZULC).

The 'Leading in the Library: A learning lab for sustainable access to knowledge in developing countries' project was set up to focus on three elements of organizational effectiveness:

1. **Leadership:** supporting consortia to nurture transformational leaders
2. **Strategy:** enabling consortia leadership to review and develop robust strategies for a sustainable future

Theresa Adu, a librarian and member of the executive of the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries (CARLIGH), Ghana

To be able to do good research and study, you need access to online literature. One of the biggest challenges is getting access to the internet. We normally get access to online literature through CARLIGH. But most of the time, getting access to the materials themselves becomes a challenge because of intermittent breaks in internet access. Since my institution is a private institution, one of the biggest challenges we have is payment for our online literature. Not just us, a lot of private institutions are having issues with funding and finances as it is a bit difficult to pay upfront. We therefore end up staggering our payments.

One thing that has really helped is strengthening the leadership in CARLIGH. I think all the training programmes we've had and the mentoring processes we've gone through have helped strengthen leadership in CARLIGH. INASP's relationship with us has helped.

Also, the fact that we have been able to re-make our strategic plan is an achievement. Our strategic plan had been an issue for us previously. Since INASP brought in Caplor Horizons to help us with our strategic plan, we have been able to recraft our strategic objectives as well as our strategic plans. I think now we are in a better position to move CARLIGH forward.

One of the things we said during the strategic planning is for CARLIGH to be a leader when it comes to online literature, when it comes to enhancing access to information. I think that that is the way forward for CARLIGH now. We are trying to build up capacity for advocacy and marketing so that we can promote issues about CARLIGH a bit more. I think CARLIGH is now able to grow from where it used to be into a greater institution. We are trying to get a lot more of our institutions to join CARLIGH. In fact, what we said is that, by the year 2027, we should be able to get about 90% of all tertiary institutions in Ghana to be members of CARLIGH and we believe that if we are able to do this, it would improve our finances, it would improve visibility for CARLIGH and it would make CARLIGH stronger so that we can provide access to the online literature.

I have been active in CARLIGH for a few years now and over the period I have realized that INASP has been very strong in partnering with CARLIGH. We have done a lot of training programmes and capacity building which has been sponsored by INASP. And the training is not only in our country, but we get training elsewhere, in various places. We have also had online literature negotiated for us by INASP, which of course makes online literature cheaper for members. And then also we get to network with other institutions such as CUUL, KLISC, ZULC [library consortia in Uganda, Kenya and Zimbabwe] and various other institutions. It's good because when you have such a network, then you can pull resources together, you can pull ideas together, you can talk with each other, you tap in to each other's ideas and strengths. I think partnering with INASP has been very good for CARLIGH.

On behalf of CARLIGH we would want to express our very deep gratitude to INASP - and to Caplor Horizons as well. I think this has been a very fruitful partnership. Sometimes you know what to do, you know how to go about things, but I think getting that push, that encouragement, that financial support which all came from INASP, that has been very great.

Full interview: blog.inasp.info/strengthened-library-consortium-helps-ensure-long-term-research-information-access-ghana





Participants in the third forum in Zimbabwe used artwork to consider some of the challenges they face

3. Influencing: enabling each consortium to achieve wider support and commitment to the idea that access to research is vital for national development

Building on current thinking in leadership development, Leading in the Library recognized that the contexts and cultures within which library consortia operate are complex and evolving. Taking a model of learning and adapting, the project used a range of approaches, including face-to-face workshops (or forums), webinars and online discussions, to help library organizations think about their role, organizational identity

and strategy and then build on these priorities.

The forum approach

Core to the project approach were a series of face-to-face forums with each of the four national consortia. The forums were built around Caplor Horizons' 'Caplor House Essentials' programme, which comprises six modules: sustainable future, learning, leadership, strategy, influence, collaboration. They were facilitated by Caplor Horizons volunteers with support from INASP staff.

Before and after each forum there was a planning meeting and then

“...now, just from the top of my head, I can remember what the strategic objectives are.”

a review meeting with consortium representatives at which the specific content was discussed and agreed with the facilitators.

Because the project was designed to be adaptive and iterative, there was no such thing as a typical forum. Depending on the needs and priorities that emerge at each stage we adjusted what was covered in each forum and who delivered them.

However, there were some common themes and every forum was based around the principles of experiential learning; creating a different, enjoyable and stimulating learning environment. During Forum 1 in each country we tried to help consortia to review and refresh their current strategy. This involved supporting them with thinking about their vision, communicating their strategy in a compelling way and exploring some of the crucial areas that will help them to work more effectively in terms of leadership, strategy and influence.

Following this, Forums 2 and 3 then took a deeper dive into the critical issues that emerged during the first forum. The circumstances and contexts were unique to each country (although there were clearly some common threads across the four countries). For example, KLISC in Kenya only required two forums, having already made progress through an INASP strategic grant it managed.

“Now [the consortium] is more able to advocate, we’re able to talk to potential clients and now they accept us. Not many have joined but many have now accepted that what we’ve been saying for all these years has been something good, and therefore we are attracting people to come to the consortium.”



“The programme has also helped us to refocus and understand the need to include the younger librarians from our university libraries. Previously it used to be a preserve for directors, but now we do have an opportunity to involve the rest of the members of staff and this is what we started implementing. Putting them in various committees and letting them take the lead.”

The approach and content of the forums let participants learn and problem solve together, with experiential activities and exercises. Participants spoke highly of the methods used and said the exercises were energizing and fun, and made it easy to remember what they had learnt. Several facilitators, observers and participants noted that the participants were very engaged and active and that everyone participated, with no-one sitting out or uninvolved.

Each face-to-face forum was led by two or more Caplor Horizons

advisors to match the needs of the consortia at that forum—with support and facilitation by INASP staff. Whilst there were many benefits to facilitators’ skills and experience being matched to the needs of the consortia, it did mean that no facilitator (from INASP or Caplor) was there for all three forums in a country, and so there was less continuity across the series.

Participants in the forums were selected by the consortium from the executive committees and working groups. The aim was, as much as possible, that the same

people attended all three forums. However, in practice, different people came to different forums. In Zimbabwe, for example, 21% of people came to one forum, 50% came to two and 29% were able to attend all three.

Online training and webinars

In addition to the forums, the initial plan was for four days of online coaching and mentoring. This was trialled in one country but proved to be difficult, and the decision was made to instead run webinars between the forums. The five webinars focused on developing 1) entrepreneurial, 2) strategic, 3) gender balanced, 4) financial sustainability and 5) culturally sensitive mindsets. They consisted mainly of presentations from Caplor Horizons advisors, INASP staff and invited consortium members with some time for question and answer sessions using chat box or spoken contributions.

In evaluation of this work, the webinars were described as being less successful than the forums, with fewer participants and lower active participation than hoped for. It is unclear what caused this but possible issues include lack of familiarity and

“Everybody just had a great energy and felt like ‘We can do this!’, and by the end of it you really felt like there was a drive and we were moving in the right direction. I think having these face-to-face sessions, and having those experts out there that could import that type of wisdom, and to do it really well and make the sessions really fun in a different style, was really appreciated and valued.”





Through the Leading in the Library project, CARLIGH in Ghana refreshed and simplified its strategy on the theme of creating a sea change

confidence amongst participants; problems connecting or using the technology; time constraints for participants; and lack of interest in the topics.

Progress on strategies

At the start of the project, all four consortia had strategic plans in place but all needed greater capacity to:

- Implement the strategy fully and on schedule
- Monitor and evaluate progress against their strategic plan
- Effectively advocate for the value of the consortium and the importance of research for development
- Put in place a well-managed and sustainable financial model
- Ensure effective succession and institutional knowledge management

The Leading in the Library project worked to help consortia feel connected with their strategies by revisiting the consortia's visions, missions and values. This helped make the strategies more focussed and achievable and allowed consortia to create their own 'strategy on a page'. CARLIGH's strategy, for example, developed the catchphrase 'SEA Change' and created a logo based around a sea eagle which the participants felt represented the consortium. CARLIGH also moved from having six strategic objectives to three.

Feedback from participants and facilitators about people's engagement in the forums was very encouraging. In Zimbabwe for example, the participants said they felt positive, empowered, enlightened, inspired, motivated and delighted. It was noted that the facilitators skilfully ensured that everyone was actively involved and contributing, regardless of gender, status or age.

Across the participants and facilitators, people frequently said that the forums were fun, and that laughing together had helped to break down barriers, build commitment to their consortium and create a team rather than a collection of individuals. People spoke about making breakthroughs in their understanding of their own thinking and skills, being helped to think 'outside the box', and that the forums brought a 'breath of fresh air' to their consortium's work.

Despite the active engagement and enthusiasm during the meetings, the consortia only made limited progress between the forums. For example, in Zimbabwe Forum 2 participants set up project groups to take on work around learning, strategy development, structure and financial sustainability but all had struggled to meet or make progress in the two months until Forum 3.

That, is of course, understandable. Consortium members are volunteers and have to make time for their consortium's work outside their usual, already busy, day jobs, and it may have been useful to take that into account in planning the project and in moderating the work the consortium members committed to between forums.

Completion of follow-on work may also have been affected by the spacing of the forums. The timing was necessarily dependent on the availability of the facilitators and consortium members, but provided little time for consortia to work together between these

"...keeping the consortia involved in the preparation of the forums as well as during the fora and building them as teams has worked really well. I think that's been a very huge success."



sessions. It also perhaps reflects one of the reasons for the project in the first place—the lack of a unified and ‘owned’ strategy and related work plans that would have allowed participants to work independently between meetings.

Strengthening organizational engagement

In the feedback at the end of the forums many commented that their consortial collaboration and communication had been improved, and that they had a new understand and valuing of the different skills they each brought to the consortium.

Participants also said the forums had helped them attract new members to their consortia, and hence new income.

In addition, participants also reported that a key outcome was the engagement and recognition of younger members to help ensure the future of the consortia. They said that they thought this was especially important as many of the existing executive were overworked. Delegating and using the skills of younger “operational” members would help ensure that the work was shared and implemented—and ensure continuity when many of the existing executive retire in the next few years.

Uncovering talents

In addition to organizational level development, a very high percentage of the participants thought that the forums had contributed to their personal learning and development.

The activities highlighted to the participants that some of their members had a natural talent for



A warm up exercise with a ball in the third forum in Uganda

communication, and that these people were not always those who were expected to be good in that role. There were discussions, for example, about using the skills within a consortium. This would mean that people with a strength for gathering data, those who were good at communicating with others, and those with vision could all contribute to advocacy and fundraising work whilst playing to those strengths.

Some of the skills learnt were also demonstrated at INASP’s regional conference in October 2017 where CARLIGH presented a strong session on advocacy and ZULC led an informative session on the use of Ansoff’s Matrix for financial sustainability and innovative approaches to fundraising.

The participants also thought that their improved relationships, appreciation of the range of skills people brought, and understanding of the issues and culture that can affect communication would strengthen commitment to and work for the consortia.

At a regional INASP meeting at the end of 2017, for example, the four consortia formed a network to support and mentor each other which could also support to the volunteers working for consortia. They also formed a small working group to plan a future regional meeting, without needing INASP as an intermediary.

The greater clarity, ownership and practical application of their strategies can also reasonably be

expected to help in handover and succession as they capture the long-term goals and work plans for the organizations, regardless of who is in post.

Strengthened for the future

The overall feeling from the participants was that successful succession had been supported by this Leading in the Library project. Engagement with younger members, increased interest and appreciation of the consortia's value to existing and potential members, and having a clear and achievable strategy were all seen as positive outcomes.

The increase in skills, coupled with more effective strategic plans and structures, is likely to strengthen the consortia's capacity to implement the strategic plans, advocate effectively, secure sustainable funding, ensure smooth succession and monitor and evaluate progress.

The project has also been successful in building a greater sense of community and commitment amongst the participants, with a greater appreciation of what they are collectively aiming to do, the skills they have available to achieve that, and how they can ensure progress does not rely on a small group of executive members.

Of course, organizational change takes time and these are volunteer-led organizations operating in busy and changing context, and they continue to face many challenges. The extent to which their improved skills and

relationships translate into more effective and sustainable consortia can only be properly evidenced in the coming years.

Further information

Strengthening Southern library consortia through partnership between INASP and Caplor Horizons – Practising Development, 2017 blog.inasp.info/strengthening-southern-library-consortia-partnership-inasp-caplor-horizons



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Lessons learnt:

The project highlighted many aspects that worked well and should be considered for future work:

- Proactive checking of needs and matching that to facilitators/ content as the project progressed
- Involvement of consortia members in design and adaptation of the forums
- Mix of exercises to look at issues in a way that was separate to the consortium, as well as directly related to the consortium's particular situation
- Involvement of established and new/young consortium members
- Active and experiential exercises and relaxed facilitation technique that allowed people to learn well and have fun together

Due to the funding period for the wider SRKS programme, the timeframe for this project was quite short – just two years – so inevitably not everything could be done. For future work, in a longer timeframe, some suggested extensions include:

- Including some training-of-trainer activities and providing the materials in modular format so participants could take particular activities to share within and beyond the consortium
- Increasing involvement of consortium members and local resource people
- Editing the webinar recordings to make them more useful after the events
- Strengthening connections with other INASP activities

