

# Survey provides picture of scholarly journal publishing in Bangladesh

Monitoring trends, understanding issues, improving services

**A survey conducted by INASP in 2014 identified current practices, emerging trends, success factors and challenges within the scholarly communication sector in Bangladesh. The survey provided key learning points for INASP that will be used to continue to improve services to editors and publishers.**

Journal publishers and editors in different regions of the world have to meet similar challenges with regard to technology, international standards of quality assurance and information delivery, online publication and sustainable financial models. While there is a wealth of information on how journals in higher-income countries are meeting these challenges, there is little information about journals in other regions of the world.

As part of INASP's ongoing work to support local research dissemination in Bangladesh, from February to March 2014 INASP invited staff from 164 scholarly journals in Bangladesh to complete an online survey. The study<sup>1</sup> was adapted from earlier research into the state of scholarly publishing in Africa<sup>2</sup> and was led by Journals Online Programme Manager Sioux Cumming in partnership with Pippa Smart, an external consultant in print and electronic academic and research publishing. The stakeholders – editors-in-chief, members of editorial boards, managers and other relevant staff – were identified primarily through their membership of the INASP-established BanglaJOL platform (see What is BanglaJOL?) and through online searches.



Participants at an INASP workshop on journal quality in Bangladesh, June 2014, facilitated by Sioux Cumming (Programme Manager, Journals Online) and Andy Nobes (Programme Officer, Research Development and Support)

The aim of the survey was to capture trends and patterns in the publishing sector in Bangladesh. The results, from 86 respondents<sup>3</sup>, have contributed to some important learning points for INASP and its partners and prompted improved ways of working with editors and researchers in Bangladesh.

The key areas of interest were around: online publishing and Open Access; copyright and licensing issues; financial stability; use of bibliographic identifiers; and the quality of journal submissions.

## Online publishing and Open Access

The survey results revealed that there was some confusion over the meaning of the terms 'online publishing' and 'Open Access'<sup>4</sup> among the respondents, with some using the terms interchangeably. This was helpful in underlining the need for INASP to define key terms in future research. INASP is also keen to find out more about partners' understanding of, and attitudes to, Open Access (see Learning points).



In the Bangladesh survey, most respondents indicated that they provide both online access/ electronic versions and print copies of their journals. Online publishing amongst the journals surveyed has increased considerably since 2007; the launch of BanglaJOL in that year may have acted as a catalyst. Respondents were aware of the benefits of online publishing, including increased reputation and coverage, wider dissemination of research and the reduced need to print expensive hard copies. However attitudes to Open Access publishing remain mixed. One issue that did arise was its impact on printed journal sales and therefore income once journals were freely accessible electronically. One respondent noted, “Hardly any non-member purchases the hard-copy journal as it is freely available online”.



Editors discuss international journal publishing standards during an INASP workshop at Bangladesh Academy of Sciences, Dhaka, Bangladesh, October 2015. Image courtesy of Dr Haseeb Md Irfanullah

In addition, concerns were raised by some of the respondents that Open Access to journals encouraged plagiarism, an issue felt to be particularly prevalent in Bangladesh academia. INASP is seeking to resolve this by making

free plagiarism-checking software<sup>5</sup> available to editors of journals on the BanglaJOL, LAMJOL, NepJOL and SLJOL platforms – and initial feedback suggests this is proving very useful. It was also felt by one respondent that a printed version was seen to be more important to authors than the benefits conferred by online publishing such as citations, impact and indexing. INASP’s Editor’s Resource Pack<sup>6</sup> describes the different publishing models that are available to editors, including any drawbacks.

## Survey methodology and respondent profile

The survey gathered quantitative and qualitative data about the scholarly publishing sector in Bangladesh, inviting relevant staff from 164 scholarly journals to complete an online survey consisting of 80 questions (mostly optional) between February and March 2014. There were 86 responses, of which 63 (38%) were unique. Among the people who responded to questions about age and gender, 50% were aged between 34 and 53, and the vast majority were male (92%). INASP is increasingly working to address gender issues with partner journals, for example, raising awareness of the importance of having women on editorial boards as part of the journal quality training. The majority of respondents were university professors and a significant proportion were also members of an editorial board or were Editor-in-Chief or Executive Editor of a journal. Although not themselves publishers, the respondents’ organizations published one or more journals and offered printing, proofreading and ISSN acquisition services, almost all of them primarily in English. The most frequent subject areas covered by these journals were medicine, biological and environmental sciences, agriculture and social sciences. Just over half of the journals were published by a scholarly/ professional society or association, with less than a quarter being published by a university and only five by a publisher.

## Copyright and licensing issues

Respondents were asked how they manage copyright and licences. Intellectual property rights law stipulates that authors must either retain the copyright for their articles and assign a publishing licence to the journal, or assign copyright to the journal. However, the INASP survey revealed that, (as in many other countries, due to complex copyright laws), Bangladesh journals do not always formally require authors to assign a licence or copyright to the

**“Open Access brought significant changes in the journal’s reputation and coverage. Our journal is currently searched and browsed by an international audience and we receive a good number of submissions from an international audience... Moreover we stopped publishing huge printed copies of the journal as it is already available online. We only issue very limited printed copies.” Survey respondent**



Sioux Cumming, INASP Programme Manager, Journals Online, presents at a workshop in Bangladesh

journal. Ten respondents indicated that they allowed the author to retain copyright but did not require them to assign a licence to the journal or publisher, and the majority of respondents were unclear on the type of licences they used to publish, indicating a need to raise awareness about copyright requirements in the sector. Recognizing the importance of protecting the intellectual-property rights of authors and journals, INASP’s training

curriculum on Journal Quality now contains enhanced content on copyright. The Editor’s Resource Pack contains a licensing checklist for editors as well as a pro forma copyright assignment form and an example licence for publication.

### Financial stability

Almost half the respondents indicated that their journals are currently operating at a loss, and a large proportion of the rest

### What is BanglaJOL?

Bangladesh Journals Online (BanglaJOL)<sup>7</sup> is a database of journals published in Bangladesh, covering the full range of academic disciplines. It was set up by INASP in 2007 in association with the Editing and Publication Association of Bangladesh (EPAB). While INASP continues to support BanglaJOL, the site is being handed over to the Bangladesh Academy of Sciences (BAS). This handover process reflects the ethos of sustainability and local management that underpins all INASP’s activities. The primary goal for BanglaJOL is to facilitate worldwide access to the full text of Bangladeshi journals - either by hosting the full text online, or redirecting users to external websites.

BanglaJOL currently hosts 135 journals and over 15,000 Open-Access articles. Since 2007 it has attracted 3 million visitors from 232 countries, and generated over 15 million article downloads. For more information see the Bangladesh fact file<sup>8</sup>.

In the survey, BanglaJOL was the most cited aggregator (46 of 59 respondents), followed by the Directory of Open Access Journals, Index Copernicus and HINARI.





**“iThenticate elevated our confidence level. We found the software a reliable tool to detect plagiarism for the publication of quality articles.” Nazmul Hussain Nazir PhD, Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Advanced Veterinary and Animal Research**

indicated that they were just breaking even. Only 10% were generating a financial surplus and 20% of the others still expected to be operating at a loss in the next three to five years. Reasons behind this were varied, and included a lack of external funding, with 57% operating without any financial support at all. This accords with the Bangladesh Sixth Five Year Plan's assessment of the severe lack of research funding available in the country<sup>9</sup>, with under 1% of funding from the Bangladesh University Grants Committee to public universities currently allocated to research.

The most significant expenses for a majority of the journals were printing, graphic design, mailing and distribution, office equipment, stationery and materials.

The launch of BanglaJOL, however, as a free online-publishing platform, had allowed some publishers to reduce running costs such as printing expenses. Many also enjoyed non-financial support from their institutions, including the use of office space and resources, free software and free journal hosting services.

Financial support from their universities, NGOs and other organizations was a key factor for most of the respondents, as was income from advertising, with a smaller proportion listing donations from academics or scientists and income from membership fees as an important source of income. The majority did not charge author fees. Those that did charge such

fees usually offered waivers for authors from the poorest countries as specified by the UN, for authors who were members of the organization or who were unable to pay but whose research was deemed important.

## Competition and predatory practices

Some journals reported that they were experiencing increased competition from other Bangladeshi or overseas journals, with competitors receiving not only more submissions but also preference by international authors seeking more widely-recognized journals. One respondent felt that their organization was only receiving submissions that had

## Working in partnership with Bangladesh

INASP has been working with Bangladesh since 2006 in the following areas:

### Research access and availability

- INASP negotiates with international publishers to secure national licences on behalf of Bangladesh, for free or significantly discounted online access to journals and books.
- INASP supports training in a range of areas related to digital information management and library consortium development.

### Research production and communication

- INASP supports local research communication through the AuthorAID project. This includes research-writing courses, an active discussion list and mentoring. There are now over 400 Bangladesh authors registered and 285 people receiving mentoring.
- INASP supports local research dissemination through BanglaJOL (Bangladesh Journals Online), hosting online peer-reviewed journals and running training courses on improving the quality of local journals.

### Grants and training courses

- Two Bangladeshi academics are recipients of 2015 JOL workshop grants, enabling them to run journal publishing workshops: Khawaja Muhammed Sultanul Aziz of Bangladesh Academy of Sciences (BAS) developed a workshop in Dhaka for local journal editors on compliance with international publishing standards, and Md. Abdullah Yusuf of the National Institute of Neurosciences and Hospital in Bangladesh held a workshop for clinicians on writing, submitting and reviewing scientific papers in BanglaJOL.



Participants at an INASP journal quality workshop in Bangladesh, June 2014, facilitated by Sioux Cumming (Programme Manager, Journals Online) and Andy Nobes (Programme Officer, Research Development and Support)

been rejected by other journals, whilst another was concerned that there were too many journals and not enough authors, with new in-country authors reluctant to publish if it did not offer any career benefits. INASP is responding to this issue by working with BanglaJOL and editors to improve journal quality and raise the profile

### Key trends and issues identified in the survey

- Online and Open Access
- Copyright and licensing requirements
- Financial support and stability
- Increased competition for manuscripts from overseas journals
- Use of DOIs and ISSNs
- The quality of submissions to journals

of southern journals internationally. Concerns were also raised by respondents over the quality of the submissions they receive, with language and presentation being particular issues. Often staff spent significant time editing and assisting with presentation, which frequently resulted in delayed publication. INASP's AuthorAID project<sup>10</sup>, which offers free training programmes in local research communication, seeks to address this issue. AuthorAID provides research-writing courses, an active discussion list and a mentoring platform to match early-career scientists to more experienced researchers.

Of increasing significance to respondents were difficulties in being seen as legitimate publishers, rather than those who leave authors open to paying fees without receiving the related services. In response to

a growing industry awareness of this issue, INASP is taking part in a new cross-industry campaign entitled Think. Check. Submit.<sup>11</sup> aimed at researchers, librarians and publishers. This online hub will help researchers ascertain before submission whether a journal is legitimate, by completing a checklist. Criteria include membership of a recognized industry initiative and the quality of the journal's peer-review process. As part of the Journals Online project, INASP is also working with journal editors to make them aware of these issues and help them increase the professional standing of their journals.

### Bibliographic identifiers

Responses to questions about whether journals had an ISSN<sup>12</sup> or Digital Object Identifier (DOI)<sup>13</sup>

indicated that there is inconsistent awareness and use of these bibliographical tools, which are key indicators of journal quality. Since the survey, and as part of the Strengthening Research and Knowledge Systems (SRKS) programme<sup>14</sup>, INASP has placed more emphasis on inclusion of DOIs in manuscripts in its work with editors.

The survey confirmed the importance of many of the issues INASP has been addressing in the research-literature arena in

Bangladesh since 2006, whilst also providing detailed information about the current challenges faced by journal editors on a day-to-day basis. INASP addresses these issues by offering training to researchers, improving access to e-resources and supporting publishers. By working with local partners to build capacity at individual, institutional, national and international levels, INASP's hopes to see significant improvement in the research and knowledge sector in Bangladesh and other countries in which the organization works.

## Learning points

INASP is working with journal editors and publishers to:

- **Improve understanding of Open Access:** INASP recognizes that understanding and usage of Open Access in Bangladesh is variable, as demonstrated by the responses to the survey. A further survey has now been implemented of all JOL members on attitudes to Open Access, using learnings from the Bangladesh survey.
- **Enhance journal quality:** INASP continues to run workshops in Bangladesh aimed at improving the quality of journals. Free access to CrossCheck plagiarism-checking software will enable journal editors to screen submissions to their journals prior to publication. INASP has also developed a Resource Pack for Editors<sup>15</sup>, a freely available guide to international journal publishing standards covering aspects such as finances, copyright, strategy and adding quality. This will be followed by an online course available in early 2016.
- **Counter untrustworthy publishers:** To support legitimate publishers, INASP is taking part in a new cross-industry campaign and online forum entitled Think. Check. Submit. This will help researchers determine whether a journal is trustworthy.
- **Raise awareness and increase use of bibliographic identifiers:** INASP has expanded the sections of its training relating to DOIs, recognizing that this subject required clarification and explanation.
- **Improve future surveys:** Finally, INASP has reviewed the format and content of its surveys and future studies will be more robust, particularly with regards to how questions are phrased and in explaining key concepts and terminology.

## INASP Team

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5. CrossCheck, powered by iThenticate [www.ithenticate.com/products/crosscheck](http://www.ithenticate.com/products/crosscheck)
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11. [www.thinkchecksubmit.org](http://www.thinkchecksubmit.org)
12. The International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) is a standard bibliographic identifier, defined by the ISO standard 3297 (2007) and used to identify newspapers, journals, magazines and periodicals of all kinds and on all media, both print and electronic
13. A serial code for electronic documents
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