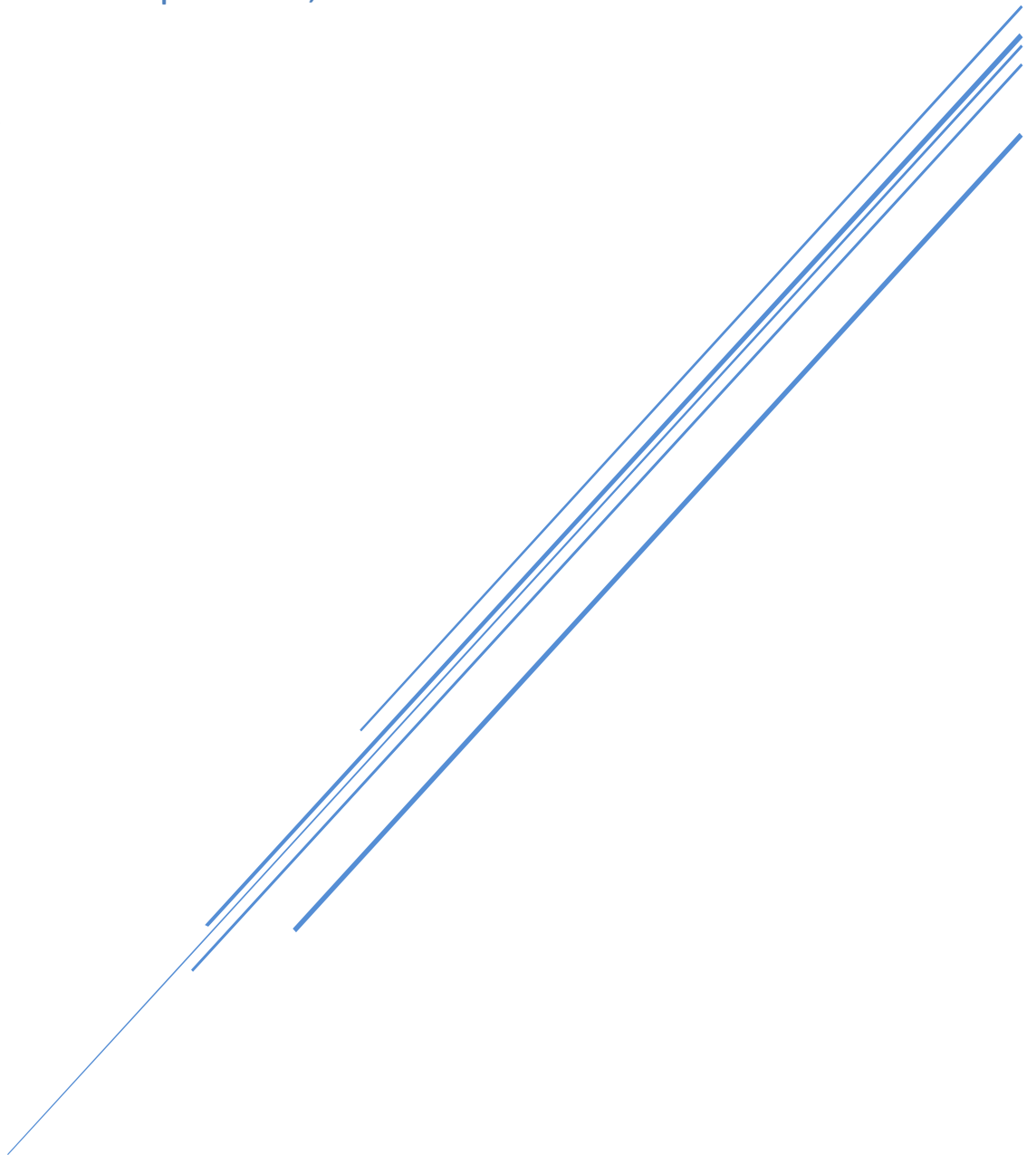


RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE AT THE HEART OF DEVELOPMENT? TRENDS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Findings of an independent, external consultation for INASP

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Contents

Executive Summary.....	ii
Acronyms	iv
Acknowledgements.....	iv
1. Introduction	1
2. Methodology.....	1
3. Research Production	2
3.1 Key trends	2
3.2 Challenges	4
3.3 Conclusions and areas for INASP to explore further	5
4. Research Communication and Use	6
4.1 Trends	6
4.2 Challenges	9
4.3 Conclusions and areas for INASP to explore further	10
5. Perspectives on INASP	10
5.1 Strengths	10
5.2 Results: the difference INASP has made.....	11
5.3 Areas for development	12
6. Key factors to consider in INASP strategy development	12
6.1 Stakeholders	12
6.2 Country-level planning.....	14
6.3 Current trends and tensions	15
7. Conclusions	16
7.1 Themes.....	16
7.2 Roles.....	17
7.3 Next steps	17
Annex 1 List of interviewees	19
Annex 2 Interview checklist	22

Executive Summary

INASP is a UK-based NGO with the mission to put research knowledge at the heart of development. This consultation sought feedback from selected key stakeholders on INASP and also to identify current trends, opportunities and challenges in research and development. It is part of the INASP strategy development process. The consultation interviewed 39 stakeholders, selected by INASP, drawn from 22 countries, representing organizations in different parts of the research and development system. They include researchers, research and programme managers, senior university personnel, librarians, journal editors, capacity-builders and donors. They work in universities, government departments, NGOs, think tanks, foundations and other parts of civil society. They include people who know INASP well and others considered by INASP to be thought leaders in the sector but with little or no previous contact with INASP. Despite the breadth of the areas being explored in the consultation and the variety of contexts, some key messages emerged.

Trends

First, there is a positive dynamic in the production, communication and use of research. More and better-quality research is being produced in the global South. Developments in higher education, infrastructure — notably the internet — and increased funding have all contributed to this positive change. Partnerships between Northern and Southern researchers have become more equal. Southern institutions and governments are making progress in setting their national research agendas.

However, significant challenges remain in the creation of a culture and enabling environment for research at institutional and national levels. Infrastructure problems remain, with researchers struggling with poor equipment and facilities, and skills gaps in writing and analysis persist. In addition, despite national efforts to establish research agendas, international donor agendas still dominate what research is undertaken. These do not always match national priorities but, rather, speak to international concerns.

Many trends are also positive in the communication and use of research. There is more attention to research communication, more demand for evidence from policy makers as well as civil society and the growth of fora to facilitate dialogue between researchers and policy makers. However, challenges remain here also, notably relating to the quality and thus effectiveness of communication products and processes, suggesting a need in the sector to focus on improving the quality of national journals, research-communication products, events and dialogue processes. Key stakeholders such as professional associations are held back in their communication role through a lack of resources. National Councils of Science and Technology also are not fulfilling their potential due to capacity constraints.

There are lost opportunities, with national data difficult to locate, research going unpublished, outputs of conferences unshared and national priorities not being addressed. The overall system to put research knowledge at the heart of national development could work better.

INASP

The positive message is that there is a growing, though still small group of committed organizations dedicated to this end and making progress. INASP itself is credited by partners and other observers as making a significant contribution to the communication and accessibility of research. Interviewees valued INASP's partnership approach, values of sustainability, being grounded in work with local partners and holding relationships with a wide range of stakeholders. Areas for improvement lie in INASP's communication of its own role and demonstration of its impact at the institutional and sectoral levels. In addition, there is a call for INASP to do more to share learning and play a higher-profile role in shaping the research development community's agenda and approaches.

Roles

The consultation raised a number of opportunities, choices and areas for INASP to explore further in its strategy development process. Interviews highlighted three key roles to undertake in the future:

- **Capacity-builder** — INASP is acknowledged as a skilled trainer and produces high-quality training resources. The consultation highlights the new and continuing need for initiatives to build capacity and, in particular, to improve quality in a range of areas including in writing skills, appraisal of data, data management, research management, journal editing, sustainability models for online open-access journals, librarianship skills and researcher understanding of research policy processes. However, capacity building needs to go beyond standalone workshops, and should both be embedded in sustainable processes and include sustained support — for example, through mentoring processes. This is a point acknowledged and already being explored by INASP.
- **Broker and facilitator** — INASP's skills in building networks were acknowledged. The consultation highlighted INASP's potential to play a role brokering partnerships — for example, North–South between similar professions such as journal editors, library professional trainers, and others — as well as facilitating and brokering relations within countries. The role of broker and facilitator is crucial to enable the needed ongoing dialogue and contact between research and policy communities for development policy and practice to become more evidence-based. INASP could play a role in this, possibly in directly supporting such brokering or building capacity for good brokering and facilitation, sharing models that work.
- **Thought leader** — INASP's potential to lead certain debates in research development where all actors are struggling was highlighted. Its distinctive attribute of being grounded in practice in a broad range of countries and different contexts gives it legitimacy to put forward and facilitate thinking on issues such as impact assessment and models for research policy engagement.

INASP is clearly linked to some of the key issues and areas for development in research and development. Interviewees viewed it as having much to offer. Given the great range of options presented, work will need to be robust to establish a clear direction and focus for the future. The consultation found that overall trends relating to putting research at the heart of development are positive. But significant challenges remain. There is an urgency to address these for governments and others to meet the development challenges and grasp the opportunities their contexts present.

Acronyms

ACBF	African Capacity Building Foundation
ACU	The Association of Commonwealth Universities
AU	African Union
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
DFID	Department for International Development
EIPM	Evidence-Informed Policy Making
ICCCAD	International Centre for Climate Change and Environment (Bangladesh)
IDS	Institute for Development Studies
JOL	Journals Online
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OSSREA	Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who gave their time so generously to participate in this consultation. The range of perspectives, views and experiences on which I have been able to draw was broad, spanning the continents and including a wide range of roles in research production, communication and use. This reflects the breadth of INASP's networks. Despite the differences between

interviewees' roles and place, some strong key themes came through. All responsibility for the interpretation of perspectives lies with the author.

1. Introduction

INASP is a UK-based non-governmental organization (NGO) with the mission to put research knowledge at the heart of development. This consultation is part of INASP's process to develop its strategy 2015–2020. The consultation sought to gather feedback and perceptions of selected key stakeholders on INASP and also to identify current trends, opportunities and challenges in research and development. The report provides a basis for strategy discussions within INASP and possibly further, more focused consultation with the INASP network and others.

The report is organized as follows:

- Section 2 discusses the consultation methodology.
- Sections 3 and 4 discuss research production and then communication and use, covering some key trends and challenges.
- Section 5 discusses the feedback provided by interviewees on INASP itself.
- Section 6 considers some key themes and issues highlighted by the consultation and their implications for INASP. This includes key stakeholders important for INASP to consider.
- Section 7 concludes with a discussion on the key issues for INASP to address in the strategy development process, and some suggested next steps.

A note on terminology

The term “research” means many things to many people. Here, research, unless otherwise specified, is being used to mean a systematic process to build knowledge. Most frequently it is used in relation to processes being carried out by universities and other “research producers” such as think tanks and NGOs. Research knowledge is the evidence and understanding that these processes produce. But, as discussed later (3.3), knowledge from other processes of data production and analysis are also important inputs to policy and practice and were referred to by some interviewees.

2. Methodology

INASP drew up a list of potential interviewees designed to represent a broad range of experiences across countries and roles in relation to research. A total of 39 interviews were conducted.

The participants

The interviewees come from 24 countries from Africa (15), Asia (12) and Latin America (3) as well as the global North (9 – USA, Canada and the UK). They include representatives of organizations predominantly known as research producers — i.e. universities and think tanks — and organizations involved in building the capacity of the research development sector. They include people who know INASP well and those who had no or little contact with INASP — approximately two thirds and one third, respectively. The final list of interviewees is attached in Annex 1.

The interview

A consultant, Teresa Hanley, carried out a one-hour semi-structured Skype/phone interview with each interviewee. The interview checklist was shared with participants in advance and covered:

- feedback on INASP’s work — what has gone well, what difference has INASP’s work made, how has INASP’s work fitted with others in the field, what could INASP have done better or differently (to be more effective), what gaps and challenges have not been addressed by INASP or others in the field; and
- views on current trends in research knowledge production, communication and use — what is going well, what are the current challenges, how can an organization such as INASP address these (what could be its contribution), what are upcoming opportunities.

Interviews were analysed to identify common themes, trends and outlying perspectives of interest. All interview notes were shared with INASP on a confidential basis.

3. Research Production

This section considers the area of research production and interviewees’ perspectives on current trends, concluding with some initial reflections on implications for INASP’s strategy.

3.1 Key trends

Interviewees emphasize a number of very positive key trends and developments in the production of research over the past 10 years.

a) Increase in research from the global South

More research is now produced in the global South by researchers from Africa, Asia and Latin America. There is a reported trend towards more multi-sector/inter-disciplinary research to address challenges such as developing responses to climate change. However, the quantity of research from the global South continues to be small in relation to the global output and in particular when considered as a proportion of research published. For instance, an analysis of articles referenced in the Bangladesh self-assessment reports for the IPCC found that, of the 100 pieces specific to Bangladesh, 75% were authored by people outside the country.

The quality of research is improving. Southern interviewees pointed to the expansion of regional networks supporting capacity-building — for example, the Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA), the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) — as well as donor support, notably from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and some US foundations. Factors driving this trend include the expansion of higher education, national economic growth in Africa, Asia and South America, infrastructure development — particularly with greater coverage and faster internet access — and the increase in incentives for research. Research projects have been integrated into some undergraduate courses, building students’ research skills from an early point, universities reward the publication of research in journals, and professionals are encouraged to undertake research in some sectors — for example, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Health provides significant financial incentives to doctors who undertake research.

However, much research is not published. There are initiatives to make unpublished research more accessible with the establishment of university-based and national repositories as well as the platform set up by the Association of African Universities to share all Masters and PhD dissertations

and theses. But there is a long way to go with these initiatives, and large quantities of research are thought to be unpublished and, therefore, inaccessible.

b) Increased funding

Interviewees reported a significant increase over the past decade in research funding in Africa, Asia and South America due to donor support, private-sector investment in certain areas — for example, bio-technology in Bangladesh — and increased government commitment to research, though this is patchy — for instance, very few countries in Africa currently reach the African Union target of investing 1% of their Gross Domestic Product into research. Interviewees reported a pattern of funding that concentrates on the sectors of health, agriculture and climate change and is more readily available for applied research rather than supporting the production of “fundamental” research in, for instance, the natural sciences.

c) Expansion of “research producers”

There has been an expansion in the types and numbers of organizations producing research. The expansion of higher education has played a role, although the growth of the private sector has had less of an impact on this, given its focus on providing teaching services rather than research. Think tanks and NGOs have become more numerous and more active research producers. Governments have also increased their capacity and intention to be active contributors to the global knowledge community — most clearly perhaps in countries such as Rwanda with its policy to be a knowledge contributor to the global knowledge society on subjects such as post-conflict development, bio-diversity and agriculture. But capacity does remain an issue — for instance, interviewees in Malawi highlighted the need for more people to be coming through the pipeline of Masters degrees to produce a future research community, and in Tanzania the expanded universities such as Dodoma have not yet reached their capacity: it is built to hold 40,000 students but has only 15,000 at present, significant though that is.

d) More equal North–South research partnerships

Interviewees from across academic, donor and capacity-building organizations as well as from the global North and South commented on the positive shift in relationships between researchers in the North and South. Ten years ago many referred to a tendency of Northern institutions to contract Southern researchers for data collection activities only and to undertake a fairly extractive process benefiting the Northern agencies more than the Southern communities and researchers. Now there has been a shift towards a more equal partnership and co-production: Northern researchers are recognized as bringing certain attributes, including analytical skills and awareness of data sets from outside the country of research, and Southern researchers bring key research skills as well as local knowledge. There is also more emphasis on capacity-building as part of research partnerships. Interviewees highlighted their learning that to be effective there is a need at the beginning of a partnership to establish explicitly the capacity-building aims and strategy. Some of the areas where capacity-building through research partnerships can be important include data storage for large data sets, use of software for analysis and analytical skills overall and management of large-scale surveys. That said, several examples of extractive processes and unequal partnership were also shared, but the underlying trend was definitely a more assertive agenda and role being demanded by Southern researchers and institutions.

3.2 Challenges

A number of challenges limit the production of relevant research to support development. Four key challenges are detailed below.

a) Enabling environment

Universities have clearly worked hard to build incentives for their staff to undertake research, with promotions and salaries being linked to publication in journals. However, the ability to do this is limited by workloads, particularly teaching demands in rapidly expanding universities; poor equipment, notably in science, where repairs and maintenance can often stall work; and inadequate infrastructure, with expensive and slow internet access as well as old computers and other equipment.

National policies have an impact too. They can assist research expansion, particularly where private-sector investment is needed. Interviewees in Asia pointed to the conducive environment created in Singapore — for example, restrictions removed for importing equipment for research, and tax breaks to investors. Other countries such as Indonesia have not addressed this and have tax and import duty policies that do not encourage investment, compounding investors' hesitation to invest in universities with still undeveloped financial assurance systems.

b) Relevance

While funding has increased for research overall, there remains a lack of support for exploratory diagnosis of what research is needed, hampering the establishment of relevant research. There is also a need to build skills in identifying knowledge gaps and facilitating links between research, national policy and donor communities so that these gaps are addressed. Governments through National Commissions of Science and Technology and other bodies are working hard to develop national research agendas. However, interviewees pointed to donor agendas being more influential in what research is undertaken and stated that these relate to international concerns, not national or local priorities.

Some interviewees argued that the models followed in the UK and other areas of an independent academia and research agenda separate from national policy are inappropriate for some African, Asian and South American countries. They argue for a model that more closely integrates policies for research, higher education and development.

The production of large-scale research led by Southern researchers and institutions is impeded by a lack of coordination among Southern institutes. Academics and institutes are reported to be reluctant to collaborate and so limit themselves to small grants and small-scale research which may be less relevant and, therefore, not maximizing the potential of in-country capacity.

Universities provide incentives to publish research in journals, particularly international journals, which can skew research questions to those of interest to international audiences rather than local priorities.

c) Skills gap

There has been a huge increase in capacity in the global South, which has helped drive the more equal partnerships between the North and the South. However, time and again interviewees —

particularly those working in the lower-income countries — highlighted the skills gap that exists, referring in particular to writing skills (for proposals, publication and other outputs to communicate research) as well as analytical skills. Many pointed to the huge amount of data being gathered from across countries but considered that the skills to analyse these remain weak.

Interviewees highlighted the proliferation of initiatives to improve writing skills and pointed to the need to move on from workshops to integrating skills development into existing processes, be they standard parts of all university courses or run by national and regional bodies. This is a point recognized and already being acted on by INASP. Also there was a call for more follow-up and support through mentoring beyond workshops. The need for skills to negotiate the ever-growing body of information, locating it, assessing it and synthesizing it was highlighted by people working with universities, think tanks and governments. Other skills development needs identified included building skills among think tank staff in areas such as research ethics; among university staff in research management and supervision; among government staff in commissioning and managing systematic reviews to address locally generated questions and topics; and among researchers in how to do them.

d) Data quality and access

There is more awareness of the importance of government statistics. But interviewees described difficulties in locating and accessing government data, which are poorly stored, managed and often of poor quality. Poor-quality data lead to development and other agencies often commissioning additional data-gathering initiatives, which in turn frustrates countries and drains capacity. In addition, researchers' protectiveness of their own data is limiting some analysis and knowledge generation. The Gates Foundation is exploring ways to create a culture that supports and enables researchers to share data. At an international level, work in developing the Sustainable Development Goals has identified the need for a data revolution for countries to be able to reach the goals and also to track progress towards them. The Gates Foundation is involved in work to develop a global data strategy in response to this recognized need which will include building capacity in health surveillance, improving national survey and census capacity and quality and also the use of geo-spatial data.

3.3 Conclusions and areas for INASP to explore further

The trends in research production are positive, with more, better-quality research being generated by the global South. Increased capacity, improving economies in some instances, greater assertiveness of national institutions and players all contribute to this trend. However, long-standing issues of poor infrastructure, skills, incentives and limited support to research remain.

It is worth noting the wide range of work interviewees referred to under the title of research and the different ways of categorizing it that were made. These include:

- research to solve problems vs “academic research” to build the field or fill gaps in knowledge;
- applied vs fundamental research;
- academic vs policy research;
- innovation and research — these were sometimes used interchangeably; and
- research as product or process.

Data, evidence, systematic reviews, literature reviews and impact evaluations were also referred to varyingly as distinct from research or equating to it. This might imply the need for INASP to communicate clearly the nature of research products and processes with which it is concerned. Some areas and implications that INASP might consider include:

- Continued need for capacity development in areas INASP has developed — i.e. writing and analytical skills. How can INASP build on its established expertise and reputation?
- There is a greater range of actors to engage with for skills building in research production, and they may have different needs — for example, NGOs, think tanks and universities. What are the implications for INASP's capacity development approach?
- Incentive systems which reward publication in international journals can have the unintended consequence of reducing the relevance of research. What are some of the key steps in creating a culture for research production that is relevant to national development?
- Despite increased national capacity and assertiveness, donors' agendas and Northern partners still remain dominant in some relationships. Is there a role for INASP to challenge and/or facilitate change here so national priorities are addressed?

4. Research Communication and Use

The areas of research communication and research use are closely intertwined. Research communication includes consideration of the products and processes by which research reaches and engages with different stakeholders. Interviewees focused their comments relating to research use mainly on policy making, but some also considered use by civil society and communities.

4.1 Trends

a) Increasing demand

Encouragingly, interviewees consistently referred to the increasing demand for evidence by policy makers. This is thought to be driven in part by the urgency of the issues many governments face which have no obvious solution, such as responding to climate change, managing natural resources, dealing with food insecurity and coping with the disease burden. Governments also have new economic opportunities. The Think Tank Initiatives surveys show growing interest and demand for evidence, particularly that linked to poverty reduction and environmental issues, including energy.¹

While demand is increasing, interviewees noted that policy makers do not usually distinguish between the different sources of evidence as long as it is useful in helping them think through policy options. Relevant sources include analyses of existing data, systematic reviews, impact evaluations, cost-effectiveness analyses and formal research projects. Demand for data is also increasing from NGOs and other advocacy groups. Evidence is essential for advocacy campaigns.

b) Increasing research communication activity

Interviewees noted the increased emphasis on the communication of research. More universities provide incentives to staff to undertake and publish (linked in part to their attention to university global rankings). There is an increase in the number of national journals and the expansion of research products. Notably, think tanks are producing outputs which aim to be more user-friendly

¹ IDRC (2012) Policy Community Survey follow-up carried out as part of the Think Tank Initiative.

for non-academics than journal articles. Donors have supported this trend, with some such as DFID encouraging a clear plan for the communication of research.

Researchers are increasingly aware of the need for their involvement in communication, and young researchers in particular are reported to be interested in this. Interestingly some interviewees also pointed to younger policy makers being more interested in research evidence, as they have often been more exposed to research through their education than some of the previous generation, which is a positive trend for future research–policy engagement.

Attention to communication has helped produce a diversification of communication products. Interviewees noted the beginning of a breakdown in an old argument of research being communicated either through peer-reviewed articles or targets for non-academic circles such as briefing papers. The need to produce a range of products is becoming more the norm, and both are seen as important. Interviewees in and working with think tanks were interested in building the research and writing skills in think tanks, to be able to produce articles for peer-reviewed journals; on the other side, in universities the call was for more skills in engaging with policy and being able to translate research findings into practical policy implications.

Despite innovations in communication products, the personal briefing of policy makers by researchers remains an important communication channel. Indeed, there are examples such as work in Vietnam which has been acted on more effectively because it was not promoted publicly but rather through “quiet” channels to reach policy makers. However, interviewees also noted that the extent to which researchers undertake such work and are proactive about it depends very much on their personal commitment; it is not something that is explicitly rewarded.

c) Early engagement is essential

There is growing recognition that attention is needed to promote the demand for research knowledge, not just its supply and communication. Early engagement between researchers and policy makers can influence research questions and increase the relevance and use of findings. The importance of ensuring connections between the two communities is not new: Carnegie, for instance, insisted on the Ministry of Health’s involvement in health research it supported in Africa in the 1980s. But there does seem to be a growing range of initiatives to enable this linkage. For example, Harvard University has developed its Smart Policy Design process to engage with policy makers to define its research agenda; it reports that this has increased the use of research. The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) uses the term “engaged excellence” to refer to processes to involve, from the outset of a project, all institutions potentially involved in any change the research might lead to or suggest. This recognizes the need to build demand for research. Early engagement is encouraged by a number of donors and other organizations such as DFID, which requests evidence of demand for research findings, and OSSREA, which requires researchers to involve relevant policy actors throughout the research process.

However, researchers have also found that it can be difficult to generate interest from policy makers to be involved in these processes without incentives. Finding a counterpart within a ministry to act as a champion has been key to make this process effective. Experience highlights the need for policy engagement early in the research process — i.e. when deciding what questions to ask — but this takes time and resources, which are rarely available.

d) Research–policy dialogue

There are indications of there being an expansion from a focus on the communication of individual research reports and researcher communication skills to considering the body of evidence relevant to specific issues and its communication. Professional associations, through their annual conferences and other processes, were identified as important players in pulling together new findings across a subject area. Think tanks also fulfil important roles by producing reports and briefs which pull together findings from different existing sources to inform policy. They are often more in touch with policy circles and nimble at responding to opportunities to engage.

A number of organizations are setting up spaces to support interaction between researchers and policy making. The International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) in Bangladesh brings together researchers and policy makers relevant to climate change policy. The IDS project Agricultural Futures found the need to build a space for researchers and policy makers to engage. INASP is similarly supporting such work in VakaYiko in Zimbabwe in the youth and industry ministries. Creating spaces where researchers and policy makers can meet and discuss confidentially is important. Interviewees reported policy makers' wariness of being at events with the media in case they are quoted. This also contributes to the importance of one-to-one briefings. Key elements identified for successful dialogue spaces are:

- an influential convenor — to ensure people attend;
- a skilled facilitator — knowledgeable in the subject area but impartial in the facilitator role;
- trust between participants for open dialogue; and
- ensuring that the dialogue involves people who can act on learning — this might mean taking them to more local levels outside capital cities, especially when countries are highly decentralized.

e) Community engagement

A number of interviewees emphasized the importance of communication with communities affected by the issues being researched. This spans engagement to inform research agendas, working with communities in research processes and ensuring good communication of research findings to ensure they can take advantage of any new knowledge. NGOs can play a strong role in this. Examples included an Oxfam-led research project on fisheries in Cambodia which was not only able to influence government policy but also ensured the inclusion of a gender angle and communication of research findings back to affected communities.

The link with communities is a noticeable trend in research in environmental issues, where there is a strong culture of ethical obligation to work with and provide feedback to communities. New initiatives such as RUFORUM (a regional university forum for capacity-building in agriculture) aim to build a pool of researchers with strong links to society. There is perhaps more innovation in this area of research communication than in others — for instance, with the use of the arts such as theatre for health messaging and social media to communicate research findings. Working with the media is also increasingly seen as a way to reach communities. For example, the ICCCAD in Bangladesh is acting as a scientific advisor to the BBC Media Action programme, which brings science and scientists to the village level to address problems communities face, such as regular flooding, and films and broadcasts the communities' progress.

4.2 Challenges

a) Quality of communication processes

A theme raised repeatedly relates to the poor quality of communication products and processes. Interviewees pointed to “briefs” which are long and badly written, seminars which are dry and boring, and journals which are poorly edited and not promoted. It was noted that researchers themselves are not always the best communicators, so the role of intermediaries remains important. Think tanks are an important player filling this role, though they also face challenges. To some extent the quality issue is heightened by the need to have multiple communication channels now and to produce multiple products, while only some, usually the production of traditional articles, are rewarded in universities.

b) Translation to policy implications and practice

An ongoing challenge to the use of research is the skills gap highlighted by interviewees to be able to translate the implications of research for policy and practice. The difficulty for many researchers to communicate their findings to “lay” audiences was often raised in the consultation, along with their tendency only really to communicate to their peers.

c) Politics of research use and policy making

Another important challenge referred to repeatedly relates to the difficulties of dealing with the political realities of policy making. Interviewees gave examples of research going unused — for example, on the prevalence of domestic violence or child labour in Bangladesh — because there is no champion to take it forward, while other areas such as those linked to food security have received considerable government investment to good effect.

Evidence use itself is an ambiguous term; policy makers may be increasingly using research, but only to support a decision already made, rather than being the basis for the formulation of policy. An IDS initiative researched the politics of policy processes and pointed to the need to develop strategies to address it based on well-informed understanding of the political context. Strategies might include challenging the dominant policy narrative through the communication of research or by working closely with the dominant groups making policy and keeping them involved with the research process — a choice of whether to try to achieve change from within or outside.

Maybe for this reason many interviewees referred to the important role of civil society. South American interviewees pointed to the difficulty of reaching policy makers in some highly centralized countries such as Bolivia, Venezuela and Ecuador. In response, some organizations have adopted a strategy to work through civil society to influence policy and practice. The media, NGOs and other advocacy bodies need to be able to interpret research for their role in influencing policy and monitoring progress as well as in their own programme development.

d) Sustainability and resourcing

The sustainability of communication processes and products was highlighted. Journal editors, in particular, emphasize their challenges. While online publishing is helping to manage costs, editors highlighted the difficulties they face, being based on volunteer time and needing to find funding for open-access journals. The issue of “predatory” journals enticing researchers who have limited

knowledge of the trend to pay to publish in them also limits research communication because new work is in journals not widely read or respected.

Incentives for communication tend to be limited to publishing. Researchers' engagement in broader communication processes is very much dependent on their individual commitment. Establishing the sustainability of communication processes is difficult.

e) "Lost" knowledge

The consultation heard that much local research and knowledge is currently "lost". Professional associations cannot afford to publish conference proceedings, so papers which do not go on to be published articles are not available; proceedings of the conferences are also often not widely shared. In addition, there remains a long way to go to make available the full quantity of research papers carried out for Masters and PhDs.

Language barriers continue to curtail communication between various communities. In Africa the Lusophone, Francophone and Anglophone countries were noted to have limited interaction, and platforms set up to enable communication between researchers and other stakeholders tended not to interact with each other across the language boundaries.

4.3 Conclusions and areas for INASP to explore further

The overall message in research communication and use is positive, with trends pointing to more and better connectivity between the research and policy making communities. However, the quality of these communication processes is an issue; importantly, dealing with the reality of policy making politics remains a challenge. A key learning is that any strategy development for research–policy engagement must be rooted in a deep understanding of the politics of policy making in the country.

Some key areas emerge as opportunities for INASP to consider exploring further. These include:

- supporting dialogue processes between research and policy making communities;
- building capacity in areas where skills are missing — writing, editing, quality assurance and others;
- supporting the development of new models for sustainability of capacity-building and communication processes; and
- supporting processes to ensure local knowledge is not lost — for example, support to conference proceedings being published.

5. Perspectives on INASP

The consultation asked for feedback on INASP itself. Some consistent messages came through.

5.1 Strengths

First, partners praised INASP's partnership approach. Many partnerships had evolved over time, allowing space to build trust and understanding as well as to identify jointly where to work together. Partners described the INASP approach as one characterized by flexibility, reliability and responsiveness, which has an emphasis on listening to partners rather than arriving with ready-made solutions. The partnerships were described as "very cooperative, not one way" and "respectful". Partners valued the participatory planning approach of INASP, giving partners space to

shape programmes themselves to meet local needs and opportunities. Worth noting here is the experience shared by Carnegie of its partnerships with universities. It found that 10 years was a good time period for partnerships — enough to do something though not solve all issues, enough to build relationships and not too long to establish dependency. They also commented on the importance of developing a relationship with an institution, rather than one with any one department in a university, given the dynamics and politics within them. INASP relationships with universities, research institutes and libraries were highlighted as very strong

Second, the INASP staff were frequently praised and the team described as excellent. Interviewees across the board referred to the integrity and genuineness of INASP staff and the organization as a whole. The quality of the INASP team in terms of their knowledge and skills was highlighted because they bring experience from other locations. Partners appreciated the INASP team's willingness to support them beyond the letter of agreements, beyond a funding relationship and actively contributing to support partners' work — for example, providing help with additional aspects of workshops supported by INASP with templates, advice on facilitation etc. "Excellent team" and "It has a big heart" said two partners, neatly summing up the general sentiment.

Third, INASP is valued, by its donors in particular, for being grounded in research and development — i.e. it is involved in "doing" the work, not just researching research policy issues. Donors and other stakeholders value INASP's networks and range of partners, seen as possibly unique among organizations working in research and development. Interviewees felt that INASP has established itself well in specific niche areas based on analysis of what is needed, though many also recognized that these need to be revised now as the environment changes with the expansion in the number of providers of writing skills courses and increased availability of e-resources.

Finally, both donors and partners all valued INASP's focus on sustainability. Partners, while at times nervous about taking on some of the roles previously filled by INASP — for instance, in direct negotiation with publishers for e-resources and hosting Journals online — recognized the appropriateness of this shift and at times that there are advantages to it — for example, journal editors who might be nervous about uploading their publication to a platform managed outside their country may have more confidence in a locally managed resource.

5.2 Results: the difference INASP has made

Interviewees identified a number of results of INASP's work. INASP is seen as having been at the forefront of the use of IT in libraries in particular, as well as other capacity-building initiatives such as scholarly writing. INASP is particularly known for enabling universities' access to e-resources and the acceleration of the development of library services. *"INASP has helped us a lot, not just in our work as libraries but also strengthen our relationships with researchers and editors... we have developed a lot with our own work but we would not have come so far without INASP. We are in a better position now than before. We have more influence,"* Head Librarian, Honduras. Researchers and editors reported results from the international exposure of research and journals through Journals Online. For instance, a journal editor noted the improvement in the quality of articles submitted to him for inclusion in his journal following its move to on the BanglaJOL platform, which in turn improved the quality of the journal and helped it gain its ISI impact factor. Another interviewee pointed to having new international partnerships as a result of the publication of research in journals online accessed

by academics outside. Interviewees cited examples of researchers being published due to AuthorAID training.

The website and INASP resources such as training materials were highly valued, and praised for being clear and easy to use. Interviewees described ways they are using and adapting these for their own programmes. INASP inputs were believed to have greatest impact when they fitted into a broader development and capacity-building process — for instance, in Pakistan, INASP’s support for access to e-resources coincided with a national push to develop higher education and the “research ecosystem”, so inputs were both able to benefit from and contribute to building a momentum for developments.

5.3 Areas for development

Some interviewees challenged INASP to increase its own capacity.

There were calls to strengthen communication about itself and its work so that more stakeholders and partners understand the complete range of INASP’s work and the difference that it makes.

Donors would like more evidence of impact, particularly at institutional and sectoral levels as well as showing how this links to national development and social and economic outcomes.

Some donors mentioned the need to shift to presenting proposals that will match the slick proposals coming from the private sector in competitive bidding.

Partners would like INASP’s network to do more to connect up all those working on different aspects of research development in their country, as well as internationally with those working in similar areas.

Interviewees would like to see more cooperation with other organisations to avoid duplication, particularly in the areas of scholarly writing training and the provision of e-resources. INASP’s work to integrate its digital library work in Bangladesh with that of the World Bank was acknowledged.

Lastly, there was a call for INASP to have a greater presence in fora working on research and development, to share its learning on capacity-building. This came from donors but also others involved in building linkages in research development. *“INASP knows just making stuff available is not enough; it would be good to hear their views on what models are effective.”*

6. Key factors to consider in INASP strategy development

This section discusses some of the important factors interviewees highlighted for INASP to consider as part of its strategy development.

6.1 Stakeholders

A number of key stakeholders recurred in interviews as important stakeholders for INASP to engage with. This list is not an exhaustive stakeholder analysis.

Stakeholder	Why?
Policy makers	INASP was credited with recognizing early on the need to focus on the demand side of research–policy engagement as well as supporting the supply

and communication of research. The difficulty of reaching these groups and engaging them was acknowledged but considered an important focus. There is likely to be learning here for INASP to share on models for research–policy engagement that works in different contexts and at different times.

Senior management of universities

These allocate resources and have the power: a) to integrate skills development into education processes — for example, writing skills into courses, training in supervision for staff; b) to create the enabling environment to support research production and communication; and c) as a collective group to be a powerful lobby group in a country given the emphasis on higher education.

Commissions of Science and Technology

These do not exist in all countries and are quite weak in many but have the potential and usually the remit to play a hugely influential role in: a) ensuring the relevance of research produced in a country by coordinating the development of national research agendas through processes that bring together researchers and policy makers; b) establishing quality standards for research; and c) taking on convening and brokering roles, given their connections with both government and policy makers as well as researchers. They will also be a key partner for private-sector investors.

Professional associations

These groups play an important role in bringing together research produced in a country on their given subject and communicating this through conferences and other processes. Many struggle to resource these events and are not able to publish proceedings, so the full value is not optimized, with presentations and unpublished papers “lost”. These groups provide a potential path to much of the locally produced research.

Think tanks

These groups have a growing influence, with new ones being set up by people with links to international organizations and government. In some countries there is more interaction between think tanks and government (rather than universities) which helps linkage between research and policy. They are more nimble and policy-savvy than universities. But they lack some of the skills of established universities (which remain important) — for instance, ethical guidelines for research — and also have capacity needs, such as in writing skills.

Civil society

Groups linked to citizen engagement, the media and civil society organizations, particularly involved in advocacy and policy monitoring work, need to use evidence — for example, to challenge dominant policy narratives, to argue for change and to monitor the progress of policies and fulfilment of government pledges — i.e. to hold those with power to account. They also use research evidence in their own programme implementation and have potential roles in feeding research findings back to communities. They have skills and capacity needs too.

Regional networks

Regional networks are already working to build capacity in research production, communication and use and value the support and input of INASP. Fitting with these groups’ own processes — for example, the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), CODESRIA, OSSREA, ACBF and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) can

help the sustainability of capacity-building work.

These stakeholders all recurred in interviews, as did reference to the networks with which interviewees were familiar — notably, librarians and journal editors. Publishers could be added to this list. In particular, the changing role of libraries and librarians was referred to often, given INASP's work with libraries and the need for more formal professional-development processes.

6.2 Country-level planning

INASP is valued for its flexible approach, listening to partners and designing interventions together with partners that are context-specific. Interviewees emphasized the importance of continuing this contextualized approach and suggested a number of factors which might guide planning at country level. Factors to consider in country selection and programme design are outlined below. These may also be relevant when planning links between countries. Interviewees credited the VakaYiko consortium focus on Ghana, South Africa and Zimbabwe as identifying three countries with enough commonality between them to make interaction and learning feasible and productive.

- **Level of stability and vibrancy of public policy space:** This guided the Think Tank Initiative in its country selection, recognizing the need for such space for think tanks to be able to make a contribution to policy, practice and development.
- **National priorities:** Momentum and the priority given to research and higher education in a country, which might be judged by budget allocations, policy priorities and stated aims, make a difference to what is feasible. INASP's successes in Pakistan were aided by the national momentum to build higher education and the research eco-system. The flip side of this may be that certain countries become the fashionable partner for all organizations so might become a crowded space for INASP programmes.
- **Infrastructure:** For progress to be possible in some aspects of INASP's work, certain infrastructure and capacities need to be in place, such as IT, a sufficient base of people with PhDs etc.
- **Quality of data** available in country and governments' capacity to bring this together and make it accessible.
- **Political system:** In the centralized systems of, for instance, Bolivia, Venezuela and Ecuador it is hard to work with policy makers because of lack of access, so think tanks work with civil society organizations. Access is easier in Venezuela because think tanks are more politically aligned. In Pakistan recent changes have led to uncertainty regarding where responsibility for aspects of higher education sit — whether at the federal or provincial level. Programme design needs to take this into account.
- **Skills and existing research capacity:** In fragile states and post-conflict environments capacity and political priorities may mean that a focus on supporting individuals' development is the priority to build a base for future institution-building. As some interviewees mentioned, the inadequate pipeline of people coming through to create a research community limits the feasibility of some initiatives. Creating networks and building institutions and sectors will be feasible later, but this needs a certain foundational capacity to begin.

- **Institutional readiness for partnership:** Institutions' readiness — for instance, in terms of grant management and transparency — will affect the extent to which others will work with them and so could limit INASP's role as a broker or indeed a partner.

6.3 Current trends and tensions

Interviewees highlighted a number of key themes and tensions in discussions about research development that INASP should consider:

- **Policy research vs academic research:** The current focus in the sector is on research for direct application to policy and practice. There is a risk that support to more "fundamental" research — for example, in the sciences — which has a less direct link to policy, is neglected.
- **Innovation** is a focus of funding and debate in research, science and technology. Innovation is a major interest of DFID and also features more strongly in the new SIDA research strategy. Sometimes innovation is discussed as a sub-set of research. Interviewees highlighted the need for more capacity to deal with intellectual property rights and stated that this may be an area for INASP to provide support.
- **Local capacity and relevance vs contribution to global knowledge:** A tension emerged between processes which encourage the production and communication of research relevant to local priorities and incentives which encourage publication in international journals, which can divert attention from local priorities and processes.
- **Focus on the poorest or where progress can be greatest?** Interviewees including donors highlighted the dilemma of whether efforts should focus on the poorest countries where need is greatest or in locations where progress and impact are most likely because foundational capacity is in place.
- **Demonstrating impact:** Stakeholders, including donors, acknowledged the challenge in demonstrating the impact of research, and research communication and capacity-building in particular. However, donors want to show linkage to social and economic outcomes. This may be an area where INASP can lead thinking and work, given that it is a common challenge. Areas to explore may be to look at what metrics are viable and meaningful for monitoring the impact of research communication, developing the theory of change or pathway from capacity-building work in this area to social and economic outcomes, possibly linking to current policy frameworks such as the Social Development Goals or Africa 2063 Agenda.
- **Customized or ad hoc?** INASP is credited with having a flexible approach to designing its work to be responsive to context. But there is a risk highlighted by some donors that this can mean its programme looks ad hoc and the collective contribution and impact of INASP is difficult to grasp.
- **New technology, progress and old problems:** New technology and the progress of many countries towards lower middle-income status offers many opportunities for support and new ways of working in research and development. But at the same time old problems such as poor equipment, poor analytical skills, heavy teaching loads and slower and expensive internet access persist. This provides a more complex environment in which to design strategy which needs to respond to a widening range of contexts.
- **New players:** The implications of new actors in research and development is still emerging. For instance, China is a major producer of research as well as a funder of development processes but often works outside existing multilateral approaches supported by Western governments;

Middle Eastern foundations are playing important roles in funding research; regional blocs such as ASEAN continue to increase their role and relevance for development, as do the regional development banks. Finally, the private sector, while not new, is increasingly influential in terms of a country's research capacity. National policies influence the extent to which the private sector invests in research as well as the nature of the relationship between the private-sector investor and national development — i.e. who benefits from innovations and new knowledge.

- **Current policy frameworks:** Some interviewees raised the relevance of the current policy frameworks and their opportunities for taking forward research development agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals, African Union policies and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. These policy frameworks may provide a structure on which to “hang” the pathway from INASP inputs to social and economic outcomes. They may provide funding and collaborative opportunities too — for example, processes in at least some countries to develop National Adaptation Plans draw quite heavily on research in formulating policy.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Themes

Despite the breadth of people's place, position and perspective, some consistent themes emerged in the consultation. First, there is a momentum right now, with positive change taking place in relation to the production, quality, demand for and use of research in development in the global South. Driven by increasing capacity, assertiveness of States and national institutions for equal partnerships and technological advances, there are opportunities for a significant step change in putting research knowledge at the heart of development.

Second, the scale of the task and complexity is vast and growing. The growing diversity of contexts and growing inequality between and within countries make the design of customized country approaches ever more complex as old problems remain and new ones emerge. The range of subjects referred to by interviewees and the fact that INASP has some activity or connection to most of them indicates the breadth of INASP's activities but also suggests that, given the size of the organization, while admirably responsible, it is possibly stretched. It is timely to review and consider focus areas and how to relate to the many other players in research development communities so its niche is defined and known, which will also facilitate working with others.

Third, the interconnection between research production, communication and use as well as the increasing number of actors in this area suggest the systems approach adopted by INASP remains relevant. The approach and the focus on sustainability were supported by key donors and other partners.

Fourth, INASP has some key distinctive qualities that are important to maintain, including its partnership approach and seemingly easy transmission of its integrity and genuine commitment to putting research knowledge at the heart of development. At the same time, skills in producing more commercially oriented proposals and a greater clarity in communicating its role, relevance and impact are important to develop, but without losing the qualities valued by partners from all locations — a tricky balance.

Finally, a common theme running through the consultation related to the changing dynamics in relationships to support research knowledge in development. This is illustrated by increased dialogue between researchers and policy makers, more equal partnerships between Northern and Southern researchers, the growing importance of regional networks to build capacity, and national institutions' work to establish national research agendas. The changing dynamics call for new forms of working relationships and present a challenge to Northern-based NGOs, which are welcome participants in these processes, to be clear about what they bring to the processes beyond being a conduit for funding.

7.2 Roles

Three roles recurred in interviews as important for INASP to maintain and/or develop further:

- **Capacity-builder:** INASP is acknowledged as a skilled trainer and produces high-quality resources. The need for initiatives to build capacity and, in particular, to improve quality in a range of areas was highlighted, including in writing skills, appraisal of data, data management, research management, journal editing, sustainability models for online, open-access journals, librarianship and researcher understanding of research–policy processes. However, capacity-building needs to go beyond standalone workshops and both be embedded in sustainable processes as well as include sustained support — for instance, through mentoring processes.
- **Broker and facilitator:** INASP's skills in building networks were acknowledged — for example, its support for consortia for e-resources — as was the uniqueness of the range of its relationships, which include researchers, librarians, editors, publishers and now policy makers, among others. Interviewees highlighted INASP's potential to play a role brokering partnerships — for instance, between the North and South — between similar professions such as journal editors, librarian professional trainers and others, as well as to facilitate and broker relations within countries. Interviewees emphasized the importance of the role of broker and facilitator to enable the needed ongoing dialogue and contact between research and policy communities in-country for development policy to become more evidence-based. INASP could also play a role in this, possibly in supporting such brokering directly or building capacity for good brokering and facilitation as well as sharing models that work.
- **Thought leader:** The consultation heard of INASP's potential to lead certain debates in research development where all actors are struggling. INASP's distinction of being grounded in practice in a broad range of countries and different contexts gives it legitimacy to put forward and facilitate thinking on issues such as impact assessment and models for research–policy engagement.

7.3 Next steps

This consultation is an early step in INASP's strategy development and aims to provide an overview of some external perspectives on research, development and INASP. To take it forward, a number of steps could be useful to include in the strategy development process. These include:

- adding INASP staff's own analysis of the external environment and of INASP itself;
- considering the areas identified as challenges or opportunities and how INASP aligns itself to these. Does it have something to offer? Who else is active in this area? Is it a gap?
- continuing discussions with specific stakeholder groups and/or at country level across stakeholders to explore options of how to address challenges and programme options; and

- taking up the specific invitations extended to explore potential future cooperation.

Annex 1 List of interviewees

Interviewee	Role	Country
Ana Marie Cetto	President of Latindex and Professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico	Mexico
Andrea Johnson	Program Officer, Higher Education and Libraries in Africa, International Program, Carnegie Foundation	USA
Anne Candelaria	Ateneo de Manila University	Philippines
Annica Wayman	USAID	USA
Anthony Muyepa-Phiri	Director General, National Commission of Science and Technology, Malawi	Malawi
Catarina Nilsson	SIDA Programme Officer	Sweden
Cosmas Milton Obote Ochieng	Executive Director of ACTS	Kenya
Deanna Ford	Director, Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD), Center for International Development at Harvard University, BCURE Director	USA
Deepak Thapa	Director Social Sciences Baha	Nepal
Dr. Dilshani Dissanayake, MBBS, PhD (UK) Lead/RPFC	Senior lecturer/Neuroscientist Department of Physiology, Faculty of Medicine	Sri Lanka
Fred Carden	Leads the Knowledge Sector Initiative (formerly IDRC)	Canada/Indonesia
Hannah Akuffo	SIDA, research cooperation	Sweden
Haseeb Irfanullah	Programme Coordinator IUCN	Bangladesh
Ibrahim Maida Inusah	Ghana Information Knowledge for Knowledge Sharing	Ghana
James Georgalakis	Director of Communication and Impact, IDS	UK
James Keeley	Head of China, UK, Africa Agriculture technology transfer programme	Beijing
Joel Sam	INASP CC, Chair of CARLIGH (consortium), Chair of GINKS (VakaYiko partner), involved in AuthorAID embedding, Director of CSIR-INSTI	Ghana
John Bagonza	Research Unit, Parliament of Uganda	Uganda

Kobena Hanson	Consultant and former Head of Knowledge and Learning, African Capacity Building Foundation	Ghana
Leandro Echt	Politics and Ideas	Argentina
Mariam Hamisi	University of Dodoma	Tanzania
Marie-Christine Gasingirwa	Ministry of Education, Rwanda	Rwanda
Mohklesur Rahman	Education Global Practice, Senior Operations Officer, World Bank	Bangladesh
Nathanael Bevan	Head of Evidence into Action Team, DFID	UK
Nelson Ijumba	PVC, University of Rwanda	Rwanda
Paschal Mihyo	African Institute for Development Initiatives	Tanzania
Patricia Villalobos Marquina	Latindex-Honduras Library Consortium Coordinator	Honduras
Pauline Taylor McKeown	Oxfam	Cambodia
Peter Taylor	Program Manager, Think Tank Initiative, IDRC	Canada
BJC Perera	President, Colombo Medical School Alumni Association (CoMSAA) Past President, Sri Lanka Medical Association	Sri Lanka
Roger Pearson	Former Chief of Research, M&E, UNICEF, Ethiopia	Kenya/Ethiopia
Ronald Munatsi	Zimbabwe Evidence Informed Policy Network	Zimbabwe
Saara Romu	Gates Foundation	USA
Saleemul Huq	Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development, Bangladesh, and Senior Fellow at IIED	Bangladesh
Scholastica Madzinga	Director at Ministry of Science and Technology in Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe
Shem Wandiga	Professor of Chemistry, University of Nairobi and Acting Director, Institute for Climate Change and Adaptation	Kenya
Dr. Sohail Naqvi	VC of Lahore University of Management Sciences and former Executive Director of the Higher Education Commission	Pakistan

Tade Akin Aida

Executive Director of PASGR

Kenya/Nigeria

Dr. Varuni de Silva

Co-editor of the *Ceylon Medical Journal* and Doctor
of Psychiatry

Sri Lanka

Annex 2 Interview checklist

INASP — External consultation on trends and perceptions — research, development and INASP

The interview aims to gather interviewees' views on trends, opportunities and challenges in research, evidence and development in relation to the production, communication and use of evidence. In addition, the interview is to gather feedback on INASP to identify key strengths and opportunities to build as well as challenges to address.

1. Perceptions of INASP

- a) What contact have you had with INASP (which aspects of its work do you know)?
- b) What has gone well in INASP's work?
- c) What could INASP have done better or differently (to be more effective)?
- d) What difference has INASP's work made? Can you give specific examples?
- e) What do you value in INASP's approach?
- f) What parts of its approach/work seem less valuable to you? Please elaborate on why?
- g) How has INASP's work fitted with others in the field?
- h) Are there key strengths INASP should build on in the future?

2. Research and evidence in development policy and practice

In relation to research production, communication and use:

- a) What is going well?
- b) What are the current challenges (e.g. structural, financial, incentives, capacity, other)?
- c) What is changing?
- d) What does this mean for an organization like INASP?

a) Consider research production — e.g. *are the right people involved in deciding research subjects; who is undertaking it; strengths and gaps in national capacity/skills to commission/manage/undertake research; funding and other resources.*

b) Consider research communication — i.e. the processes involved in ensuring that new evidence reaches the relevant people who need to be aware of it or who could or should act on the evidence including policy makers and people supporting them (civil servants etc.) and practitioners in development. But also others.

c) Research use — how does your organization use research and other evidence to inform policy and practice. How is your research used? How do you support research use? Others?

6. External trends and future opportunities for INASP

- a) Are there other trends in research and development which we have not discussed so far which are important for an organization like INASP to take into account in their planning for the next 5–7 years?
- b) INASP aims to put research knowledge at the heart of development. What do you think it should focus on to do that?
- c) What gaps and challenges have not been addressed by INASP or others in the field?
- d) Are there other areas you would like to see INASP focus on in the future? (How can they help you in your role in the future?)
- e) Are there new opportunities for INASP?