

Executive summary

*AuthorAID embedding programme:
an evaluation*

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Executive Summary

Background

In 2013 INASP's AuthorAID project launched an embedded stream of work. This was an expansion of its approach to train researchers in research and proposal writing in the Global South. Prior to this, courses were delivered primarily through face-to-face workshops and, more recently, through online courses. Research evidence established that course participants derived real benefit from the courses delivered with these approaches.

However, anecdotal evidence appeared to suggest that a more focused concentration of effort on an institution over time could create the critical mass of trained researchers required for institutional-level impact and scale up within and external to the institution and perhaps enable long-term sustainability. Consequently, INASP launched an institution-specific research and proposal writing embedding programme with a select number of partner institutions – both existing and new partners.

Four countries were selected and, within those, 10 institutions as follows:

Ghana: Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and, within CSIR, a focus on two of the 13 institutions – the Institute of Scientific and Technological Information (INSTI) and Food Research Institute Ghana. However, over time all 13 of CSIR's institutes have benefitted from the embedding programme, most recently in August 2017 through a Training of Trainers workshop for senior staff from the seven regional institutes outside Accra.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA), University of Colombo Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya Faculty of Medicine.

Tanzania: St John's University (STJU), Open University of Tanzania (OUT), Tanzania Muhumbili University of Allied Sciences (MUHAS), Tanzania Fisheries Research Institute (TAFIRI), University of Dodoma (UDOM) (note: St John's University was not part of this evaluation).

Vietnam: Thai Nguyen University (TNU).

A regional project for **Latin America** was also included with Latindex as the partner organization although this was not considered part of the embedding project.

Evaluation purpose and approaches

Between November and December 2017, the INASP Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) team conducted an evaluation of the "AuthorAID embedding" project. The purpose of the evaluation was to understand the factors that create a successful embedding programme – that is a programme introduced into an institution that subsequently becomes owned, contextualized as necessary, run, budgeted for and valued as important by the "recipient" institution.

Specifically, our objectives were to determine the extent to which:

- INASP has been able to train trainers within the institution to deliver the courses
- The institutions have the mechanisms, processes to deliver these courses effectively and efficiently
- Partners believe that the project is sustainable
- The approach has been successful/challenging in enabling the achievement of the embedding goal

The objectives of the evaluation were explored using two components – sustainability and learning – to guide the direction of the evaluation.

This evaluation used a multi-method approach, drawing on a variety of sources for its data, including:

- Document review
- Interviews with partner leads
- A focus group with partner leads
- Interviews of staff

Findings

There was never a single approach adopted by all partners towards the embedding programme, nor was there a single approach advocated by INASP in the development of the programme. In exploring how partners defined “embedding” within the programme, the evaluation reveals that there is no significant difference across the different perceptions. All partners spoke about “ownership”, “expansion”, “adaptation”, “incorporation” into the institution in order to build a much-needed capacity – better skills at research and proposal writing. Indeed, many partners demonstrated that “embedding” is adapting the core programme such that it responds to the specific and unique needs of the institution. Not one of these courses remains in the initial format and delivery approach first delivered by/via INASP.

Through interviews and a collective reflective exercise, the degree to which partners believed the project to be sustainable was explored. All the partners believed the courses embedded within their institutions to be sustainable – in one form or another. In other words, nobody felt that the courses would come to a halt in a post-INASP era. Only the Sri Lankan Medical Association (SLMA) had not run any courses in 2017 but had tentative plans to get the project running again.

In a focus group session conducted with the project leads, the group discussed what they believed were the ingredients of sustainability. It is interesting to note that the overwhelming criteria mentioned, expressed in differing language and contexts is about people - the quality of the people, their relationships, the way they work and their willingness to go the extra mile and the ground work they do and are willing to do to grow demand and support for the course. While important, it is very much less about regulation/policy and indeed even funding.

So, to what extent did the embedding programme enable the goal of “building capacity” to write good research? It is accurate to say that *all* partners were able to demonstrate the following, some with better-quality data than others:

- Increases in publication rates
- Increases in networking across scientists (peer to peer) in similar fields
- Increases in networking across levels of professionals – senior to more junior scientists for support

Two salient points arise from the evaluation of the AuthorAID project that have implications for the work of INASP going forward. These relate specifically to its approach, the nature of the outcomes of the approach for partners and the sustainability of this project beyond INASP’s involvement.

The approach

For a relatively modest investment of £332k (programme and associate costs) over five years the AuthorAID embedding project has been able to deliver 11 unique courses to 1100 researchers/scientists, adapted to their needs. A people-centred focus, flexibility and adaptation have emerged as strong elements of this approach.

Sustainability

While the fluidity of not pre-defining criteria such “embedding” has been a positive thing for the AuthorAID embedding project, one criteria that should certainly have been defined at the outset was that of sustainability and how to advance it *during* the project to ensure it continues *after* it. This suggests that more effort should have been invested in understanding what it would mean at the individual partner level at the start of the project and build that into the implementation plans.

This has implications for programme design methodology at INASP. INASP should include, as a key component of its approach to programme design, defining what sustainability means for the programme/project and building this (as a set of activities) into the project plan.

Recommendations

Moving forward, three recommendations emerge:

- Define/standardize criteria for running a course and assess partner readiness *before* its delivery
- Explore the potential to monetize our support to existing and new institutions through our course design

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- Identify the supportive and “non-technical” people elements of delivering courses and incorporate these into future module development.