



# Platforms to support strong and equitable research and knowledge

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# Executive summary

Research and knowledge ecosystems must be both strong and equitable to ensure that diverse talents, ideas and energies can be brought to bear on local and global challenges.

INASP's global learning platforms support the production, sharing and use of research and knowledge across the Global South and provide a foundation for capacity development and improving equity.

Over the past year, within a Sida-funded programme of work to support Strong and Equitable Research and Knowledge Systems (SERKS), we continued our commitment to the AuthorAID platform for connecting and supporting researchers; our platform for online learning; and our support to improving quality of publishing processes of Southern journals. We also supported eight national library consortia so that they now manage their relationships with publishers directly.

This work on strengthening global platforms complements our work to explore in more depth issues of inequity within national research and knowledge systems.

## Introduction

The Strong and Equitable Research and Knowledge Systems (SERKS) project built on the learning from the [Strengthening Research and Knowledge Systems](#) (SRKS) programme, developing and/or piloting relevant activities with partners, and initiating discussions and thinking on equity and inclusion within research and knowledge systems. The project aimed to lay the foundations for a future phase of work.

Our vision for the year was:

1. **Sustainability** – demonstrate with partners that sustainability is possible and achievable
2. **Commitment and local ownership** – partners make the necessary (tangible) investments and adopt approaches in their projects that ensure project continuity beyond INASP
3. **Relationship building** – grow existing and new relationships to build strong local teams clear about what work they choose to deliver and why
4. **Equity** – demonstrate equity within the projects in a locally defined and locally applied context

The year-long programme can be thought of in two over-arching strands:

- Continuing and building on the global platforms developed over the course of INASP's history and which formed the core of our work in SRKS
- Deepening our understanding of inequities in research and knowledge systems, with a particular focus on gender, through deeper engagement with a range of stakeholders within specific countries in a series of dialogue events.

We have reported elsewhere on findings from the dialogue events and reflections on gender discussions within these events. In this report, we present an overview of highlights and key learning from the work on global platforms to support the production, sharing and use of research and knowledge.

These global platforms underpin more focused areas of our work and provide the tools for partners to strengthen their own activities. A further programme of work is planned from 2019 to provide continued support to these global platforms.

*Cover photos show researchers who participated in AuthorAID online courses in 2018 and entered our "Capture your Research" competition: (clockwise from top left) Talent Chimbunde, Zimbabwe (doing market research on goats); Jacquelyne Arusei and colleagues (in a tissue culture laboratory); Kyaw Thu Soe, Myanmar (interviewing a TB patient); Sabita Gurung, Nepal (carrying out a rodent study, assisted by her mother)*

# Equitable access to relevant and quality research literature

## Supporting Southern journals

### *Journals Online and Journal Publishing Practices and Standards*

The Journal Publishing Practices and Standards (JPPS) framework is designed to raise the quality, visibility and accessibility of Southern research publications, especially to those most in need of them, by assessing the publishing quality of the journals in which they are published against a set of transparent criteria and awarding them badges.

All the Journals Online (JOL) journals were assessed using the JPPS framework and the badges were displayed on the journals at the end of the SRKS programme in March 2018. In August 2018, the editors were invited to apply for a re-assessment of their journals based on improvements they had made since the first evaluation. The table below shows the ranks at the end of SRKS in March 2018 compared with the percentages by March 2019.

JPPS Level	BanglaJOL (Bangladesh)		NepJOL (Nepal)		CAMJOL (Central America)		SLJOL (Sri Lanka)	
	Mar 2018 (%)	Feb 2019 (%)	Mar 2018 (%)	Feb 2019 (%)	Mar 2018 (%)	Feb 2019 (%)	Mar 2018 (%)	Feb 2019 (%)
Inactive	55	51	49	41	29	23	26	33
New Journal	1	0	3	9	2	7	4	0
No Stars	35	37	28	28	48	36	26	19
One Star	6	7	11	9	21	34	24	25
Two Stars	3	5	9	13	0	0	20	23
Three Stars	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

There is a complex picture of change across the JOLs, but a few points can be highlighted:

- During the year, 32 new journals joined the JOLs sites and these were all assessed and classified.
- There was a decline in the number of inactive journals overall, but Sri Lanka Journals Online (SLJOL) did see an increase. This category has the most change because, as time passes, if a journal is not publishing to schedule it can quickly slip into the inactive category.
- Most encouraging is that there has been an increase in the proportion of journals in the one- and two-star categories as the journals have made an effort to improve their practices.
- No journals are in the three-star category, partly because they do not have the required ethical policies in place and partly because technical support for digital preservation of content still needs to be put in place.
- Bangladesh Journals Online (BanglaJOL) still has some disappointing results, with a very high proportion of inactive journals and a small proportion achieving one- or two-star status.
- SLJOL still has the most advanced journals and has received a great deal of support from the management team at the National Science Foundation

During the year, 32 new journals joined the JOLs platforms and these were all assessed and classified but were not counted as part of the changing percentages in the table below:



Journals Online platform	% of journals changing JPPS level*
BanglaJOL	23
CAMJOL	35
NepJOL	38
SLJOL	38
<b>All JOLs</b>	<b>32</b>

\* Measured as a % of the journals on each individual JOL

Across all the sites, 32% of the journals changed their grade, either up or down from the time of their first classification to the end of February 2019. This is very encouraging because it indicates that many journals have engaged with the process. 19% of the journals moved up a grade, while 13% moved down. It should be noted that some journals have changed their classification several times.

Overall the JPPS project has been very successful in motivating the journals to improve their practices and publish their content on time. It has caused several journals to re-engage with the JOL project in order to avoid the inactive classification and it has also encouraged many more journals to join the project.

### *Peer support among journal editors*

The first journal editors' course was run in September 2018, bringing together a range of editors from various disciplines and geographies into a learning and peer engagement forum. As with all of INASP's courses, the online space for global peer support is inbuilt and over the course of time facilitated and supported to develop into an active peer-owned and facilitated forum. This does not occur overnight but is an ongoing journey! There are clear indications that this journey has begun through the editors' course; and the demonstrated interest and levels of engagement are encouraging.

## Southern library consortia

### *Library consortia develop systems and processes to self-manage e-resources*

During the SRKS programme, we progressively transitioned to local library consortia the management of subscriptions to online literature. At the end of that programme we identified eight library consortia

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*“We are writing to thank you for all the support provided at each moment as it has been a fundamental element for us to achieve the goals of the AUREA Network.*

*“We are pleased to inform you that we have achieved the formation of the Network with the 20 universities in the country, in addition to obtaining the support of the decision-making authorities of each of the institutions.*

*“A key element to achieve the signature of the rectors for the creation of AUREA was to work jointly with the Higher Education Directorate (in charge of regulating higher education in the country), which will undoubtedly be essential to promote some activities proposed by AUREA.*

*“We are aware that this is the beginning of a new stage for the Libraries of Honduras, which would not have been possible without the unconditional support provided by INASP. We will assume with great responsibility the new challenges of this new stage and we will keep you informed of each of the achievements.”*

Feedback from Honduras

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that would benefit from more support in the handover process. Over the past year, we supported these eight library consortia to achieve a responsible handover of the management of subscriptions to online literature, drawing on our learning from the process during SRKS, which has successfully prepared both consortia and publishers for direct relationships.

INASP negotiated subscription costs for 2019 subscriptions and the consortia are paying publishers directly, to build the relationship for direct negotiation in 2020.

Letters explaining the completion of the programme were sent to consortia and publishers in January 2019 and followed up with a blog post. See [blog.inasp.info/supporting-access-global-information-evidence](http://blog.inasp.info/supporting-access-global-information-evidence).

### *Future of access support within INASP*

Given the importance of 'information access' to our partners and our work, alongside a rapidly changing research context globally, we commissioned an INASP associate to undertake a review of the current situation in Southern research systems. This was done in the context of significant shifts in the research publishing and funding landscape globally and at country level. The broad remit of the study was to examine three assumptions that have underpinned INASP's work in this area to date, and to consider the evidence as to whether these hold true in 2018/19:

1. Access to research strengthens a country's capacity to address development issues
2. Researchers in low- and lower-middle-income countries need/demand access to research
3. Those needs/demands are not adequately met

The results of the review were published online (see [Access to research in the Global South: Reviewing the evidence](#)) and disseminated through a series of blog posts, including on the Scholarly Kitchen, a major outlet for discussion and comment within the scholarly publishing community. The report, and a series of internal discussions, have helped INASP to reflect on the ways in which we can best meet these needs through future programming. We will continue to discuss this and share plans as we move forward with our work.

## *Supporting individuals and institutions to produce, share and use quality research*

### *Online learning*

Between March 2018 and April 2019, we ran four major online courses: two AuthorAID Research Writing MOOCs (in the natural and social sciences), one Editorial Processes for Journal Editors, and one AuthorAID online facilitation toolkit course.

#### *Editorial Processes for Journal Editors*

The online Editorial Processes for Journal Editors course was run between September and December 2018. It attracted 217 registrants, although only 153 completed the induction. Of these, 59 (39%) completed all seven modules but many others completed individual modules. 478 action plans were completed (an average of 68 per module).

When the invitation for enrolment was sent out, some enthusiastic responses were received:

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*"Many thanks for this opportunity. We will surely enrol on this course. It will be an immense help for us as [an] editorial team"*

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*"You may not believe that our journal team discussed some of the matters that covers by this course. So this is gonna be a fruitful experience for me and others."*

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Comments received during the course about individual modules were similarly positive:

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*“This module is really an eye opener on plagiarism.”*

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*“I think this module is incredibly impressive. The videos and links to all the information is extremely useful. The module was more than explicit. It was excellent and I learned so much.”*

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### *AuthorAID Research Writing in the Sciences course*

The AuthorAID course took place in September/October 2018. 1,592 participants from 78 developing countries signed up (43% women), and 664 completed the course (a completion rate of 41.7%). The course included additional optional modules on 'research communication outside academia' and grant proposal writing. Of those who completed the course, 41% focused on the core research writing content, 17% took the grant proposal writing modules, 12% took the optional 'communicating research outside academia' module, and 29% completed all the optional material.

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*“I have learnt a lot of new topic in this course. The course content is perfectly designed and clears all the main points which are necessary for a researcher. The most interesting part of the course was the writing activities, which taught me how to write for an academic writing and also increased my confidence.”*

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### *AuthorAID Research Writing in the Social Sciences course*

After a successful pilot in March 2018, the Social Science online course was rolled out as a MOOC for the first time from 26 February to 8 April 2019. A total of 840 participants started the course (40% of whom were women), and 278 completed the course with a passing score. This represents a completion rate of 33%, which is lower than previous AuthorAID courses, despite the feedback from participants being extremely positive about all aspects of the course (see below). We will reflect

further on this statistic, and whether it was connected to the difficulty of the course content/activities, or the level of participant engagement.

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*“This is the best planned/executed professional online course I have undertaken and the resources are extremely useful. I look forward to participating in other courses in future. The knowledge gained has also helped me revisit a number of things as I work on my Master's thesis proposal.”*

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This was the seventh Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) that has been run by AuthorAID since 2015. In total we have trained 11,880 participants from 135+ developing countries, of which 5,578 have completed the course (a 47% completion rate).

### *AuthorAID Online Facilitation Toolkit course*

The AuthorAID Online Facilitation Toolkit online course took place in November/December 2018. 132 participants registered for the course. The course covered how to run an AuthorAID research writing course locally and provided an option to take modules on the 'course supervisor' role and the 'course facilitator' role. 61 participants completed the course (a completion rate of 46%). Of these, six took the supervisor track, 12 took the facilitator track, and 46 completed all modules.

Many participants reported that they had successfully installed and set up a Moodle course at their institution, and that we could look forward to hearing more about these initiatives in the future:

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*“I am delighted to have successfully set the AuthorAID course on our Moodle site. Our students and young researchers can now have access to it using the university calendar. Thank you for this training.” (researcher from Zambia)*

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*“I am learning that it is a process to manage to plug in a Moodle platform in my institution as a facilitator. I am however encouraged as I am seeing other institutions [other course participants] managing to create such a platform in their institutions. I do have the facilitation skills as emanated from various MOOCs learned (YALI, Future Learn, INASP) etc. I also have a passion to develop this Moodle and run the AuthorAID course given its relevance on the professional and career and professional development of academic authors. I am very convinced that I will share a success story on the subject after some time.” (researcher from Tanzania)*

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### *Developing and expanding a network of local moderators, facilitators and researchers*

Strongly embedded in all INASP courses is the development of local networks of resource persons to support course participants – both locally and regionally. This remains a feature of both our existing courses as well as those that we developed in 2018. For the newly run courses, we have identified individuals who have expressed an interest to play this role. 2019 will see this resource being developed and consolidated through the range of spaces on our global platform – journal clubs, mentoring spaces, discussion forums as well as the spaces within the courses themselves.

## Supporting partners with key learning approaches

Over the course of the year we analysed SRKS material on online and blended learning to identify key factors for the adoption of the learning approaches that we had developed during SRKS. An internal learning review identified key factors influencing online and blended learning and the importance of a needs and context analysis for making sound design decisions.

Factors that affect the readiness of institutions to partner with INASP and to incorporate AuthorAID materials and approaches into their institution were also identified; as well as the success criteria that underpin this type of work.

As a result, we have developed a series of checklists and guiding documents including:

- Technical readiness checklist
- IT skills self-assessment tool
- Needs assessment guidelines and online-temperature checks.

These documents and tools have now been completed and will be shared with partners wishing to incorporate AuthorAID into their activities. This will help us make informed decisions on partner selection for future work.

Following on from the analysis of the SRKS material to identify key factors contributing to the success of online and blended approaches in partner countries, we have:

- Redesigned feedback surveys on our online courses to collect new information and address gaps in understanding
- Disaggregated data by country and gender to gain new insights into differences between the countries, and to better adjust our future support measures to partner countries. We have complied and shared internal evaluation reports

We have analysed country-specific information collected from the context analysis in Ethiopia and Uganda to extract key information on the aspects that relate to a supportive environment for online and blended learning. These results have been compiled into a report that will help us tailor our capacity development approaches to the specific needs in those countries.

## *Enhancing the global access to and visibility of Southern research and knowledge*

### Supporting Southern researchers

#### *AuthorAID platform*

The AuthorAID platform enables researchers to establish mentoring and collaboration relationships. Last year, 1,074 requests were sent for mentoring or collaboration via the AuthorAID website, of which 322 resulted in an agreed task. Of these, 51 have now been marked as formally completed. The most commonly requested tasks were for ‘small edits’ to papers (84), study design (42), help with the publishing process (41), research discussion (37), and article planning (32)

1639 messages were sent between members who had agreed to work with each other.

Amongst the positive feedback, mentees identified helpful assistance with methodology; writing style and structure; and language polishing.

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*“Devayani is a great mentor. She is a highly talented and professional mentor. As her mentee, I learnt to write an article in a logical and coherent way, which will indeed add a great benefit to my academic career. Through her support, I am planning to submit an article to the Q1 journal.”*

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The platform has also seen growth; 77,134 users (56% new visitors) from 198 countries visited 364,525 pages on the AuthorAID website. The most frequent locations of visitors were Nigeria, India, Kenya, Ghana, Nepal, Tanzania, Pakistan, South Africa, Ethiopia and Uganda (excluding the US and UK).

The membership of the AuthorAID website grew to 19,391 members, of which 10,374 had registered as mentees (36% of which are women), and 542 are registered as mentors (of which 34% are women).

The numbers of women mentors and mentees have been slowly rising in recent years but are still disappointingly low. To address this problem, we will be partnering with the Organization for Women in Science in Developing Countries (OWSD) to build the capacity, confidence and profile of women researchers who are part of our network, as well as encouraging more senior women researchers to become mentors.

#### *Think. Check. Submit.*

INASP has helped to guide the direction of the [Think. Check. Submit.](#) initiative over the past year, both with communications and with ensuring that the initiative to guide researchers towards



publications they can trust is globally relevant. The checklist has now been translated into nearly 40 languages, many of which are official languages of countries INASP has worked with for many years. Some members of the AuthorAID community have contributed translations.

In July 2018, a working group, which includes a representative from INASP, met in London to discuss next steps for the initiative. Drawing partly on findings from discussions in AuthorAID during the final year of SRKS, we identified that there were some limitations in the current checklist in terms of explanations for people unfamiliar with research publishing and also in terms of broader understanding of the factors that result in people publishing in dubious journals. We identified the short-term need for a clarified mission statement, which was developed in August 2018:

*“Think. Check. Submit. helps researchers identify trusted journals for their research.*

*Through a range of tools and practical resources, this international, cross-sector initiative aims to educate researchers, promote integrity, and build trust in credible research and publications.”*

We also identified the need for simple research to guide our next steps. We anticipated that the next steps would likely include more in-depth research and development and/or promotion of educational resources. However, we recognized that the initiative is currently solely funded by small contributions from committee members so plans might be limited by availability of finances. In September 2018, we ran an online survey (see a summary of results at [blog.inasp.info/survey-reveals-good-guidance-trustworthy-places-publish-research](http://blog.inasp.info/survey-reveals-good-guidance-trustworthy-places-publish-research)). It revealed a strong demand from both researchers and librarians for guidance about where to publish and an appreciation of the services that the initiative offers. However, it also revealed a need for further educational resources and deeper understanding of the issues, as well as a need for greater awareness of the initiative amongst researchers.

These findings are guiding the initiative’s work in 2019. As a result of the survey, Think. Check. Submit. was invited to be a collaborator on a research proposal from a US university. If the proposal is successful, it will provide the more in-depth independent research that the Think. Check. Submit. committee identified was needed and will generate educational resources to help researchers choose where to publish. INASP was also invited to speak about the need for the initiative, particularly through the lens of INASP’s work, at London Book Fair.

A follow-up face-to-face strategy meeting of Think. Check. Submit. took place on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2019 to explore how the initiative can move forward to meet its refreshed mission statement and address the needs identified in the survey. Key plans going forward include:

- Explore establishing Think. Check. Submit. as an official entity (such as a foundation or not-for-profit organization) to improve scalability, credibility and ability to fundraise.
- Using some staff time donated by one of the other partners to produce an overview of the resources that have been produced across the partners in the initiative (including AuthorAID and Journals Online training materials) and identify elements that could be used in educating researchers – and providing tools for librarians to educate researchers – on trustworthy journals.
- Develop an interim communication plan to ensure that the small amount of communications consultancy work that Think. Check. Submit. is currently paying for is used most effectively to increase awareness of the initiative itself and of the steps that researchers can take to avoid being tricked by dubious journals.

## *Key lessons learnt*

In working towards our vision, we have identified a number of important insights into our work, from both the global platforms reported here and also the dialogue events that looked into the issue of research equity at national levels:

### **Online and blended learning**

Our learning about learning approaches and in particular what a supportive environment for online and blended learning looks like has been a cross-project effort, through which we have combined and

synthesised learning from work undertaken as part of the SERKS project, with learning emerging from other projects in which INASP is involved. This has included:

- Our experience with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and smaller-scale online courses delivered through SRKS
- Documents from Ethiopia and Uganda we had collected and used for the context analysis in SERKS
- A literature research and scoping workshops in Sierra Leone that were facilitated by INASP in 2018 through INASP's involvement in a DFID funded project Assuring Quality Higher Education in Sierra Leone.
- Attendance and presentation at the e-Learning Africa conference in Rwanda in September 2018

This resulted in new ideas on how online courses can be set up in an environment with limited access to internet by using a MoodleBox, a small offline computer that provides a local network and the Moodle learning platform. This innovative approach is currently undergoing testing at INASP.

Some reflections about the role of online and blended learning within INASP's capacity development approaches are shared in this blog post: [blog.inasp.info/inasps-approach-online-learning](http://blog.inasp.info/inasps-approach-online-learning).

## Online courses

- On the whole, participants found the structure of our current online course clear and functional, with videos and quizzes regularly commented on as useful and engaging.
- Participants found the key factors that supported their learning were often related to the direct support received through facilitators of the course, particularly when given prompts through email when a deadline was soon coming up. This may be related to the factor of time which often online course participants found difficult to manage when balancing homelife and worklife.
- Another key factor was related to whether course content was downloadable or available offline as a significant proportion of participants had challenges with connecting to stable internet as well as power outages. Some participants requested that future courses potentially could include printable resources to further address these challenges.

## Access to research literature

As noted, the study "Access to research in the Global South: Reviewing the evidence" confirmed our concerns that the current economic climate, technological contexts and the changing world of access no longer made viable the "one to many" relationship INASP has been able to cultivate and maintain between our partners and publishers in the past. It became clear that for us to continue to meet the needs of Southern users, to which we are wholly committed, INASP would need to re-focus and re-frame its information access work.

As a start to addressing this, we are developing and piloting an online point-of-need tutorial to guide any researcher, whether academic, policy maker or practitioner, to develop search strategies which equip them to retrieve research information effectively and efficiently.

## Keeping pace with change

The pace of change happening in our sector demands regular reflection time on the direction of our work at INASP to ensure that we are keeping pace with the needs of our partners and working in the best ways possible to support these needs. Starting the year (2018) with needs analyses by partners and a series of conversations with them ensured that we were well directed in where and how to situate elements of our support. Additionally, scanning our wider environment to observe trends in the publishing industry also enabled us to start on the journey of developing new and innovative ways to meet the research literature needs of our partners, circumventing potentially non-sustainable solutions.

## Supporting partners in their goal to address issues of equity in research systems

INASP's global learning platforms support the production, sharing and use of research and knowledge across the Global South and provide a foundation for capacity development and improving equity. Our work on strengthening global platforms complements our work to explore in more depth issues of inequity within national research and knowledge systems.

The dialogue events that we held during 2018 and 2019 in Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Bangladesh emphasized that the topic of "equity" is powerfully owned by all our partners. A focus on certain types/levels of researchers or indeed research, primarily one single gender, people without physical or other challenges, or a limited number of institutions robs society of the depth of its existing and potential talent. Consequently, it diminishes the overall capacity of research in the country, and the capacity of the country to achieve its vision of research contributing to its development. The commitment to equity in research was strongly demonstrated at the dialogue events and through the national agendas into which the dialogue outcomes are being incorporated.

Building on this commitment will be very important for INASP in the next phase of our work. We will ensure that our skills and other resources reach a broad network of researchers, editors and other knowledge professionals and is as inclusive of as many voices and perspectives as possible.

Our partners have structures in place to address many of their challenges. They also have many strengths and areas of capacity which they have built up over many years and which other partners and funding agencies have supported them in developing. This project has enabled INASP to identify key areas of support where our global platforms can add real value:

- Working with researchers and their institutions to facilitate the building of skills of researchers, lecturers, editors, and students - including through online and blended learning
- Supporting institutions to put in place systems that allow for the continuity and sustainability of their skills building – e.g. training and mentoring programmes that can be sustained with local expertise and resources
- Supporting greater publishing quality and more efficient research publication via a national platform.

Thank you to Sida for funding this work.

