



Unleash
the **talent**

*Towards an
equitable knowledge
ecosystem*

inasp



STRATEGY 2020-2025

1. An equitable knowledge ecosystem

We face many challenges in today's world – from climate change, to global pandemics and the lack of decent work, health and education for many people. We know that a strong knowledge system is key to a just, peaceful and sustainable world. We have seen important and substantial investments in knowledge systems across the South. But these are undermined by serious inequities.

There are voices that are not heard, talent that is wasted and research which is not used. There are inequities in who can create and produce new knowledge, in whose knowledge "counts", how knowledge is shared, and who can access and make use of research results. Building islands of excellence is not enough. What we need is a knowledge system that includes every voice and fosters every talent. We call that an equitable knowledge ecosystem.

This strategy describes how we will contribute to building equitable knowledge ecosystems that will unleash the talent, and ensure that research and knowledge remain at the heart of development.



A global coalition

We cannot do that alone. To achieve equitable knowledge systems, we need a global coalition of the many actors all over the world, and particularly in the South, who are working to support knowledge and research.

INASP has been on this trajectory for some time now, driven by our values and approaches to the work we do. But we recognise the need to change more, to show the world what working in coalition can achieve.

We need to be more collaborative, more responsive to the needs of our partners. Together, we will identify the best contribution that we can make to this effort - drawing on the expertise and experience of our 27 years, and facilitating connections and collaborations between our partners and other actors.

**Work with us,
let's build the global
coalition together.**

Let's move towards a more equitable knowledge ecosystem in order to

**Unleash
the talent**

This strategy is a **call to action** to organisations and individuals who share a common interest in **"putting research and knowledge at the heart of development"**.



many
voices, *many*
institutions,
many types of
knowledge

***An equitable
knowledge ecosystem***

Students at University of Ghana listen to their political science professor.

2. What's going on around us?

We are facing profound problems that alter the global and regional distribution of conflict, poverty, inequality and need - global challenges like rapid urbanisation, climate change and natural resource scarcity. Researchers, policymakers, practitioners, industry and civil society will need to work together if we are to respond and find solutions to them.

At the same time, we're seeing a global shift of emphasis in development agendas – from poverty to inequality – and the recognition that most of the world's poor live in middle-income countries, which has implications for the location of our work. There is also global recognition that many roles can and should be fulfilled locally by in-country actors.

The key trends in research and knowledge systems which have informed this strategy are:

- **Technological transformation:** Digital skills and platforms will be vital as part of the “Fourth Industrial Revolution”. *INASP has a role in supporting researchers and students to navigate and harness technological and data advances.*
- **Access to research information:** Recent years have seen significant changes in research publishing. But access to digital information and tools continues to be inequitable, and Southern users continue to be disadvantaged. *INASP will develop new approaches to ensure Southern access to research information.*
- **Broader perspectives on evidence:** The discussion on evidence is broadening, and much of the most interesting work and thinking is originating in the global South. *INASP will continue to support research and knowledge actors to ensure that a wide range of evidence informs development decisions.*

Sara Ahmed from Sudan researching the chemistry of plants used in traditional remedies in Africa.



3. Our vision and call to action



But the solutions to global challenges are greatly **constrained** by **inequities** in the knowledge ecosystem.

Important voices are currently **excluded** from addressing development problems because:

- **A limited number of institutions are privileged** by greater funding and greater access to decision-makers.
- **Women don't receive the training and mentoring** afforded to men and their voices are neglected in research.
- **Young people's** experience, knowledge and ideas are often neglected in the process of formulating policy and practice.
- **Dominant scientific methods** and measurement exclude important local knowledge, and within research some disciplines are privileged over others.
- **Policy makers face major technical and political challenges** to finding and using diverse and relevant evidence.
- **Researchers and students in rural universities, policymakers and practitioners** outside capital cities or from particular regions, or those who are differently abled, often face additional barriers to securing research funding, accessing learning opportunities or advancing their careers.

To realise our vision to put research and knowledge at the heart of development, we need to see a system in which these missing voices are heard.

We are reaching out to others to work together to build a global coalition that will help break down barriers, support an equitable knowledge ecosystem, and unleash the talent to find solutions to global challenges.

4. Our values

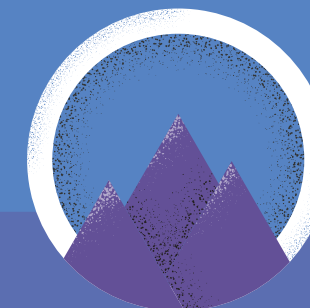
We are a values-driven organisation.

Our values reflect our commitment to equity, respecting others, acting with integrity, openness and transparency. They provide a lens for our work, both inside and outside of the organisation.



In it together

We collaborate with our partners and those we serve to understand where we are needed, and the expertise that each party brings to the table. We co-design and co-develop solutions as teams. We speak up when necessary and are equally open to being challenged by others. Together, we learn and evolve.



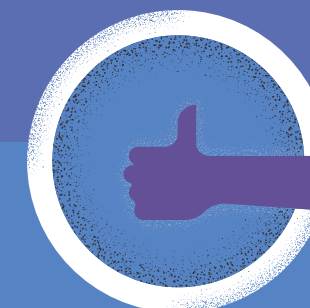
Making change last

Lasting change is our goal. We aim for a destination where we are no longer needed, and work hand in hand with our partners to get there. We are bold and try new ideas as an integral part of learning what works.



Every voice counts

Everyone has a contribution to make, and is listened to with deepest attention. We embrace differences and believe that diversity makes our understanding of the world more robust. We recognise the innate worth of all people and actively seek to address issues of power and equity within our work.



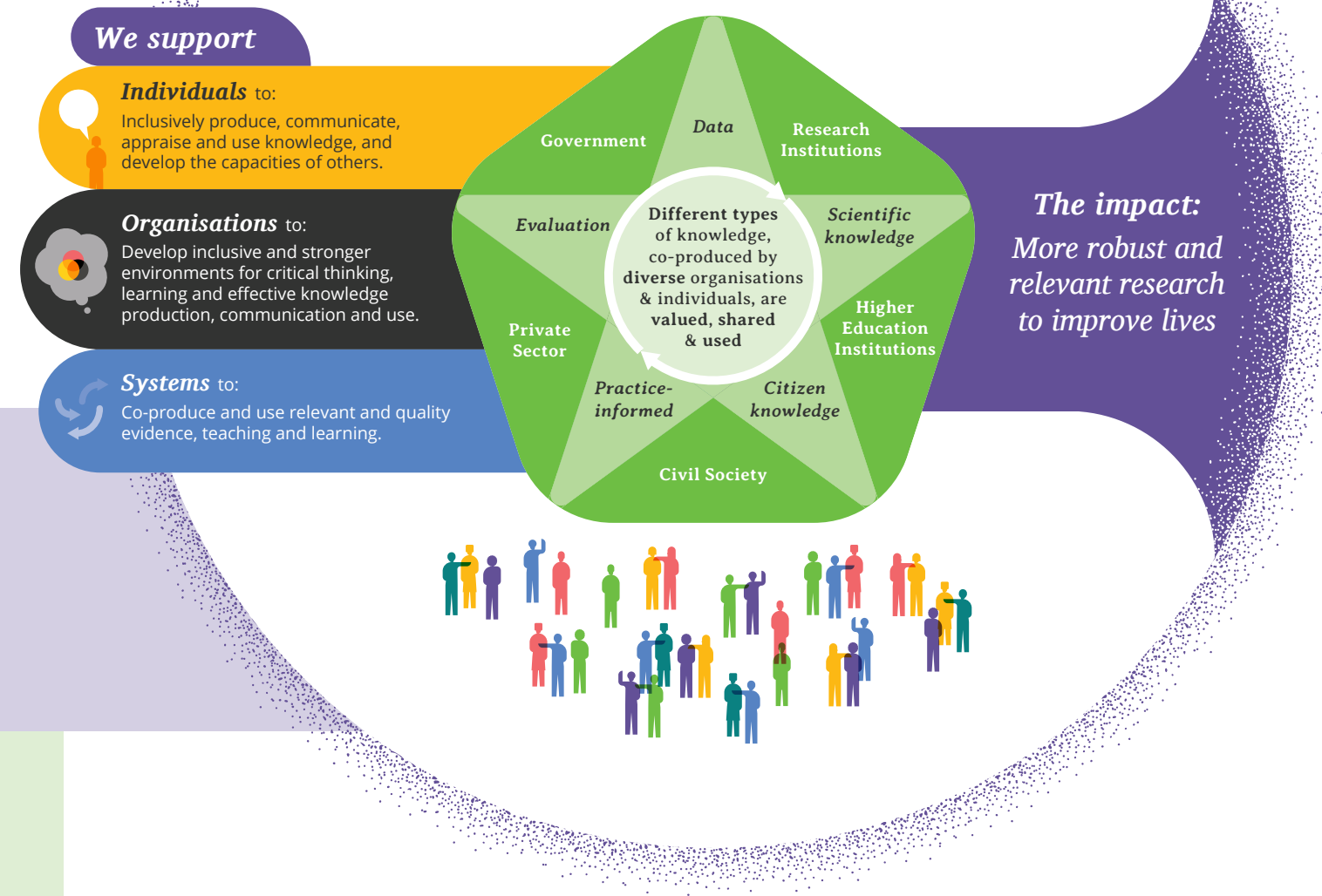
Doing things right

We are proud of what we do and uphold the highest standards of personal and professional honesty and behaviour. We are fair and open in our decision making and hold ourselves accountable to delivering the best work.

5. Our mission and pathways of change

Our mission is to support individuals and institutions to produce, share and use research and knowledge to transform lives.

We believe that contributing to stronger and more equitable ecosystems will enable and empower knowledge producers and users to address the key development challenges and improve lives.



We have identified eight distinct ways in which we will support change over the next five years.

HIGHER
EDUCATION
AND LEARNING

Pathway 1:

UNIVERSITY GRADUATES ARE ABLE TO PRODUCE AND USE EVIDENCE IN PROFESSIONAL AND CIVIC ROLES IN SOCIETY.

We enable university graduates to produce and use evidence more effectively in their professional, civic and private roles.

To do this, we work with higher education institutions to re-think and re-design their teaching and learning programmes.

Pathway 2:

RESEARCHERS IN UNIVERSITIES AND OTHER RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS ARE ABLE TO PRODUCE AND COMMUNICATE RIGOROUS, RELEVANT KNOWLEDGE IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

We enable researchers to design, undertake and communicate relevant and rigorous research to address critical development issues, and questions of interest to society as a whole – nationally, regionally and internationally.

To do this we work with universities and research institutions to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence of their staff to design, undertake and communicate research, to strengthen research uptake. We also provide support directly to individuals through online training.

We support universities and research institutions to forge relationships with policymakers, and civic and private sector organisations, to enable researchers to understand the knowledge needs of users, to create knowledge collaboratively with them, and to communicate it effectively beyond academic networks.

RESEARCH
CAPACITY

Pathway 3:

SOUTHERN RESEARCH PUBLISHING PLATFORMS ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE CREDIBLE, TRUSTED CHANNELS FOR COMMUNICATING SOUTHERN RESEARCH.

We enable Southern research communities to publish their own research, and to gain visibility and credibility for this work internationally and locally. By doing so, we aim to address the inequities in global knowledge production and ensure a richer knowledge base for development.

To do this we work with research agencies or consortia of research institutions in a country to develop and manage credible and trusted research publishing platforms.

Pathway 4:

SOUTHERN RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ARE ABLE TO FOSTER AND SUPPORT RIGOROUS, RELEVANT RESEARCH, TEACHING AND LEARNING, IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

We support a more diverse group of universities and research institutions to participate in, produce and publish research, and to strengthen their teaching and learning.

To do this we deliberately seek to work with “non-apex” universities and institutions, particularly those outside of capitals or major cities, develop longer term partnerships, and work together to understand aims, identify needs, and strengthen organisational capacity.

Pathway 5:

PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND PARLIAMENTARY STAFF ARE ABLE TO PRODUCE AND USE EVIDENCE TO IMPROVE THE POLICY AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, TO ACHIEVE BETTER DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES.

We enable civil servants, public officials and parliamentary staff to make better use of evidence in the policy-making and decision-making processes.

To do this we provide training and support to individuals, support organisations to develop their own in-house training programmes, and support networking between individuals.

Pathway 6:

PUBLIC AGENCIES CAN SYSTEMATICALLY AND STRATEGICALLY IDENTIFY AND MEET THEIR EVIDENCE NEEDS TO INFORM POLICY-MAKING PROCESSES.

We support public agencies to identify and use a diverse range of rigorous and relevant evidence so that they can systematically draw on a strong and inclusive knowledge base, within the political processes of policy making.

To do this we work with governments, public agencies and parliaments to strengthen their systems for evidence use.

Thoa Tran treating apical meristem for flowering in a pineapple farm.



Pathway 7:

FUNDERS OF RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS BETTER UNDERSTAND THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF RESEARCH AND THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS OF SUPPORTING SOUTHERN RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE USE.

We help funders and other actors to understand the most effective ways of supporting Southern knowledge production and use.

To do this we ensure that our own learning, and that of others, is distilled and communicated to drive engagement with and uptake of effective capacity development within research and knowledge systems.

Pathway 8:

NORTHERN RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS AND NETWORKS ARE BETTER ABLE TO SUPPORT SOUTHERN RESEARCHERS.

We work with Northern research institutions to help them to understand needs, develop more equitable partnerships with, and provide more effective support to, Southern institutions.

To do this we use our experience and that of our partners to show what more equitable partnership means and requires, and work directly with Northern universities to develop more effective programmes of support.

6. Our approach: How we work and what is changing

In order to deliver this strategy, we are ready to transform the way we work. By living our values, we will demonstrate the power of equitable, collaborative partnerships.

We have identified five specific areas where INASP can add value.

In the global coalition, INASP is one actor among others, each bringing their unique attributes to the table.

The
global
coalition

1. Our expertise in adult pedagogy, online learning and digital platform development will help deliver global platforms to connect, support and empower Southern researchers.
2. Our proximity to Oxford-based development research, policy and operational agencies will enable Southern partners to access a wide range of knowledge and expertise.
3. Our adaptive management approach across our operational work with partners will help ensure effective implementation and identify lessons that can be applied by others.
4. Our relationship with Northern research donors will help Southern organisations to meet their increasingly stringent demands for financial and project management capacity, and encourage donors to fund research in ways that build rather than undermine Southern capacity.
5. Our relationship with UK-based researchers interested in development issues will help them to establish equitable relationships with Southern partners and undertake research in ways that strengthen Southern capacity and improve the usefulness and use of their research.

Evolving our work

We have identified eight specific ways in which our programme work will evolve to meet this new way of working.

1. We will develop our online learning platforms to evolve a more community-driven model of supporting learning and generating knowledge, and reduce our climate impact.
2. We will extend our work on gender in knowledge systems to do more gender responsive pedagogy, working with new partners and seeking to play a leadership role in the sector.
3. We will aim to bring our expertise in online capacity development, pedagogy, evidence-informed policy and research impact to peer-to-peer networks of research and practice.
4. We will connect our work better within countries, to improve the quality, visibility and impact of our work. We want to develop a better understanding of context as we deliver projects and understand how our work is supporting equity across the knowledge system.
5. We will seek to expand the global coalition, exploring new regions in which our collective knowledge and expertise can offer value – beginning with South East Asia – and also bringing our experience to regions in the North, such as the Western Balkans.
6. We will apply our concept of an equitable knowledge ecosystem to understand and support the production and use of research and evidence in specific sectors or thematic areas.
7. We will do more monitoring, evaluation, research and learning (MERL) work beyond our own projects, supporting other organisations in the knowledge sector to improve their own MERL.
8. We will seek to be bolder in our articulation and positioning of our intellectual leadership and how we contribute to making the case for greater investment in research and knowledge systems.

Partnership

Partnership has long been, and continues to be, essential to the way we work.

PARTNERSHIP MATTERS TO INASP BECAUSE IT IS THE RIGHT WAY TO WORK, AND IS DRIVEN BY OUR VALUES, AND BECAUSE IT IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF ACHIEVING REAL AND LASTING CHANGE.

Partnerships are absolutely central to the global coalition. But we expect the mode in which we work, as partners, will change. We will continue to lead some projects, but will also work increasingly with Southern partners that are leads and grant-holders.

Our most important partnerships are with organisations within Southern knowledge systems. Enabling change is about empowering partners to achieve their own ambitions, develop their own capacity and unleash their talent. An important part of our role in the global coalition is to not only work with individual partners, but to connect them together, to foster learning, bring new insights, and to enable more significant change.

Research and knowledge systems are broad and complex – and we are a small organisation. We forge strategic partnerships and alliances with like-minded organisations who share our aims of strengthening knowledge systems and bring expertise that we lack.

Capacity development

Our approach to capacity development is founded on deep expertise and technical knowledge.

BUT WE ALSO RECOGNISE THAT POWER AND POLITICS PLAY A HUGE ROLE IN ADDRESSING PROCESSES OF CHANGE WITHIN COMPLEX KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS.

Too often a lack of capacity is assumed. We start by recognising the capacity that already exists. Our approach is to identify how we augment and add value to this existing capacity, and ensure we understand the social and political context in which capacity is being strengthened.

Effective capacity development requires that we work at multiple levels. We work with our partners to strengthen capacity at institutional and individual levels, and to be able to work more effectively with other organisations as part of a national knowledge ecosystem.

Our approach is guided by INASP's Learning and Capacity Development Framework, which has three defining elements:

- 1. A multidirectional and interrelated approach to change** enabling us to enter at any point of the learning journey.
- 2. Mutual learning** – we work together to define the problem and identify the most appropriate solutions.
- 3. Learner-led, technology-enhanced capacity development** founded on the theory and practice of effective adult learning.



Boris Alladassi and a colleague identify sources of resistance to bacterial disease in common beans in Uganda.

Learning and adapting

We believe that adaptive approaches to programme design and delivery are vital to enable us to shape our work to local contexts and the changing needs of our partners.

OUR APPROACH IS UNDERPINNED BY A COMMITMENT TO CONTINUAL LEARNING FROM OUR OWN PRACTICE AND THAT OF OUR PARTNERS.

We design and embed monitoring and evaluation frameworks at the point of programme conceptualisation. This generates robust evidence and learning to inform ongoing programme development. Programme approaches and activities are re-visited and re-shaped based on proactive engagement with the data and evidence as it emerges.

We are committed to facilitating and sharing this learning within INASP, between partners and with the wider sector.

As well as supporting the development of a “learning capacity” within INASP and the partners we work with, INASP is able to support other organisations and projects in the growth of these skills.

Influencing

Achieving change means influencing those with power, locally and internationally, as well as developing capacity.

OUR INFLUENCE GOAL IS TO ACHIEVE GREATER AND LASTING CHANGE BEYOND THE IMPACT OF OUR OWN PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES.

Our values and our commitment to equitable knowledge ecosystems mean that the way we do our work is distinct. We have both the privilege and the responsibility to play a role in influencing those with power to think differently about how research for development is done.

We will bring INASP's values and an equitable knowledge ecosystem lens to existing debates and interactions, with a particular focus on approaches to capacity development, partnership, learning and considering issues of gender and equity within research for development programmes.

Reflecting our ambition to work across systems to support change, and to influence the people and institutions who hold power, we will do more to identify opportunities to act as a convenor nationally and internationally – within and between the countries in which we work, and also in the North.

Gender and diversity

We believe that every voice counts and we must recognise and support the inclusion of diverse voices and experiences in our work, and in knowledge ecosystems.

OUR AMBITION IS TO MAKE OUR WORK GENDER RESPONSIVE AND WHERE WE CAN ENABLE IT TO BE GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE.

We nevertheless recognise that gender and diversity must be understood within the specific cultural, social and political contexts in which our partners work.

We will support partners to improve the inclusiveness of learning environments through teaching practices, recognise that practices of research production and evidence use are gendered, and that opportunities must be created for women as well as men to access training and support and to advance

their careers. We will work with partners to strengthen equity within their organisations, by identifying the ways in which processes and policies may create structural biases which exclude or disadvantage individuals according to their gender.

Progressively we will seek to understand and address other dimensions of power and exclusion within the systems in which we work and the intersections between different issues and identities.

An important way in which we will seek to make our work more inclusive is by reflecting on our own role in knowledge systems, our contribution to spaces of discussion and debate and our own organisational practices.

7. Progress: What does the future look like?

IMAGINE IT IS 2025. WE ARE STILL STRIVING TOWARDS PUTTING RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE AT THE HEART OF DEVELOPMENT, WE HAVE TRIED TO LIVE OUR VALUES, AND WE ARE COLLABORATING WITH PARTNERS IN THE GLOBAL COALITION. WHAT MIGHT WE BE ACHIEVING TOGETHER?

- A vast range of new, fresh voices being heard for the first time, with new skills being brought to the global coalition.
- Measurable contributions – real-life impacts – that this new knowledge and research will be making to development priorities all around the world.
- New ways of working, fully embedded in INASP's operations. Still nascent, the global coalition will have a long way to go before it reaches its full potential. But new partners will be joining the network, from both the global North and the global South.
- The distinction between Northern and Southern roles will be breaking down and we will have shown the sector that this is an effective, sustainable way of working, which has facilitated us and our partners in delivering real-world results.

And in some sectors and in some countries we will see the beginning of living examples of truly equitable knowledge ecosystems.





*Research and knowledge
at the heart of development*

Photography ©

p.1 Dominic Chavez/World Bank

p.4-5 Dominic Chavez/World Bank

p.7 Sara Ahmed

p.16-17 Thoa Tran

p.22-23 Boris Alladassi

p.26-27 Yulia Agnis

Design | squarebeasts.net

 [@INASPinfo](https://twitter.com/INASPinfo)

 facebook.com/inasp.info

inasp.info

