



How do our partners feel about working with INASP?

Results from a partnership satisfaction survey undertaken in March 2020

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Introduction

Partnership matters to INASP. Firstly, because it is the right way to work, and is driven by our values. Secondly, because it is the most effective way of achieving real and lasting change.

But while partnerships can be powerful, they are rarely easy. They require commitment, hard work, the preparedness to learn, and a willingness to challenge each other.

Partnerships become more challenging in an environment where much of the work we do is not simply through a project with a defined start and end date, but through contract-based funding. These often combine a focus on results with compliance with quite detailed terms and conditions and can restrict the flexibility of both INASP and our partners to respond to challenges we encounter.

To understand how well INASP is doing as a partner, we ran a pilot survey in 2019, and from this developed a new survey of all current project partners in March 2020. The results of this survey are presented below.

We are grateful to all those who took the time to respond, and to help us learn how we are doing, and how we can do better.

Our pilot survey and the development of our new strategy

This survey builds on a pilot survey undertaken in July 2019. The pilot survey was our first attempt to gauge how well we were living up to our ambitions to be a good partner. We received responses from 17 individuals representing 11 organisations. It helped us to understand how our partners experience working with INASP, and where we could do better.

The results of the pilot were largely positive, valuing the support that we had been able to provide, our responsiveness to partner needs, the quality of interactions between INASP team members and partners, and our willingness to listen and to discuss problems that arose. Nevertheless, the survey also highlighted areas where we could improve. These related to our ability to understand the contexts in which our partners operate, our understanding of partner strategies rather than simply our own, and promotion of our partners work alongside ours.

We considered these results internally and committed to do more. The study was undertaken alongside – and fed directly into – the process of developing INASP’s 2020-2025 strategy (www.inasp.info/strategy). Most importantly it led to a commitment to repeat the survey twice per year, to develop a “charter” setting out our commitments to partners, and to ensure that the principles of partnership are embedded clearly within the development and delivery of our programme.

This survey

What follows here are the results of our second survey, undertaken in March 2020, just before the COVID-19 crisis emerged. While these results were gathered pre-COVID, the pandemic has further highlighted the importance and strength of our partnerships, and the responsibility INASP bears in living up to its partnership ambitions.

Note: the analysis of survey results was undertaken in-house by INASP. While we have offered our interpretation, we have also presented all the data here in the interests of transparency.

Who responded to this survey?

21 individuals representing 17 partner organisations responded to this survey.

Where are our partners based?

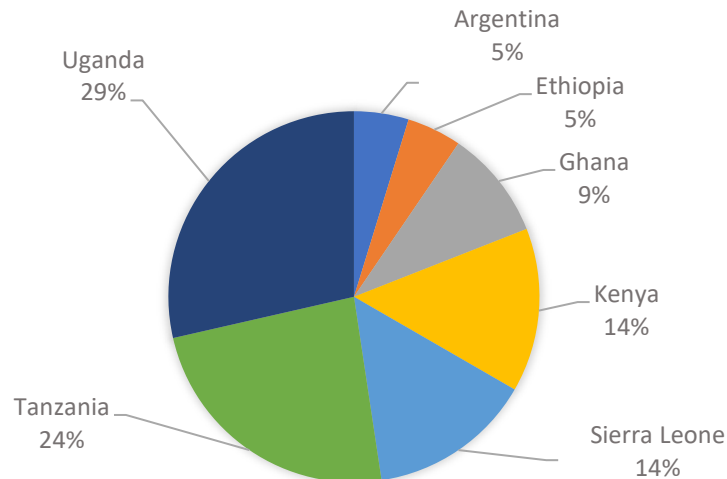


Figure 1: Country in which partner is based (n=21)

In March 2020, most of INASP’s active partnerships (which we defined as a collaboration supported through a current funded project) were in Africa.

15 responses (73%) came from East Africa and 5 responses (23%) came from West Africa. Our only non-African respondent came from Argentina. This fits the profile of our currently active projects.

Over two thirds of respondents (14 individuals) worked in a university. Three were based in NGOs, one in a government ministry, department or agency, and three were part of a network or association.

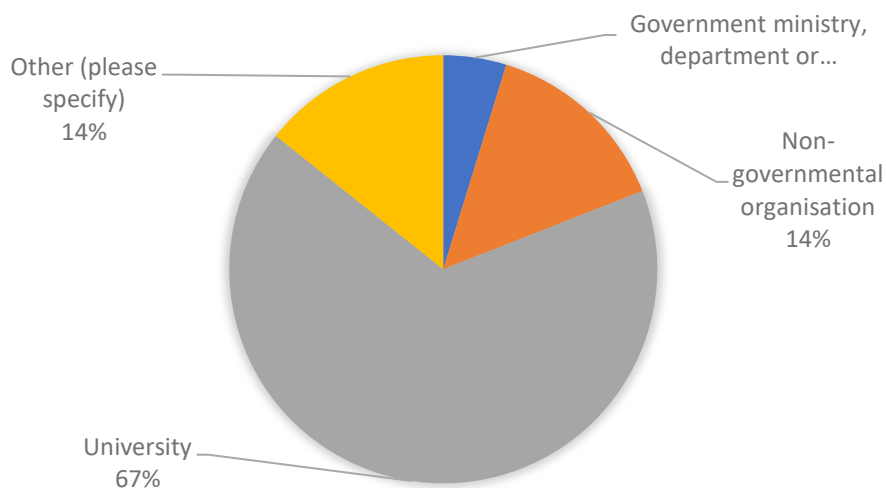


Figure 2: Type of organisation in which the respondent is based (n=21)

What is the nature of our partners' relationship with INASP?

The majority of respondents were working in a project led by INASP or had been commissioned by INASP to undertake a piece of work (82%). Two responses (9%) came from individuals working alongside INASP in a project led by another organisation, and two responses (9%) came from individuals working for an organisation leading a project in which INASP was a partner.

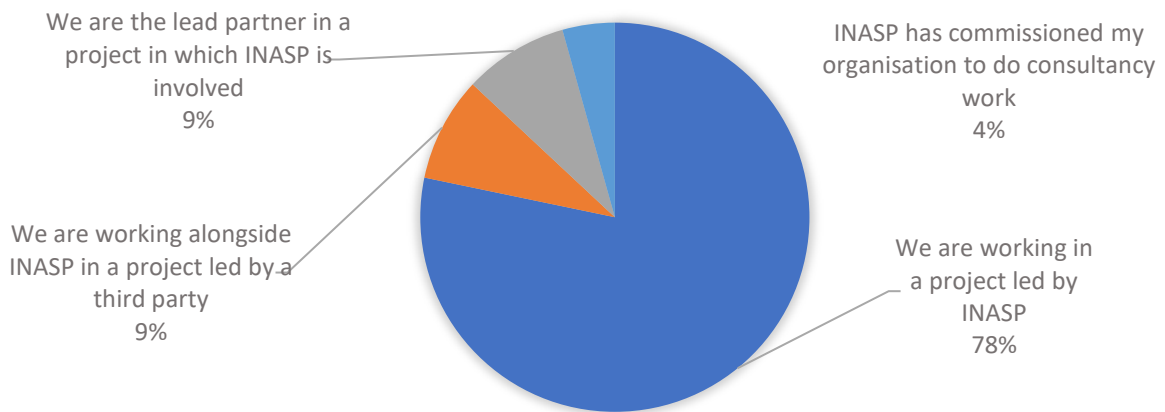


Figure 3: Type of relationship that the partner has with INASP (n=21)

How long have partners worked with INASP?

Two thirds of respondents (66%) had been a partner with INASP for between two and five years. This fits the profile of our current project relationships, most of which were established in their current form since 2018.

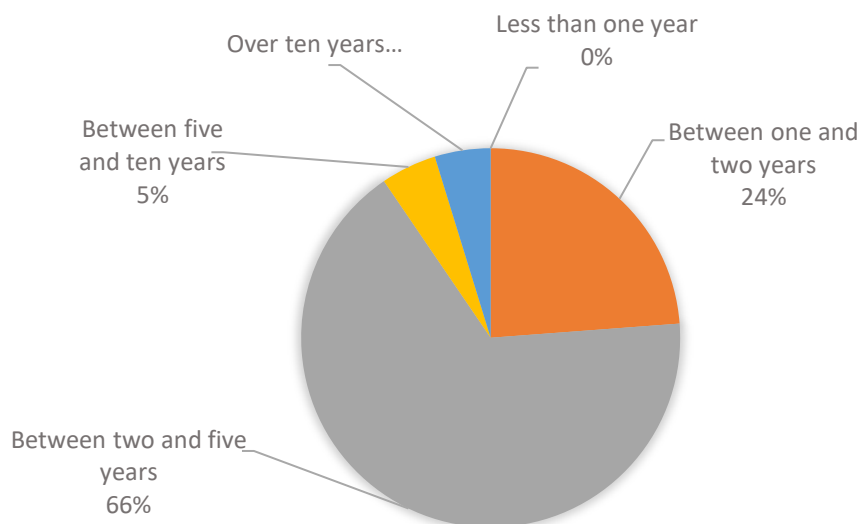


Figure 4: How long have partners worked with us? (n=21)

Who completed the survey?

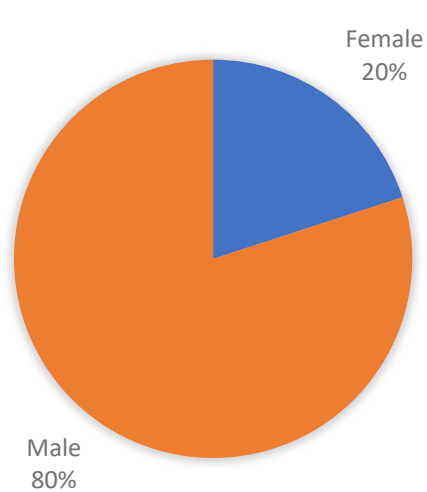


Figure 5: Gender of person completing survey

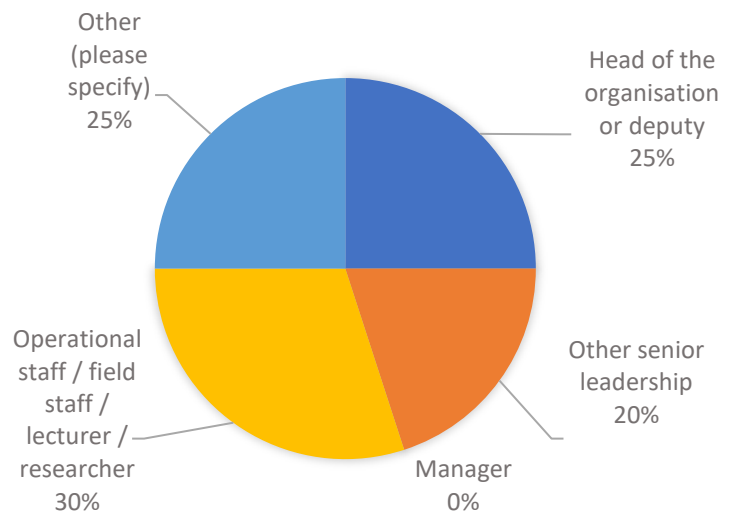


Figure 6: Position within organisation of person completing the survey

How has INASP supported our partners?

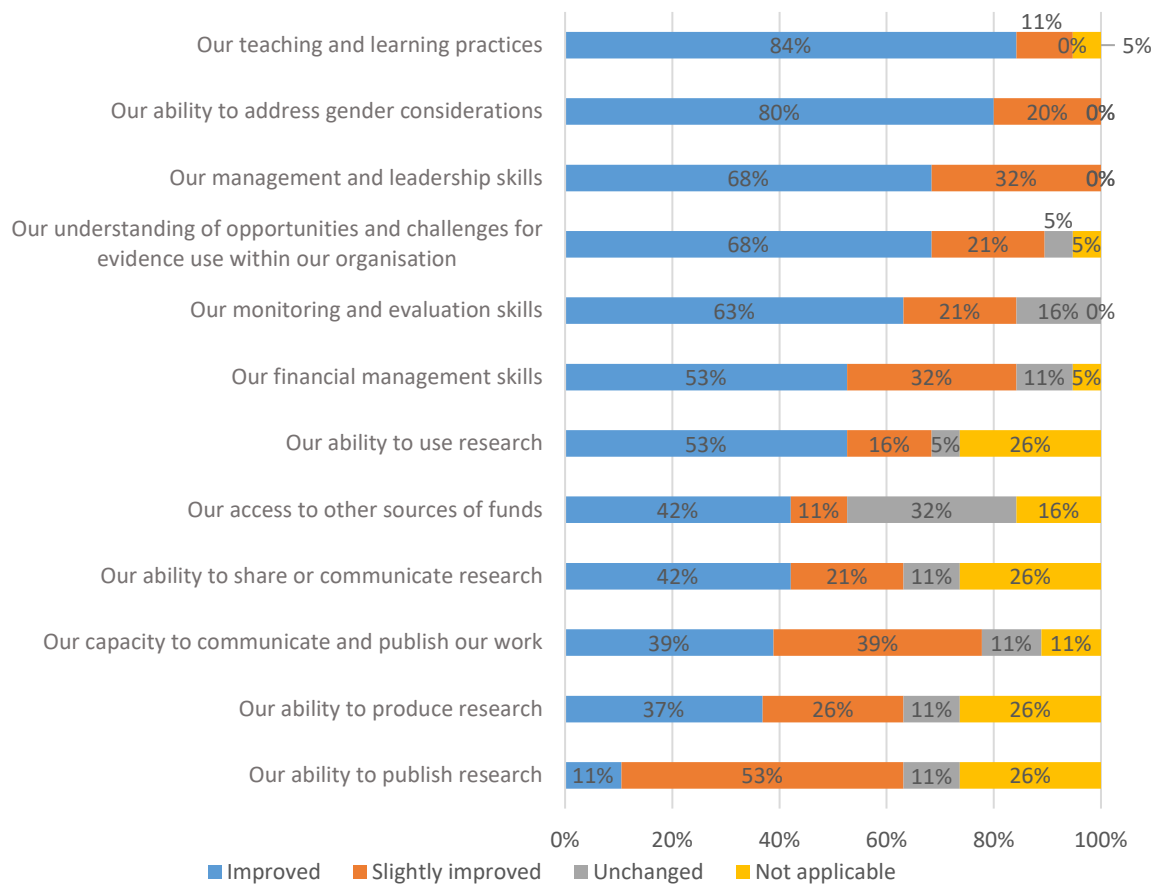


Figure 7: How collaborating with INASP had enabled partners to improve the work of their organisations (n=20)

INASP supports partners in a number of areas of their work, either directly related to the creation and use of knowledge and evidence, or by supporting the organisational systems which underpin this work.

The ability to address gender considerations in their work, improving teaching and learning practices and improvements to management and leadership skills were identified as the areas in which INASP’s support had enabled partners to make the greatest improvements to their work.

The ability to communicate and publish their work, or to produce and publish research, were identified as areas where INASP’s support had made least contribution. Most of INASP’s support in research production and research publishing is to individuals, through our AuthorAID platform, and thus is not captured by this survey. The figures therefore reflect the distribution of INASP’s current projects.

The area where the greatest proportion of respondents felt their organisation’s capacity was unchanged through working with INASP was in their access to other sources of funding (32%), though 42% of respondents felt that their access to funding had improved. Access to funding is in many ways a by product of our work with partners, rather than a direct aim of the project or partnership, but it is nevertheless an important dimension of collaboration. The fact that just over half of respondents felt their access to funding had improved through working with INASP is therefore encouraging.

We asked partners to elaborate on how the support they had received had been useful. Responses highlighted specific dimensions of existing projects – notably around teaching practice and improvements to university learning environments, more effective approaches to capacity strengthening, better monitoring, evaluation and learning, and forging stronger connections with other organisations in the country or the region.

How do partners rate the support that INASP provides?

How do partners rate the technical quality of INASP’s work?

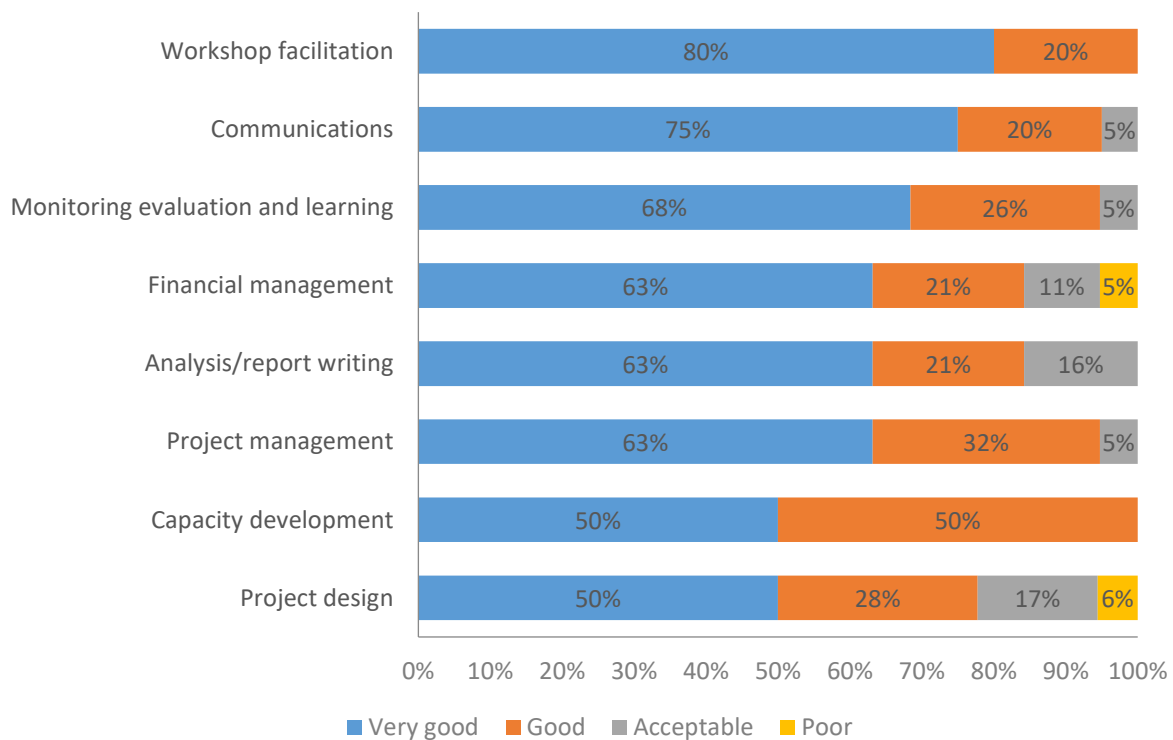


Figure 8: How survey respondents rated the technical quality of INASP’s work in key areas (n=20)

We asked partners to rate the quality of the support they received. When asked to elaborate, respondents often referenced capacity building activities - both through face-to-face trainings or workshops and online courses. Areas of capacity that were referenced included teaching and facilitation; research skills; and project management.

Over 75% of respondents rated INASP's support as good or very good in all areas. The most valued areas of INASP's support were:

- Workshop facilitation (80% very good, 20% good)
- Communications (75% very good, 20% good, 5% acceptable)
- Monitoring, evaluation and learning (68% very good, 26% good, 5% acceptable).

All respondents rated INASP's support in capacity development as very good or good.

While around 80% of respondents rated our support as good or very good, the areas that had the highest proportion of respondents answering acceptable or poor – i.e. where INASP performed least well – were:

- Project design (50% very good, 28% good, 17% acceptable, 6% poor)
- Financial management (63% very good, 21% good, 11% acceptable, 5% poor)
- Analysis/report writing (63% very good, 21% good, 16% acceptable)

Where do partners feel that INASP should strengthen its capacity, to support them better?

16 respondents answered the free-text question “Where do you think INASP should strengthen its capacity?”. Three respondents commented on improving aspects of project management, two referred specifically to financial management, though in one case this was explained as introducing closer scrutiny of the partner’s financial management systems, rather than our own. Two respondents wanted INASP to do more to influence funders in relation to their rules and requirements. Two respondents commented on better project design, one on partnership management, three noted aspects of capacity development, and two noted providing either more funding or just more support in their priority areas.

How do partners experience working with INASP staff?

We asked partners a series of questions about how they experienced working with INASP staff, how they feel they are treated, and what we could do to improve in the future.

When asked to think of three words that they would use to describe INASP and its work, respondents were notably positive.

- Six chose the words “committed” or “commitment”
- Three chose “collaborative” and three chose “respectful” or “respect”
- Two chose “ethical”, two “challenging”, two “knowledgeable”, two “professional”, two “strategic”, two “transformative”, and two “transparent”.



Figure 9. How partners would describe INASP

How well are we doing to embed our values in our work?

INASP is a values-driven organisation. As part of the process of developing our new strategy we refreshed our values, making them clearer and more tightly focused on our core principles. www.inasp.info/about/values.

We asked respondents to comment on how well our values are embedded within our work and provided a link to explain these.

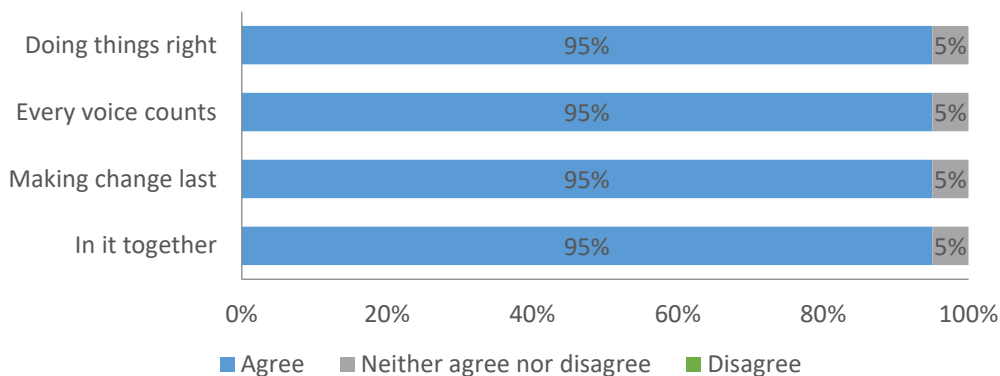


Figure 10. Agreement on whether INASP embeds each of their values into their work (n=20)

20 respondents answered this question. 19 respondents agreed that INASP embedded each of the four values into our work, and one neither agreed nor disagreed.

How satisfied are partners with their working relationship with INASP?

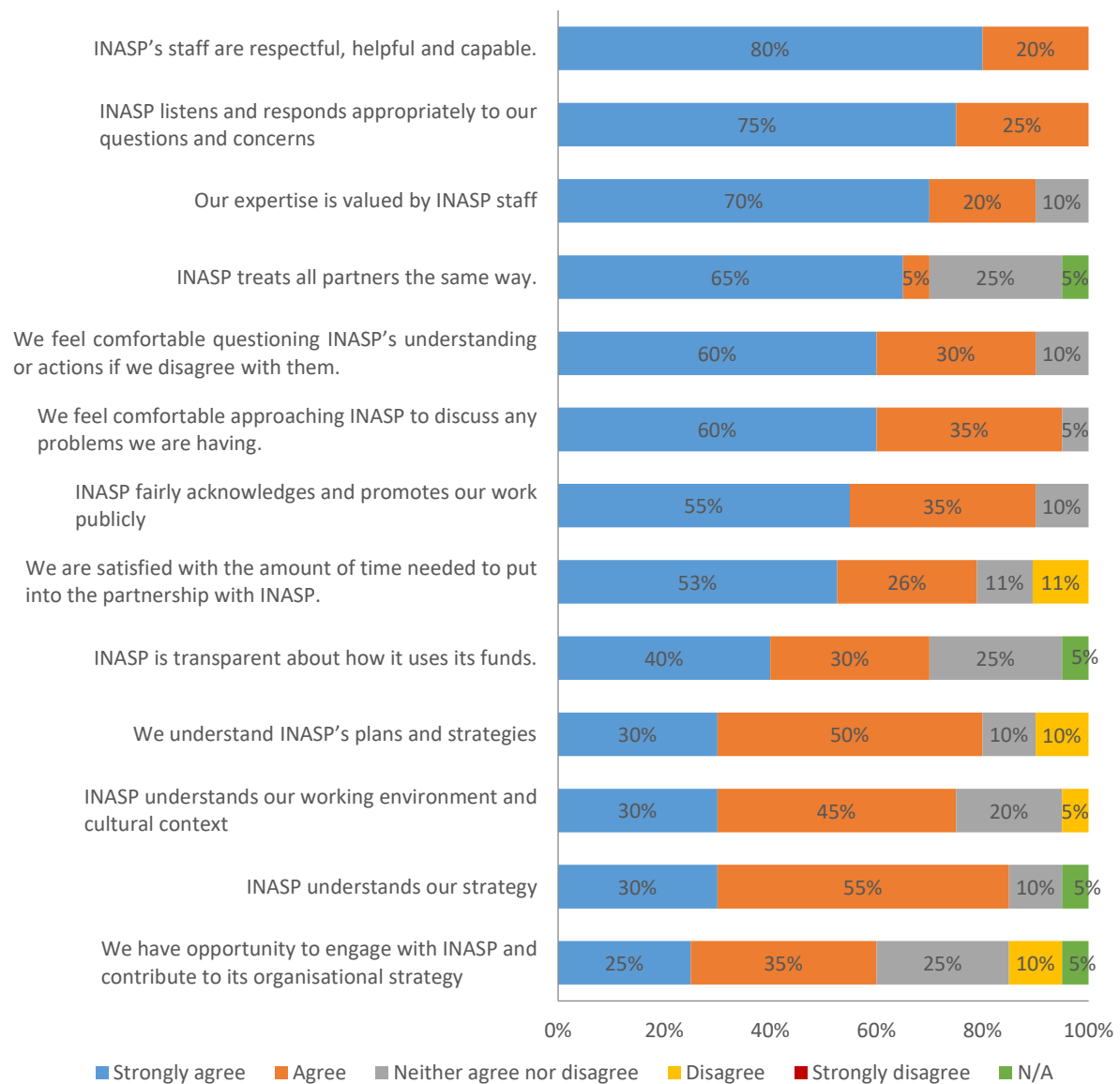


Figure 11. Partners' agreement to statements related to INASP and its work (n=20)

We asked partners a series of statements about our work, and whether they agreed or disagreed with them. For all statements, 70% of respondents indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed, with the exception of "We have opportunity to engage with INASP and contribute to its organisational strategy" where only 50% of respondents were in agreement.

Two statements received complete agreement (either agreed or strongly agreed)

- INASP's staff are respectful, helpful and capable (80% strongly agreed, 20% agreed)
- INASP listens and responds appropriately to our questions and concerns (75% strongly agreed, 25% agreed)

In addition, 90% agreed that their expertise was valued by INASP's staff. Two respondents neither agreed nor disagreed..

The four statements that recorded any disagreement (note, no respondent strongly disagreed with any of the statements) were:

- We are satisfied with the amount of time needed to put into the partnership with INASP (11% disagreed)

- We understand INASP's plans and strategies (10% disagreed)
- We have opportunity to engage with INASP and contribute to its organisational strategy (10% disagreed)
- INASP understands our working environment and cultural context (5% disagreed)

Each of these represents an area where we need to improve: to ensure that we engage partners better in formulating our strategies and plans (or communicating better how we are doing so), doing more to understand partner contexts, and ensuring that partners' relationship with us does not feel too burdensome.

How could we improve how we work with partners in the future?

We asked partners "What would you most like INASP to do to improve its relationship with you in the future". 16 respondents answered this question, with almost a third of respondents indicating that INASP did not need to change and that they were happy with the relationship:

- *"Just continue improving on it way of relating and partnership."*
- *"I am so pleased with our relationship with INASP."*
- *"The relationship is already superb, we wish to continue that way in future."*
- *"Not applicable here. I am satisfied with the work of INASP with us."*

Nine respondents made suggestions for how INASP could improve, with suggestions focusing mainly on the quality and levels of communication between INASP and partners. Each of these highlights an area which we will need to address, and which we will reflect further on.

- *"To be listened to keenly and more. At times the suggestions we make are not taken into consideration or just ignored; no one responds to the email or contacts you to find out why you wrote the email."*
- *"INASP staff to reflect more on some of the suggestions from partners or individuals in the partners. At times one feels that I just have to go along with it because it has been decided; period."*
- *"More frequent feedbacks"*
- *"I am ok with how INASP works, it might add value to inform more about future plans as it will help us engage in that direction and have even longer lasting partnerships outside the current one."*
- *"Build inter-personal relations with key actors in our organisation and maintain regular communication."*

How confident are our partners that we will change?

We asked partners how likely they thought it was that INASP would make changes as a result of the feedback we received through this survey. 20 respondents answered this question. Encouragingly, 80% felt we were likely or very likely to make the changes needed to our practices. Less positively, two respondents (10%) felt change was unlikely, and two (10%) were unsure.

We also asked partners whether they would want to work with us again. All 20 respondents were positive, with 75% feeling they were very likely to want to continue to work with INASP in the future.

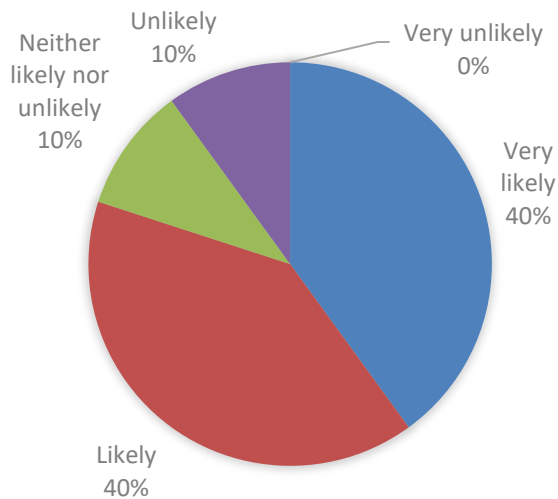


Figure 12. How probable partners felt that INASP would make changes as a result of this survey? (n=20)

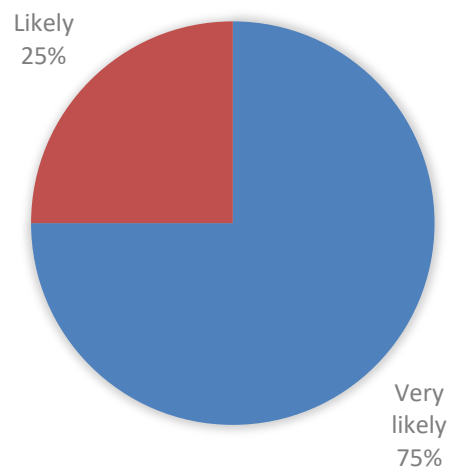


Figure 13. How likely partners would want to work with INASP again (n=20).

What will we do next?

Our strategy commits us to support a global coalition of organisations and individuals seeking to achieve a more equitable knowledge ecosystem. Strong partnerships are vital to this, and we need to be more collaborative and more responsive to the needs of our partners.

We are reviewing the results of the survey within the team and will be reflecting further on what we can do to improve the way we work with you. We expect to discuss this further with partners through the respective project channels to identify specific ways to respond.

We are working to ensure that our values and partnership principles are embedded in our approach to programme management and delivery, and we will shortly be publishing a document outlining our approach to partnership, setting out our commitments and aspirations as a partner.

In 2019 we established an informal advisory group to help guide the development of our new strategy, and we now intend to make this a permanent structure, to continue to guide us as we implement our new strategy.

We also intend to run this survey again later in 2020, to understand if anything has changed, as part of a continue dialogue with partners.

We welcome – and actively encourage – feedback on our partnership approaches. Please write or talk to any member of the INASP team, or to Jon Harle, Director of Programmes, who is also happy to discuss any issues in confidence: jharle@inasp.info.

Finally, we would like to thank our partners for taking the time to respond to this survey, and for helping us to improve the work we do together.