



INASP's approach to partnership – what does it mean?

October 2020

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Introduction

Partnerships are at the heart of INASP's work, and of our mission to support Southern individuals and institutions to produce, share and use research and knowledge.

Partnerships can be powerful, but they are rarely easy. They require commitment, hard work, the preparedness to learn, and a willingness to challenge. This means we need to be clear about their purpose, and clear about what we need to do to make them work. This document explains what partnership means to INASP, why it matters, and how we strive to work as a partner to others.

Why does partnership matter to INASP?

Partnership matters to INASP for two reasons. 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.

1 The right way to work

Working in partnership is fundamental to INASP's approach to capacity development and to supporting sustainable change. It is underpinned by and responds to our four core values: In it together; Making change last; Every voice counts; Doing things right. These are explained more further on.

Partnership for INASP means a relationship that is founded on mutual trust and respect. It means working collaboratively with partners to design, deliver, take decisions and to learn from initiatives together. Partnerships are about developing capacity on both sides – INASP's capacity is strengthened by our partners, as much as we seek to strengthen theirs through the support we provide.

INASP is a UK-based organisation, which means that while we work with and within knowledge ecosystems in many countries, we are also outsiders to these systems. INASP's role is to support and enable local leaders; Our partners are best placed to understand what is needed where they are and in the systems they work in and they are the ones to drive change. This is rarely straightforward, given the funding and associated structures within the systems in which we work together, but it is the way we strive to work.

2 Achieving lasting change

As our Theory of Change and the pathways of change that we have identified recognise, knowledge ecosystems are complex and involve many, diverse actors with different and sometimes competing interests, and multiple sources and types of knowledge.

Capacity development is fundamentally about change – in awareness, attitudes, capabilities, and behaviours. Some of that change must be at international and regional level – influencing the thinking of the Northern agencies that are responsible for considerable funding and for establishing norms as well as policies. But the greater part of this change must be rooted in the institutions and organisations, and their people, that are responsible for driving the creation and use of knowledge within a country. We know this as a knowledge ecosystem. Change within knowledge ecosystems is complex as a result, with many different pathways, and many actors to be supported or influenced.

Change is often unpredictable. It moves forwards as well as backwards, and sometimes sideways, and can advance in sudden bursts, or through small, incremental steps. For capacity to be developed

and sustained requires shifts not only in knowledge and skills but in power, and in the institutional structures, ways of working and cultures of organisations and the networks of organisations and individuals which make up a knowledge ecosystem. This requires local leadership and local effort and cannot be substituted by external actors.

Over its 28-year history, INASP has built up a wealth of expertise and knowledge which we believe can contribute to many of these issues and challenges. From our UK base, it is clear the only way that we can bring this expertise and experience to bear, and to make a meaningful contribution to these processes of change, is through strong partnerships, which are based on long-term relationships with individuals and organisations rooted in a country.

As well as being a mode through which we offer our expertise and experience, partnerships are a key mode through which INASP learns. It is through listening to partners, understanding their needs and constraints, sharing our own ideas and thinking, but retaining humility and being open to challenge, that we learn and improve our work for the future. So our work with new partners in one organisation or country helps us to work better when we work with partners in another organisation or country.

The values that underpin our partnerships

INASP's partnerships – as with everything we do – are underpinned by our four core values.

- **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 needed, 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.

The types of partnerships we have

INASP has a number of different types of partnership. Partners may be an organisation or a part of an organisation (such as a department), or an individual within an organisation.

In some cases, our partnership involves of **consortium of several organisations working together to achieve change**. These types of partnership are not mutually exclusive, but simply describe some of the different ways in which we engage in partnership. INASP only enters into partnership with, and continues partnerships with, organisations with which it feels there are shared values and objectives, and where there is a mutual advantage to partnering – where we each bring something that the other can benefit from.

In some cases, **we may have a lead role** in a funded project and be responsible for the primary contract with and reporting to the funder; in others, **we may play a supporting role** in a collaborative project led by another partner.

In some instances, partnership describes a **long-standing relationship which is not supported by current funding**.

Our partnerships range from strategic, long-term relationships with an organisation, to more time-bound project-based partnerships, and cover Southern and Northern organisations. Most of INASP's partnerships are with organisations in the South, and involve us collaborating with an organisation in the South to advance some aspect of the knowledge ecosystem. In some cases, the purpose of our partnership is to directly support the organisation in question; in other cases, we work in partnership with a Southern organisation to support a third Southern organisation. Our partnerships also cover Northern organisations, such as funders or research institutions, with whom we work to jointly provide support to one or more Southern partners.

Our commitments and aspirations

For organisations and individuals that enter into a formal partnership with INASP, we use the following, along with our values already described in this document, to guide our work together. These describe how we strive to work, but recognise that the context of funding, and of other external pressures to our partnership may pose other obstacles. We invite partners to let us know when we fail to live up to these commitments, and we run a short, six-monthly survey of our partners to invite feedback and comments. In return, we look for partners who share our interest in learning and listening, who strive as we do to continuously improve the quality of our work, and who embrace the need to work iteratively and adaptively, to modify activities as necessary to achieve the aims of the project.

- **Purpose:** When establishing a new partnership, or when we and an existing partner initiate new work together, we will ensure we set the aims and purpose of the partnership and/or project together, and understand our respective capacities and needs and how these will influence the scope of work and the allocation of responsibilities and roles. We will review these as we work to ensure we retain a shared understanding.
- **Respect:** We will respect partners, their ambitions and needs, their expertise, and their leadership. This means that we strive to ensure that we share information and make decisions together, so that power is distributed, while also seeking to avoid overburdening partners.
- **Relationships and communication:** We will use the tools available to us to talk regularly and often, making sure that we don't rely only on email for communications, and invest in building the organisational and personal relationships that good partnerships need. We will invest in our skills to nurture relationships virtually and online, in recognition that more can be achieved online, and that we have a responsibility to reduce our carbon footprint and the environmental impact of regular international travel.
- **Visibility and recognition:** We will profile our partners and partnerships in our communications, to give due credit and visibility to the work we do together, for key relevant audiences at national, regional and global levels.
- **Learning:** We will learn together about what works and what is most effective in the achievement of project goals, and also about how we can be a better partner. In addition to listening during our day-to-day interactions, we will use a six-monthly survey to all partners with which we are actively engaged on a project, to understand what is working, what isn't, and where we need to improve. We will design our monitoring, evaluation and learning systems and indicators with partners to ensure that they are jointly owned. We will ensure there is a regular, dedicated time and space set aside to consider the health of the partnership.
- **Fair allocation of resources:** We will ensure that, for any projects where we hold the budget, we allocate resources fairly, and are transparent about funding and finances, except when we need to respect the confidentiality of another individual or organisation.

- **Integrity:** We will work with integrity and will ensure that funds are spent well – this means the funds that INASP spends directly, and any funds that are spent by partners but for which INASP is responsible.
- **Safety and well-being:** We will ensure that the safety and wellbeing of our partners and our staff is paramount. We are committed to promoting the rights of all people to live free from abuse and coercion, and are committed to putting in place safeguards and measures to prevent abuse and to ensure that people are treated with respect.

Governance and policies

INASP has developed a series of policies to govern the way in which the organisation operates and to guide the work of INASP staff. These policies ensure that we are accountable for our decisions and actions, that finances are well managed, and that our staff, partners and those we work with are protected from harassment or bullying.

When INASP works with another organisation or individual as part of a funded partnership, we ask that the partner either provides us with evidence that they have their own robust policies in place, or that they sign to commit to complying to INASP's policies for the duration of our work together. INASP's policies are available on our website here:

- [Anti-Bribery Policy](#)
- [Equal Opportunity Policy](#)
- [Fraud Policy](#)
- [Sub-Contractors Policy](#)
- [Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [Whistleblowing Policy](#)

For more information on partnering with INASP please contact Jon Harle, INASP's Director of Programmes, jharle@inasp.info.

Cover picture shows some people involved in the Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa ([TESCEA](#)) partnership.