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The Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI): an integrated response to needs

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Abstract:

There has been much concern within emerging and developing countries that the gap between those who have access to information and those who do not is widening. There has also been an increased recognition of the vital role that information and knowledge can play in development and of the potential for the use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) within this.   Following the provision of connectivity, but experiencing difficulties in obtaining relevant and timely 'content', research partners in a number of countries called upon INASP to work with them in developing a coherent programme of opportunities to access international information, provide access to and dissemination of local and regional research results and provide training in both 'Internet' use and journals production.
*The result was the **Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI)**.*

1   Background

The 1990s saw a proliferation of ICT connectivity programmes, e.g. those supported within the NATO Science, UNDP, and InfoDev programmes.   Catherine Nyaki Adeya[1] (2001) reviewed a number of those playing a significant role in Africa, complementing and updating the personal accounts of introducing new

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[1] Adeya, C.N. *Information and Communication Technologies in Africa: A Review and Selective Annotated Bibliography 1990-2000* Oxford: International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), 2001.

information technologies into institutions in the publication 'Bridge Builders'[2] (1996). Both pieces of work cite many examples illustrating the steps to build links between countries and the worldwide movements related to the global information infrastructure. However, both cite few examples of activities or programmes involved in providing the opportunities of relevant and affordable literature.   In fact, there have always been a number of ad hoc activities providing 'content', both from individual publishers and via a host of externally supported research projects. However, few have been affordable and sustainable in the long-term, access to national and regional research was very limited and researchers soon found that the Internet also provides a surplus of 'free' information of dubious authority.

In1999, INASP was invited to work with partners involved in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Danida programme ENRECA (Enhancement of Research Capacity in Developing Countries) in development of a programme (the Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI) to meet their expressed needs.   A pilot to test logistics ran throughout 2001 and the activities continue to be enhanced and developed by the PERI Country Coordinators and INASP.

2   Aim

To support capacity building in the research sector in developing countries through strengthening the production, access and dissemination of information & knowledge.

3   Objectives

The immediate objectives of the programme are to:
- facilitate the acquisition of international information and knowledge through electronic Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)
- strengthen and develop access to national and regional journals as a medium for the dissemination of local information and knowledge
- provide awareness or training in the use and/or evaluation of electronic ICTs
- enhance skills in the preparation, production and management of journals.

These objectives are presently being met by four complementary activities:

4.1   Provision of international scientific and scholarly information
A programme has been developed, and continues to be developed, in response to requests to include access to all major scientific, technical, medical, social science and humanities journals.   Individual publishers, 'packagers' of information and consolidating subscription agents responded eagerly to the preliminary research for the programme. INASP's non profit Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) status means that extremely attractive discounts (usually between 80% - 95%) for country-wide access can be negotiated on behalf of partners.

The programme includes current awareness databases, on-line full-text journals as well as document delivery services.   Almost all packages are available on a country-wide access licence basis and in-country PERI Coordinators and INASP are encouraging collaborative purchase. The key to success being that the price-models being adopted by the information providers have to be affordable and sustainable in the long-term.   Partners are provided with the opportunity to make selections in line with their research priorities and needs.

4.2   Journals Online programmes (JOLs)

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[2] National Research Council. *Bridge Builders: African Experiences with Information and Communication Technology*. Washington DC, National Academy Press, 1996

Dramatic changes are taking place in academic and library communities. Advances in electronic technology have led to new ways of accessing information and communicating the results of research. Electronic access, especially via the Internet, has grown rapidly over the past three years. The trend towards access rather than ownership has serious implications for publishers everywhere but scholarly journals in emerging regions are particularly vulnerable. They have already suffered through cuts to library budgets. The increasing use of electronic publishing now threatens to marginalise them further and to make their existence even more precarious.

Moving into electronic publishing has not yet been an option explored by many developing country publishers. It is, however, important that they benefit from the exciting opportunities offered by the Internet. They should be able to use it to promote their journals and to disseminate information about their activities to a wider audience. A successful model has been developed through *African Journals Online* (AJOL) <http://www.inasp.info/ajol/> and INASP is now assisting in the establishment of regional online services to:

- enable the results of research undertaken and published locally to become more widely known and accessible;
- strengthen the local scholarly journal publishing sector by providing income both through encouraging print and/or electronic subscriptions and through the purchase of single articles;
- increase worldwide knowledge of indigenous scholarship
- assess the impact of using the Internet to promote locally published journals

Programme elements include:

- *TOC and ABSTRACTS* Tables of content and abstracts from journals of proven content and regularity are hosted on a central Web site, for a minimum period of five years. Access is free of charge. Contents are searchable by key word.
- *FULL TEXT* AND *DOCUMENT DELIVERY* Links are provided to full text, where available online. A print document delivery service for articles is offered, with proceeds being remitted to the journal concerned.

Additional features include:
- full details about each journal, including scope, contacts, instructions to authors, how to subscribe
- links to journals about the region but published elsewhere
- details of other relevant journal indexing sites and services

4.3   'Internet' awareness and training for researchers and information personnel

For university and research communities throughout the world, finding high quality, relevant information is becoming increasingly difficult and, at times, frustrating. The pilot phase of PERI confirmed requests from librarians and researchers for quality, relevant training in order to use the Internet, to utilise information available in PERI to its full potential, and to help them identify and evaluate other information sources. Extensive engagement and experience with partner institutions has led to the adoption of a locally facilitated, multiple participants (from a single site), 'travelling' workshop methodology <http://www.inasp.info/peri/internet> whenever possible for ICT training activities. This methodology has the following key characteristics:

- expert produced training materials: materials are developed with appropriate sector, subject and environmental knowledge and experience. The end result is a resource bank of high quality training and support materials

- 'Travelling' workshops' with regional and local facilitators: workshop facilitators are drawn from the local sector community and are involved with at least two workshops before acting as lead facilitator for one or more workshops. This has the benefit of building local skills and capacity in both the subject area and training programme development and delivery

- single site in-country training: wherever possible, workshops are run with multiple participants from a single site to help build a critical mass of trainees in each location. This helps ensure effective follow-up, support and training impact.

The following workshop series are presently available:

*Using the Internet (*3-5 day hands-on workshop)
Modules available include: introduction to the Internet; browsers; search engines and searching the Web; information gateways; resources for teaching, learning and research; evaluating and quality of Internet information; web page design, usability and evaluation; free and low cost software; copyright; costing the use of the Internet; Internet training for library users and developing a training plan.

Electronic Journals and Electronic Resources Library Management (4-5 day hands-on workshop)
Modules available include: electronic library resources overview; supply models; software requirements; PERI programme resources review; downloading and document delivery; effective searching; archiving of electronic resources; copyright and licensing; evaluation and monitoring use; managing access and purchase; managing implementation and user access.

Web Page Design and Authoring, leading to Library Web Pages (5 day hands-on workshop)
Modules available include: Web authoring tools; HTML; principles of Web design; reverse engineering; stylesheets; efficient Web design; images for the Web; graphics tools; information architecture; optimal navigation techniques; evaluation techniques (user analysis, task analysis, stakeholder analysis); project management and project costing; developing library Web sites.

ICT Troubleshooting for Librarians and Information personnel (1-2 day workshop)
Modules available include: review and analysis of common IT problems with software, hardware/workstations and printers; when to help and when to get help; fixing common problems; diagnosis of problems for an IT technician; how to manage the IT technician.

4.4   Enhancement of skills in the preparation, production and management of journals
Many publishers are not yet able to take advantage of the electronic media for marketing, publicity and dissemination as their publications have not yet been able to reach a consistent level of quality of content, currency and regularity of publication.   PERI offers:

Training workshops covering management and production
A programme of practical 'hands-on' regional training workshops is being developed, building on INASP's experience 1996-2001. The aim will be to continue to assist journal publishers to improve their publishing operations, and most especially to provide them with exposure to the options available in utilising ICTs. The programme for each workshop is elaborated with the participants, and usually includes emphasis on the management of journals publishing processes (editorial, production, financial, marketing, etc.) as well as the actual processes themselves (e.g. copyediting, production, proof reading, etc.).

Training activities covering publishing online
Following discussions with journal publishers in Africa, INASP developed a pilot project to assist African titles to publish full text on the Web. Initially, ten journals are being supported in the African Journals OnLine Publishing Project (AJOPP) <http://www.inasp.info/psi/ajopp>. An inception workshop covered

all issues in e-journal publishing and provided the necessary knowledge to allow journal publishers to decide their best option in moving forward into electronic full text publication. Topics covered included:

- technicalities: what is required to move from camera-ready copy to full electronic text; postscript, pdf and html formats; the roles played by pre-print services, digitizers, etc.
- distribution and delivery: various models of electronic distribution (author, primary publisher, second party distribution, gateways/consolidators, subscription agents); payment mechanisms.
- costs and sustainability.
- advantages and disadvantages of electronic journal publishing.
- options for Africa, now and in the future.

Each journal has now produced strategic and action plans of how it intends to mount full text on the Internet and is being assisted to follow through its preferred method of going online.

Publishing Partnership Programme

PERI is also able to provide support for study visits and arrange journal 'mentoring' through a Partnership Programme.

Conclusion

PERI is certainly not the only programme providing opportunities for access to information. In 2000, the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) developed the SAP (Supply of Academic Publications) programme; the Open Society Institute developed eIFL Direct (Electronic Information for Libraries); and, in 2001 WHO launched HINARI (Health InterNetwork Access to Research Information) All the activities to date raise other important considerations:

- Providing access is only the first step
- There is a real need for extensive, hands-on, high quality and effective training
- High quality content increases demand for network resources – at present the external network speeds are significantly failing to meet demand
- information sharing & collaboration between activities and programmes is essential and is best co-ordinated in-country.

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