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Enhancing research information

A new programme of support to information access and dissemination for research partners in developing and transitional countries utilising new ICTs

There is much concern within developing and transitional countries that the gap between those who have access to information and those who do not is widening. There is also an increased recognition of the vital role that information and knowledge can play in development and of the potential of the use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) within this.

INASP has been approached by research partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union to assist in the design and implementation of a programme of complementary activities to support information production, access and dissemination utilising ICTs. As a result, earlier this year, INASP was ready to launch the Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI).

About INASP

INASP is a co-operative network of partners whose aim is to enhance world-wide access to information and knowledge. It has three immediate objectives:

- to map, support and strengthen existing activities promoting access to and dissemination of scientific and scholarly information and knowledge;

- to identify, encourage and support new initiatives that will increase local publication and general access to high quality scientific and scholarly information;

- to promote in-country capacity building in information production, organisation, access and dissemination.

INASP is a programme of the International Council for Science (ICSU).

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In response to expressed needs, the immediate objectives of the programme will be to:
■ facilitate the acquisition of international information and knowledge through electronic Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs);
■ strengthen and develop journals in the regions as a medium for the dissemination of results from national and regional research;
■ provide awareness or training in the use and/or evaluation of electronic information and communication technologies (ICTs);
■ enhance skills in the preparation, production and management of journals.

A pilot project for the programme will be run throughout 2001. This will include four separate but interrelated components.

Component 1. Provision of international scientific and technical information

In line with research needs and priorities, partners are invited to make their selection of current awareness databases and services, on-line journals and document delivery. Using funds available within institutions, or through externally funded projects, partners can take advantage of highly favourable, differentially-priced subscriptions that have been negotiated with major publishers and information providers.

Component 2. Strengthening and development of journals from developing and transitional countries

Through continuing support to the strengthening and development of national and regional journals, the aims of this component are to:
■ help the results of research undertaken and published become more widely known and accessible;
■ strengthen the academic publishing sector, by providing income both through encouraging print or electronic subscriptions and through the purchase of single articles;
■ assess the impact of using the Internet to promote nationally- and regionally-published journals.

In the first instance this will be through an appropriate extension and expansion of African Journals OnLine (AJOL).

Component 3. 'Using the Internet'

Although online access to the Internet has recently been introduced in many universities, librarians in those universities often feel inadequately trained in its use. The PERI pilot will extend the programme of 'travelling' workshops on Internet use for staff in university libraries (see previous issues of this *Newsletter*) and will provide the opportunity for facilitators in ten university library systems in Africa to meet to discuss their needs and plan for a future series of workshops. In response to expressed needs, a complementary series of 'travelling' workshops on *Evaluation, Selection and Management of On-line Information* is also being developed.

Component 4. Workshop for journal editors, typesetters and managers

Past experience has shown that provision of information in the form of externally published materials has often stifled, or even killed, fragile publishing sectors in developing and transitional countries. In pursuit of helping journal publishers to move to an all-electronic environment, INASP has been asked to facilitate a workshop to provide awareness of all the online publishing options which are now at the disposal of journal publishers.