Embedding online research-writing training in Africa and Asia

Developing an online embedding approach through AuthorAID in Tanzania, Ghana, Sri Lanka and Vietnam

In the past two years, in response to a rise in demand for online training, as well as to the successful introduction of embedded research-writing courses within Southern institutions, INASP's AuthorAID project has begun introducing online courses within partner institutions in Africa and Asia.

Since 2007, AuthorAID has supported researchers from low- and middle-income countries to communicate their research by developing their capacity through workshops, mentoring, and e-resources.

In 2013, AuthorAID also started a programme of embedding, or institutionalizing, training in research and proposal writing in institutions. There are now 10 institutional partners across Ghana, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Vietnam who are at varying levels of progress in developing sustainable training programmes in research writing revolving largely around regular workshops and mentor support.

AuthorAID ran its first online research-writing course in 2011 for a group of researchers in Rwanda. After running this course for more diverse and larger audiences from 2012 to 2014, AuthorAID held its first six-week massive open online

Enthusiastic participants at the online training workshop in Vietnam in November 2016

course (MOOC) in October 2015, drawing 1,275 participants from over 80 countries. Since then, AuthorAID has offered two further MOOCs, drawing nearly 3,000 participants globally (see a March 2017 article in Open Praxis for more information on our MOOCs [1]).

With the success of AuthorAID online courses, some of the AuthorAID embedding partner institutions expressed an interest in developing capacity within their institutions to run their own online courses. Thus began a series of INASP partnerships in 'online embedding' of research-writing courses within the four partner countries. AuthorAID launched its first online embedding

partnership with Open University Tanzania (OUT) in 2015, followed closely by other partners in Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Ghana. All institutions sought support in building their online learning capacity, and in learning about teaching appropriately in online environments.

For online embedding to happen, the institution first needs to have capacity in providing online courses. This process of capacity development broadly involves support in the technical aspects – setting up an online learning platform (AuthorAID uses Moodle, an open-source virtual-learning environment) and uploading and adapting course materials.

Medical researchers at University of Colombo in Sri Lanka, with INASP's Joanna Wild, develop an online course to complement its research writing clubs research communication

It also involves teaching and facilitation aspects – developing skills for facilitating learning in online courses, engaging with students, and monitoring their progress. To solve the common challenge of implementing an institutional Moodle site (costly and time-intensive because of the need to invest in hosting and maintenance), the majority of our embedding partners have instead opted to use MoodleCloud, a free cloud-based version of the Moodle application that limits the number of participants to 50.

Why are online courses a potential solution?

Online training is considered an attractive option for institutions in low-income countries that might not have the capacity to regularly run face-to-face workshops (because of costs related to transport, meals, room rental and facilitator fees). They also suit multi-site institutions that have offices scattered throughout a country. Likewise, online courses offer flexibility: researchers can sign up to take the course and do the coursework at any time that suits their schedule. Online courses also create bridges connecting researchers between locations, many of whom may not

otherwise have come to know each other, thus encouraging further collaboration and networking.

However, online learning is not always the best solution; in cities and regions where internet connectivity is unreliable, accessing the online course content and activities can be an arduous task. Researchers who engage in field work in remote locations (which is often the case at a practically oriented research institutions such as CSIR) may also sometimes find themselves cut off from the course because of time spent in rural locations.

On a broader note, there is almost always a steep drop-off between those who sign up to an online course and those who actually make the start on the course; even further, some participants may also drop out before completing the course because of a lack of time to complete (often coupled with a lack of dedicated time during the day to focus on it). Finally, developing online courses is not always easy or cost-effective; specialists are needed to deal with the learning design, technical development and facilitation of the course, and expenses may be incurred for the IT expertise or infrastructure needed to run an online learning platform.

The AuthorAID approach to

online embedding thus attempts to manage these difficulties. As mentioned, most partners will host their courses on their free MoodleCloud site which means there is no need to invest in IT infrastructure or involve IT personnel. Further, with the course hosted externally (in the cloud) there is less strain on the institution's bandwidth. Courses on MoodleCloud sites can also be optimized for offline use on its dedicated mobile app, which should reduce barriers further.

Compared to face-to-face workshops, there is an important advantage of online courses in a capacity-development context and this involves handover. There is perhaps less risk in dilution of pedagogy in handing over online course materials compared to workshop materials. A workshop is not going to run itself, no matter how good the materials are – there is a lot of responsibility on the facilitator. On the other hand, the AuthorAID online course is a ready and proven 'product' that can be quickly set up on any MoodleCloud site using a standard structure and sequence, and much of the course supports self-study (such as interactive course content and quizzes). Of course, AuthorAID partners do provide facilitation on the discussion forums, and we have worked with them to produce standard guidelines for this.

Launching training in online learning in Tanzania

The embedding of the online course at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) kick-started discussions with a number of other partners about their desire to launch online courses at an institutional level. With four African partner institutions expressing an interest, the first workshop to support partners with online embedding took place in Dar es Salaam from 21 to 23 May 2016,

introducing participants to the delivery and management of online courses. The partner institutions represented a cross-section of academics and researchers from universities and research institutes.

OUT is a large university with 30 regional centres, specializing in open and distance learning. It launched its first AuthorAID online course in August 2015 with 56 researchers from four regional centres. Our contacts at OUT had a desire to learn more about using Moodle for learning design and online facilitation, and they planned to build on the INASP support to institutionalize research writing training into the curriculum for young academic staff.

Tanzanian Fisheries Research Institute (TAFIRI) is an emerging centre of research excellence in fisheries and aquaculture in Eastern Africa. With a focus on turning research into evidenced policy making, TAFIRI identified a need to further train its researchers in communicating their findings. Although it had not yet run any AuthorAID courses, staff had experience in working with Moodle, which we thought would be a benefit to the workshop group.

A large university in Dar es Salaam, the Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS) benefits from partnerships outside INASP for much of its training output. While the university held two workshops in 2015 (on research and grant proposal writing), it had not yet run any online courses. However, with plans to develop a distance Master's programme with an online component, the university expressed an interest in attending the workshop.

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in Ghana is a research institute and the national body for science and technology in Ghana. It comprises 13 institutes and has been running

INASP's Joanna Wild provides online course development support to institutions from Tanzania and Ghana at the Tanzanian Fisheries Research Institute in Tanzania

face-to-face workshops and sporadic online courses since 2015. CSIR felt that it would be able to reach its researchers across the country through training in using Moodle and in facilitating online courses.

All four institutions at the workshop were at different stages in developing an online course programme. They also all had different levels of internet and online learning infrastructure, with some having previous experience in developing online courses, and the others having no experience. There were 15 participants invited, 10 were skills trainers and the other five were IT experts to support the implementation of a Moodle site.

The workshop was facilitated by Ravi Murugesan, INASP Associate and Moodle expert, and Joanna Wild, INASP's online learning expert attached to our capacity development team. The workshop kicked off with a networking session for participants – many of whom did not know each other – to build familiarity with each other. This proved fruitful; at the end of this, two institutions discussed the possibility of working more closely together in the future. Moreover,

there was a desire to encourage participants to move beyond the usual assumptions surrounding online courses (for example, that online courses are a low-cost solution) by brainstorming the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of running the AuthorAID research-writing course in an online format.

The results revealed some common issues for all institutions in moving forward with online courses. Workload and scheduling time would be key factors, as would the need to develop facilitation skills and ways to encourage senior faculty members and management to grow more comfortable with online technology replacing face-to-face classroom time. Interestingly, the group identified many non-economic benefits such as being able to deliver training over long periods, the ability to enhance overall IT skills as an institution, and the ability to bring people together across many locations.

During the workshop, each participant was granted the time to familiarize themselves with the Learning Designer, a web-based application to design activity-based training programmes, as

The first workshop on embedding an online course brought together four institutions from Tanzania and Ghana

well as certain features of Moodle to adapt the content and activities in the AuthorAID online course for their institutional needs. Some workshop participants were amazed at the ability of Moodle to create something like a quiz or a writing activity so easily, and there were many ideas for future courses. Ismael Kimirei, a fisheries researcher from TAFIRI, said: "there were many lessons I gained from the workshop, but the most important one was on course design. I learned how the team behind the online courses work and the importance of their work. I also learned that well designed and planned online courses will always have a lasting impact on participants."

However, it was also apparent that not all institutions have the IT and digital literacy skills in place to launch a Moodle platform and

online course quickly – ongoing training and support are needed as they move through the process of setting these up. Likewise, internet and bandwidth remain unreliable in many places, which impacts on the success of online courses that require logging on to undertake the course and complete activities.

Bringing four institutions together for one workshop meant that there were many opportunities to develop capacity between them; in one instance, an IT expert from one institution engaged with others to support them in setting up a Moodle site. However, delivering this type of capacity development in a three-day workshop to four different partners represented its own challenges. While some partners were familiar with Moodle, others were not, and time had to be spent walking them through the course. Luckily, some of the

more proficient Moodle participants happily helped out the other institutions, lending a hand to the facilitators. It was, however, unclear at the end of the workshop how successful the training had been, with many partners not yet ready to share their plans for how to roll out online courses at their respective institutions.

A few months after the workshop, three of the partner institutions did roll out online courses: CSIR, OUT, and TAFIRI ran courses between September and November 2016.

OUT considered its course a success with 25 of 48 course starters completing the course and being awarded certificates. It also held a face-to-face workshop for online course completers from 9 to 10 December 2016 in Dodoma, inviting all completers to present drafts of their grant proposals and

"We see the long-term impacts of the online course in research and proposal writing to be more publications in high-quality journals, an increase in high-quality dissertations and theses, and increased research grants, locally and internationally."

Professor Emmanuel Kigadye, OUT

Sharing ideas, experiences and plans between African institutions

research papers to their fellow students and facilitators. Part of this workshop was observed by Jennifer Chapin and Ravi Murugesan. Professor Emmanuel Kigadye of OUT notes that he has successfully added the course to the curriculum, making it compulsory for postgraduate students: "The training is already embedded at OUT and we are in the process of running independently after having acquired facilitation skills from this workshop. As a result of this, we have seen increased capacity of doing research in young academic staff. More staff have applied for small grants and several staff are writing proposals for further study."

TAFIRI saw 21 out of 42 participants finish the online course, with feedback that the course has had a huge impact on converting the research being undertaken into evidence presented at conferences and to government. One PhD student notes, "immediately after the online course, I started putting my data together and started writing a manuscript from my PhD data. I could not have been better equipped to take on the task." Participants' feedback revealed that a face-to-face workshop, like

at OUT and CSIR, would be valuable in accompanying the online course. TAFIRI is now planning to run blended courses in 2017.

The online course run by CSIR faced more challenges. Although 43 participants enrolled in the course (from eight institutes), only 18 of them made a start by completing the background information form. Of these, 11 completed all course tasks. In discussions with the facilitators, it was thought that this course had not been well marketed by them ahead of time, and that many people had been encouraged to register but then not had the time or motivation to actually take the course. Likewise, there were many issues with internet and electricity during the course duration. Facilitator Albert Allotey struggled to access the course as a facilitator as a result: "power fluctuations compelled me to move away from my office during the course period in order to access electricity and internet services. Otherwise, I would not be able to follow the participants online."

He notes that CSIR has decided to focus on rolling out further face-to-face training given the somewhat

disappointing outcomes of their online course. However, there are plans to understand the issues leading to low enrolment and completion of online courses, and run further courses in 2017.

Incorporating online courses into writing clubs at the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka

In early 2016, discussions began with the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Colombo to integrate the AuthorAID online course into the faculty's workshop schedule. Having launched its own Research Promotion and Facilitation Centre (RPFC) (read all about it in a previous Learning, Reflections and Innovations article [2]), a dedicated centre for supporting the production and communication of research, it had run AuthorAID workshops in research writing and mentoring since 2014. The RPFC also developed writing clubs out of a desire to provide longer-term support and mentorship to younger academics who attended a workshop. The model of facilitating

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four-month-long writing clubs to complement workshops had so far been successful; INASP and Colombo co-authored a poster on the process for the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) in 2015. However, it was felt that offering online courses in tandem would enhance the current training provision and also create an ongoing communication forum for writing club members who would normally only meet once a month for four months. One of the key proponents of embedding the online course into the current research-writing support offer was Dilshani Dissanayake who had knowledge of online learning having acted as a guest facilitator in AuthorAID MOOCs run by INASP in 2015 and 2016.

With the University of Colombo operating a different model of writing support to that of other AuthorAID partners, the RPFC workshop was to be different from the one undertaken in Tanzania and Ghana. In August 2016, a specially designed workshop was facilitated by Ravi Murugesan and Joanna Wild to support the roll-out of online courses. Everyone agreed to call the workshop a 'working session' in order to position it as a collaborative session rather than a traditional workshop. Building on the learning from the African embedded courses, this session was designed to lead to tangible outputs that would allow the programme to be implemented right away. This included a mentoring announcement, clear roles and responsibilities and an outline of the integrated support programme that shows how the workshop, online course and writing club would fit together.

Like in Tanzania time was spent with participants in externalizing their thoughts on the value of online courses (by identifying pre-existing assumptions), in getting familiar with Moodle in a hands-on way, and in developing online

Thai Nguyen University in Vietnam, where online research writing training is being embedded

facilitation skills. Unlike in Tanzania, this working session was preceded by a three-week online component that encouraged the Colombo team to do some of this thinking to prepare for the face-to-face working session. The online component was successful – the participants created a draft plan that fed directly into the working session. The face-to-face session ended with a plan for a new programme that included roles, milestones and a date for the first course. The session was considered a success in its collaborative style, and in leading to tangible outputs. The participants were impressed by the opportunities afforded online and they were keen to move forward.

A number of factors distinguish the Colombo workshop from the one held in Dar es Salaam. Unlike in Tanzania, there was only one institution to work with; this meant that there was no variability in IT skills, digital literacy or objectives. Everyone was there to work towards an objective of developing facilitation and Moodle skills to complement their writing clubs. Likewise, with only four participants, instead

of 15, both course trainers had more time to work individually with each participant. The working session also benefitted from the pre-workshop three-week online session that encouraged time spent preparing and the production of tangible documents to encourage the implementation process. This was a different approach from Tanzania where there was no accompanying online session, and where there was little time spent on taking steps to prepare for the immediate roll-out of an online course at the institutional level. The time spent in Colombo managing the practical aspects of rolling out online courses seemed to have an important impact, and it led to the courses being implemented quickly after the working session.

The working session resulted in a programme that launched on 13 October 2016 with the first meeting of the latest writing club. Two local facilitators ran the online course and were active in managing discussions. Twenty participants completed the online course out of 30 enrolled (with 24 starting the course by completing the background information form).

> **"When we started the programme we wanted to increase the number of fundable proposals produced, and actually funded, and increase the number of journal articles and book chapters produced per year. I am happy to report that so far the number of manuscripts being developed is overwhelming. We are currently preparing for a conference later this year and the number of abstracts submitted from from [one of the TAFIRI centres] Kigoma alone is five—all written by course participants."**
>
> **Ismael Kimirei, TAFIRI**

The programme facilitators used the forums in the online course to post announcements and to answer questions from the participants throughout the duration of the four-month writing club. The online course was well received by the participants, and 100% of the feedback respondents completely agreed with the statement that the course was relevant for their learning needs.

Kicking off blended training at Thai Nguyen University in Vietnam

Thai Nguyen University (TNU) is a large university in Vietnam. An INASP partner since 2015, the university had struggled to kick off a blended training programme. By November 2016, it was agreed to re-launch the programme with a three-day workshop on managing Moodle and online facilitation. A regionally important university with nearly 80,000 students, TNU has recently seen a renewed focus on publishing, with promotion and staff awards tied to publishing in English language journals. The workshop took place from 25 to 27 November 2016 in Tam Dao, Vietnam. This workshop differed from the others in that it was a

residential workshop; the decision was made to hold it two hours away from the university in the mountaintop town of Tam Dao from Friday to Sunday. This was to combat the lack of dedicated time and space for attending workshops that characterizes the university. This created a distraction-free space to focus on learning. The workshop included 12 participants who represented a broad range of academic levels, from junior lecturers to senior professors and heads of department.

The objectives of the workshop were to decide a format for the blended training programme and how to roll it out, as well as to train all participants in online facilitation and the elements of both online courses and face-to-face workshops. In effect, in learning about what worked in both Tanzania and Sri Lanka, this workshop included elements of both: TNU was in the lucky position of already having a Moodle expert; this really helped in the workshop as he was able to support his colleagues, modify the Moodle course and learn himself. The workshop was evenly split between men and women, leading to a good and varied conversation between the group.

During the workshop it became clear that there was a desire to

run the courses thematically along the lines of the university's distinct departments: life sciences, natural sciences and social sciences, which meant the final programme involved running three courses in 2017 divided by thematic area. The final stage of creating an action plan meant that many of the tools were in place to run the first course. Similar to Sri Lanka, there was an online component to the preparation of the online course, but in this case it took place after the face-to-face workshop instead of ahead of it. The post-workshop three-week online component was designed to walk all participants though INASP's online facilitation guidelines and give them practice with online facilitation through a role-play activity. Ten of the 12 participants completed the activities in the online session and were impressive in their activity level in the practice forums, with many participants exceeding the completion requirements for the session.

What was unique about the TNU workshop was the amount of time that the participants spent on planning the programme roll-out. Taking their thematic area, they divided into their respective groups of life sciences, natural sciences and social sciences. Each group brainstormed the course format

that would work for them, and discussed incentives that would encourage the participants to enrol and complete the course. All three groups agreed that face-to-face time both before and after the meeting was important for developing relationships between course participants across such a large university. As a result, each online course would be preceded by a half-day kick-off session laying out the elements of the course and introducing everyone to the facilitators and each other, and it would be followed by a two-day workshop where participants could work on the more practical aspects of research writing.

With this workshop taking place so recently, TNU is conducting its first AuthorAID research-writing online course in March and April 2017. The half-day face-to-face kick-off meeting took place in February and was a success, with 28 participants enrolled in the course and attending a social gathering afterwards to meet and get to know each other. At the time of writing this report, the third week of the six-week online course is underway at TNU.

Lessons learnt

On adapting the approaches as we have worked through the workshops

Looking back, the workshop in Tanzania in May 2016 was an ambitious endeavour. We brought together four institutions with varying needs and levels of expertise. We then ran a workshop that covered a range of things: learning design, Moodle matters, adapting the AuthorAID course, and approaches to blended training. While the workshop introduced participants to many new things, there was a sense at the end that the participants were still very much in the 'learning' phase and not the 'doing' phase. We had to offer a substantial amount of personalized support after the workshop to help the partners run their own AuthorAID online courses. Out of this, we learnt that it is difficult to deliver a one-size-fits-all workshop, with many of our partners at different levels. Perhaps we should have tailored our training individually and understood better the more immediate needs of each institution. To achieve this, more time could be devoted to pulling out these details ahead of time – perhaps in-person if resources allow.
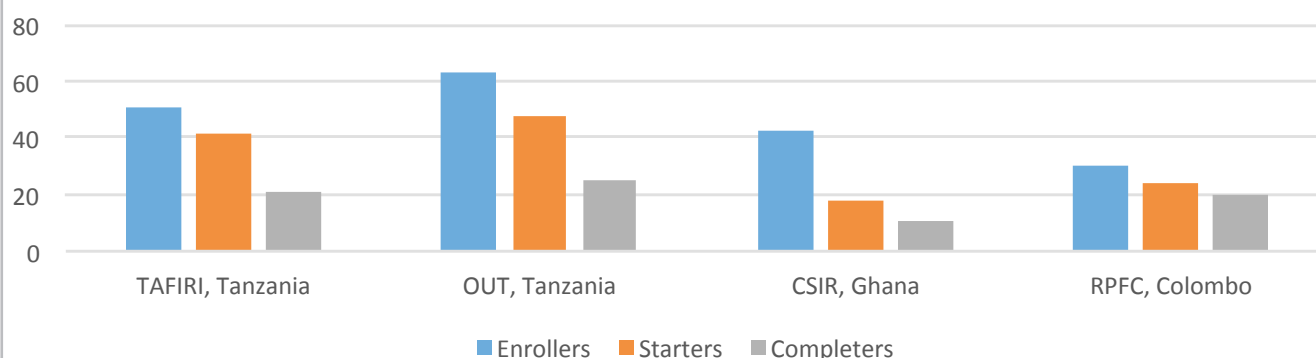
The Tanzanian experience thus motivated us to design a 'working session' for the RPFC in Sri Lanka, where we offered intensive and focused support to the team in a well-defined period of around a month (the online session plus the in-country workshop). We were focused on achieving tangible

goals, mainly the design and rollout of a research-writing club that included the AuthorAID online course.
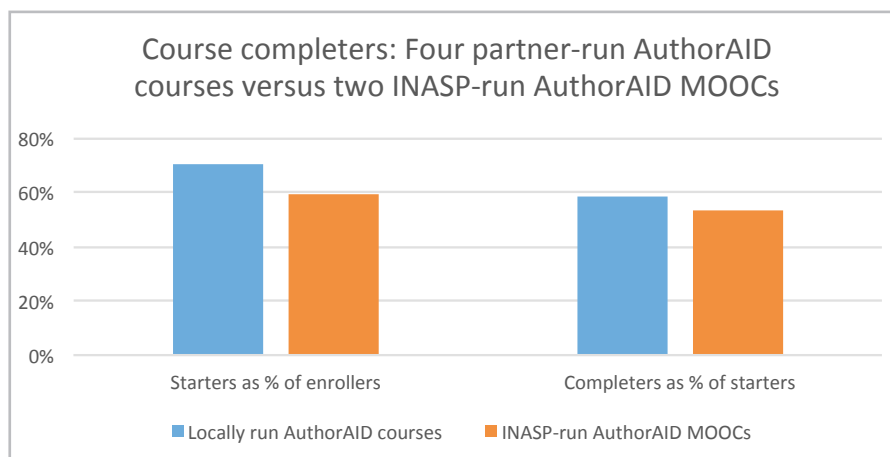
We used a similar approach with TNU in Vietnam, although this time we ran a more traditional training-of-trainers workshop first to get everyone up to speed. A part of this workshop was a sort of working session where we agreed upon an overall outline and dates for the rollout of training. This was followed by an online session and then some remote support for practical and logistical matters because TNU was going to run the AuthorAID online course for the first time.

Another lesson we have learnt is the value of bringing in professional expertise in capacity development to the AuthorAID embedding context. For several years, INASP-led AuthorAID training programmes, whether for skill development or for training future trainers, had been run by AuthorAID trainers – typically INASP Associates who are subject-area experts in research communication. There tended to be a strong focus on the subject itself but perhaps there was a bit of 'missing the wood for the trees' going on. The Tanzania and Sri Lanka workshops were designed and facilitated by an AuthorAID trainer and a member of INASP's capacity development team. As a result there was a focus on both

Participant numbers in recent partner-run AuthorAID online courses

Course completers: Four partner-run AuthorAID courses versus two INASP-run AuthorAID MOOCs

Chart showing two groups of bars. "Starters as % of enrollers" and "Completers as % of starters", with y-axis from 0% to 80%.

Legend: Locally run AuthorAID courses (blue), INASP-run AuthorAID MOOCs (orange)

the nuts-and-bolts of Moodle and the AuthorAID online course as well as the larger picture of online embedding and capacity development.

On online course results

It is true that there will always be a percentage of those who enrol in the AuthorAID course who do not complete it. However, it is worth mentioning the completion criteria for the course: participants must pass the quizzes in the course by scoring at least 80% in each quiz. There are five to seven quizzes in the course, depending on whether the course covers research writing or research writing plus grant-proposal writing. These quizzes test the participants' comprehension of the topics covered in the course lessons. Participants are also encouraged to submit their writing work (typically a research abstract), which is part of a peer-assessment activity.

In contrast, AuthorAID face-to-face workshops typically have somewhat loose or informal completion criteria. Even if there are a range of activities in a workshop, it is difficult to objectively evaluate the participants' work. Just showing up for a workshop and being somewhat participative is usually enough for one to get a certificate. One's output may not be evaluated on a pass/fail basis. So completing an online course such as the AuthorAID course may be more

difficult, as a result of the objective evaluation of performance, than completing a workshop where completion mainly signifies attendance and participation.

Perhaps a better comparison of the above numbers is with the AuthorAID online courses that have been run by INASP. From October 2015 to May 2016, INASP offered two AuthorAID MOOCs. Data on enrollers, starters and completers for the aggregate of these courses versus those for the aggregate of the abovementioned four courses are shown above.

In a way this is not a fair comparison because the two INASP-run MOOCs had nearly 1,500 completers, whereas the four partner-run courses together had only 77 completers. Typically in MOOCs there is a higher dropout rate than in smaller online courses. Still, what can be said with some confidence is that the partner-run courses show slightly better metrics for percentages of starters and completers. We believe this is an encouraging sign, especially considering that our four partners who ran these courses had very limited prior experience with online course delivery.

The gender balance of the first four partner-run courses was generally encouraging, and it adds to the body of evidence from INASP-supported workshops and online courses that the latter are

often more accessible to female professionals in developing countries.

On delivering successful online courses

There are shared frustrations about running online courses that have come out of all three workshops, in particular that it cannot be guaranteed that course participants will be confident about using online technology. It is worth saying that there were variations across partners, with this raised as a more immediate issue in Tanzania and Ghana. To combat this, some institutions discussed running a pre-course sensitization session or an introduction to the course, and to better advertise the benefits of completing the course (such as publishing more and increased opportunities for funding) so that there is motivation to learn about using online technology in this way.

With some struggles with online course completion by the participants, some partners agree that the prestige factor of having an external facilitator is important in promoting engagement, and this is particularly evident in Sri Lanka and Tanzania. This does not necessarily have to be someone from outside the country; a facilitator from another university within the country would also increase interest level and encourage people to sign up.

The experience of Vietnam revealed that devoting workshop time to incentivizing online course enrolment, and completion, is a useful activity in understanding where the audience for courses exist and how to pique their interest to take the course. It also encourages time spent on understanding how to engage participants during a course – through forum posts, activities and social aspects that encourage participants to get to know each other.

Finally, a locally run AuthorAID course may seem less attractive to some participants than an INASP-run AuthorAID course, even though the course materials are identical. The latter kind of course when offered as a MOOC presents more opportunities for international discussion and networking, but the former may be more conducive for strengthening local relationships and developing a sense of camaraderie. However, ultimately, the cachet of a 'foreign' organization such as INASP offering the course may be alluring to some, especially to those who may have found local educational offerings a bit wanting. To counter this, it is particularly important for embedding partners to make the AuthorAID course part of something bigger, such as writing clubs and mentoring (as our partner RPFC has done in Sri Lanka) or a sequence of events that include face-to-face workshops and even social gatherings (as our partner TNU is in the process of doing).

On embedding online training

There is no one-size-fits-all model for embedding online training. Every institution – and every staff member – starts the process at a

Gender balance among completers in recent partner-run AuthorAID online courses
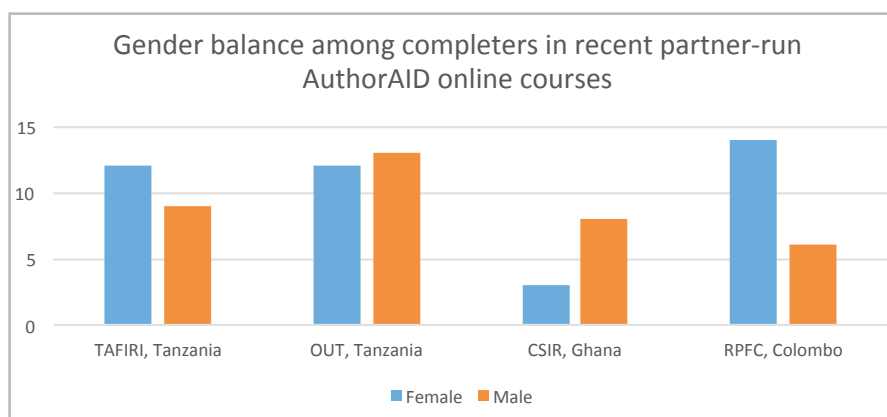
different level and could encounter any number of challenges related to internet and technology infrastructure, digital literacy, funding, leadership and technical ability to manage an online learning platform like Moodle and the online courses on it over time. It is thus important to approach any online embedding initiative from the institution's context and adapt to suit the institution's needs.

Almost all institutions prefer blended modes of training that ensure a face-to-face component to any online course. This could be because of socio-cultural factors in the country that mean people are more comfortable in face-to-face environments and have strong preference for verbal communication rather than reading and writing. It is also likely to be because of still-evolving levels of digital literacy, closely linked to a lack of internet and computer provision in many places. However, this is not always an easy task in institutions with so many scattered sites as it means high costs can be incurred in travel and accommodation to a workshop location.

In Tanzania and Ghana, unreliable internet hampers the ability to deliver a dependable schedule of courses, with feedback revealing that it is sometimes difficult to complete the courses because of a lack of an internet connection. Discussions with partners reveal a need to optimize AuthorAID online course content for use offline or on a mobile device. This means that course materials should be fully downloadable, and that quizzes and activities should be easy to complete offline or on a device. We intend to investigate the offline capabilities promised by the Moodle Mobile app and test our courses on the app.

In line with INASP research on programme sustainability carried out in 2016 [3], online embedding also relies on the support – and 'ear' – of senior leadership in the institution. Partners like OUT and University of Colombo have credited the commitment of their senior leaders in rolling out a successful programme. In line with this, dedicated (and protected) staff

AuthorAID embedding partners in Tanzania and Ghana discuss their experiences of online courses in December 2016
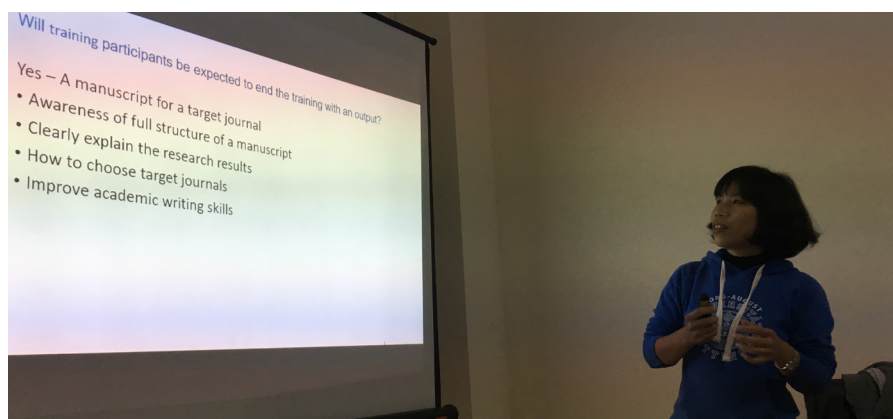
TNU workshop participant presents her plan for the roll-out of the first online course

time for online courses is central. This means that the same time and energy is devoted to preparing and managing a course as for a lecture. Most of our partners have been able to protect their time for courses through their role leading on the initiative, or by tying course outputs to further promotion. In the case of online courses, dedicated academic course facilitators should go in tandem with dedicated Moodle and IT support.

In many instances, AuthorAID partners now manage most aspects of the online courses. This means that they set up and modify the content, manage adding participants, and are able to review and extract key data following the course. However, in some instances our partners are still hesitant with certain aspects of Moodle. This means there is still ongoing support from AuthorAID to provide back-end support in this way. The next year will see an effort to develop partner capacity in all aspects of managing Moodle. We are hopeful that these preliminary lessons learnt are the start of a sustainable initiative of online course delivery.

Overview of the intervention and preliminary impacts

AuthorAID support for embedding partners in the 10-month period from May 2016 and February 2017 has been characterized by bespoke support for different partners while simultaneously identifying shared themes and gradually improving our approach from one event to the next.

Summary of AuthorAID intervention:

• Three-day workshop on online embedding in Tanzania for four institutional partners, three from Tanzania and one from Ghana

• Three-day working session for an institutional partner in Sri Lanka, which was preceded by a three-week online session

• Three-day workshop on blended training in Vietnam for our institutional partner there, which was followed by a three-week online session

Summary of the impact following intervention:

• Two of our partners in Tanzania have run reasonably successful AuthorAID online courses that appear to have had an impact on the writing endeavours of the participants

• Our partner in Sri Lanka has successfully integrated the AuthorAID online course within its existing model of support involving workshops and writing clubs

• Our partner in Vietnam has made a strong start at running a blended training programme comprising face-to-face events and the AuthorAID online course

• Our partner in Ghana has decided to focus on face-to-face training as a result of the unique challenges it faced in running the AuthorAID online course

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