

Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform (SPHEIR)

Transforming the quality, relevance,
scale, access and affordability of
higher education

SPHEIR programme management



FOREWORD

In 2016, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office increased the scale of our ambition and support in higher education by establishing the Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform (SPHEIR) programme. The programme aimed to transform the quality, relevance, scale, access and affordability of higher education through new and innovative partnerships.

Strong higher education systems are key to accelerating development, building inclusive societies and promoting sustainable economic growth. As well as the important role in driving development, higher education contributes to the government's vision for a Global Britain. Through higher education partnerships, we can strengthen our international relationships and increase the attractiveness of the UK as a trusted and valued partner.

In its lifespan, SPHEIR has made a valuable and significant contribution to addressing systemic challenges and generating the job-ready, skilled graduates that business needs to grow. Through the programme, we have seen transformational change at individual, institutional and system levels in focus countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

The programme's support for access and inclusion stands out as a key achievement. To cite one example, the Partnership for Digital Learning and Increased Access (PADILEIA) has developed a new model for higher education in emergency settings. At the individual level, this project had an incredible and lasting impact on the lives of Syrian refugees and disadvantaged young Jordanian and Lebanese learners. More than 12,500 students in Lebanon and Jordan accessed study tracks and bespoke short courses with a further 1.1 million learners worldwide enrolled online, gaining access to higher education at a time when crisis, displacement and other barriers threatened to disrupt their learning. Another example is the Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA) partnership across Tanzania and Uganda. The project's gender-

responsive pedagogy framework and training has been transformative at the institutional level, leading to positive change in the classroom and the establishment of Gulu University's Gender Unit.

A key feature of the programme was the partnership model which brought together diverse and new actors into the higher education space to achieve more through collaboration. The Pedagogical Leadership in Africa (PedaL) partnership, for example, built on an existing partnership of 13 universities across seven African countries and established a network of academics in African universities to build faculty capacity and help transform graduate education. More than 2,760 teaching staff from over 90 universities across eleven African countries received innovative pedagogy training from PedaL.

An unanticipated strength of SPHEIR was the adaptability and resilience of the projects within the portfolio in the face of the unprecedented challenge of Covid-19. The innovation in pedagogy that many of the projects were promoting, such as supporting participating universities to transition to online teaching and learning, meant that SPHEIR-trained teaching staff were often at the forefront of their universities' response to the pandemic. For example, the Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL) enabled participating universities to rapidly, and sustainably, scale up capacity for blended learning. The project supported 23 universities to develop, deliver and share blended content; over 44,000 students were enrolled in PEBL-developed modules, 76 academics trained directly, and this training was cascaded to a further 3,441 lecturers.

SPHEIR also aimed to harness and support genuine innovation. At the forefront of this was the Lending for Education in Africa Partnership (LEAP), a first-of-its-kind partnership dedicated to solving the systemic education-to-employment challenge through affordable student financing. LEAP was a private sector-led initiative with a novel idea, through SPHEIR the project was able to build and test a model which went on to leverage significant external investment from grant and private funders to sustain its operations.

Parts of the portfolio set their sights on aligning with national reform processes and influencing change within the higher education system of a whole country. Assuring Quality Higher Education in Sierra Leone (AQHEd-SL) developed a National Qualification Framework for Tertiary Education to set new quality standards for higher education institutions. Prior to the military takeover in 2021, the Transformation by Innovation in Distance Education (TIDE) partnership worked closely with Myanmar's government to develop a roadmap for

the establishment of an open university in Myanmar – a country where distance education plays a significant role in the higher education sector. The Prepared for Practice (PfP) partnership addressed Somaliland's health workforce challenge in part through supporting the formation of a national medical education policy and standardised medical curriculum.

I would like to place on record the FCDO's appreciation for all of the partners involved in the SPHEIR projects across the six years of the programme and to look ahead to the continuation of the relationships and innovations that have been developed under the programme as the demonstrated sustainability and scalability of SPHEIR's projects is further leveraged for transformational change.

Mostafa Al-Mossallami

Team Leader – Higher Education and Skills, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office



TESCEA course redesign workshop at University of Dodoma

ABOUT SPHEIR

Strong higher education systems are key for accelerating development, building inclusive societies and promoting sustainable economic growth.

SPHEIR was a UK Aid programme (2016–2022) that supported reform and innovation in higher education to better meet the needs of students, employers and society in focus countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

The programme was managed by a consortium of organisations, led by the British Council in association with PricewaterhouseCoopers and Universities UK International.

The SPHEIR approach

Mutually beneficial partnerships brought together different types of organisations – including higher education institutions, authorities and associations, civil society and private sector organisations – to design and deliver innovative solutions to higher education challenges by focusing on transformative change at individual, institutional and sector-wide levels.

SPHEIR's transformational impact

Quality – In Sierra Leone, a National Qualification Framework for Tertiary Education set new quality standards for higher education institutions. Across East Africa, a new quality review tool was applied in 21 universities to improve institutional blended learning capacity.

Relevance – Across Somaliland and Sierra Leone, 13 degree programmes were redesigned with contextualised content and practice-based learning. In Tanzania and Uganda, four universities are engaging public and private sector representatives through new Joint Advisory Groups.

Scale – 4,470 academic and support staff were trained in curriculum design, student-centred and gender-responsive pedagogy, assessment, blended learning and distance education. Over 77,600 students benefitted directly from SPHEIR, including 12,400 from Myanmar who accessed online courses.

Access – More than 12,500 students in Lebanon and Jordan accessed study tracks and bespoke short courses with a further 1.1 million learners worldwide enrolled online.

Affordability – 913 students in Kenya received an affordable loan to start or continue university, of whom 82% were from the bottom three wealth quintiles and nearly half were the first in their family to progress to tertiary education.

8 partnerships






58 organisations

16 countries



GLOBAL COLLABORATION

SPHEIR supported a diverse portfolio of higher education partnerships which brought together higher education institutions, regulatory bodies, private sector organisations, and NGOs to transform higher education through pedagogical and curricula reform, quality assurance, and facilitating equity and access to education.

-  Pedagogical capacity building
-  Curriculum design or redesign
-  Blended and/or distance learning
-  Enhancing access and equity
-  Enhancing quality assurance



Partnership for Digital Learning and Increased Access (PADILEIA)

PADILEIA supported refugees and displaced young people in Jordan and Lebanon to access higher education through a unique online and blended learning initiative.



Assuring Quality Higher Education in Sierra Leone (AQHEd-SL)

AQHEd-SL brought together higher education institutions, the Tertiary Education Commission and employers across Sierra Leone to improve quality management in higher education and to enhance graduate qualifications and employability.



Pedagogical Leadership in Africa (PedaL)

PedaL established a network of academics in African universities to help transform graduate education and its outcomes by embedding innovative pedagogy within graduate social science programmes and beyond.



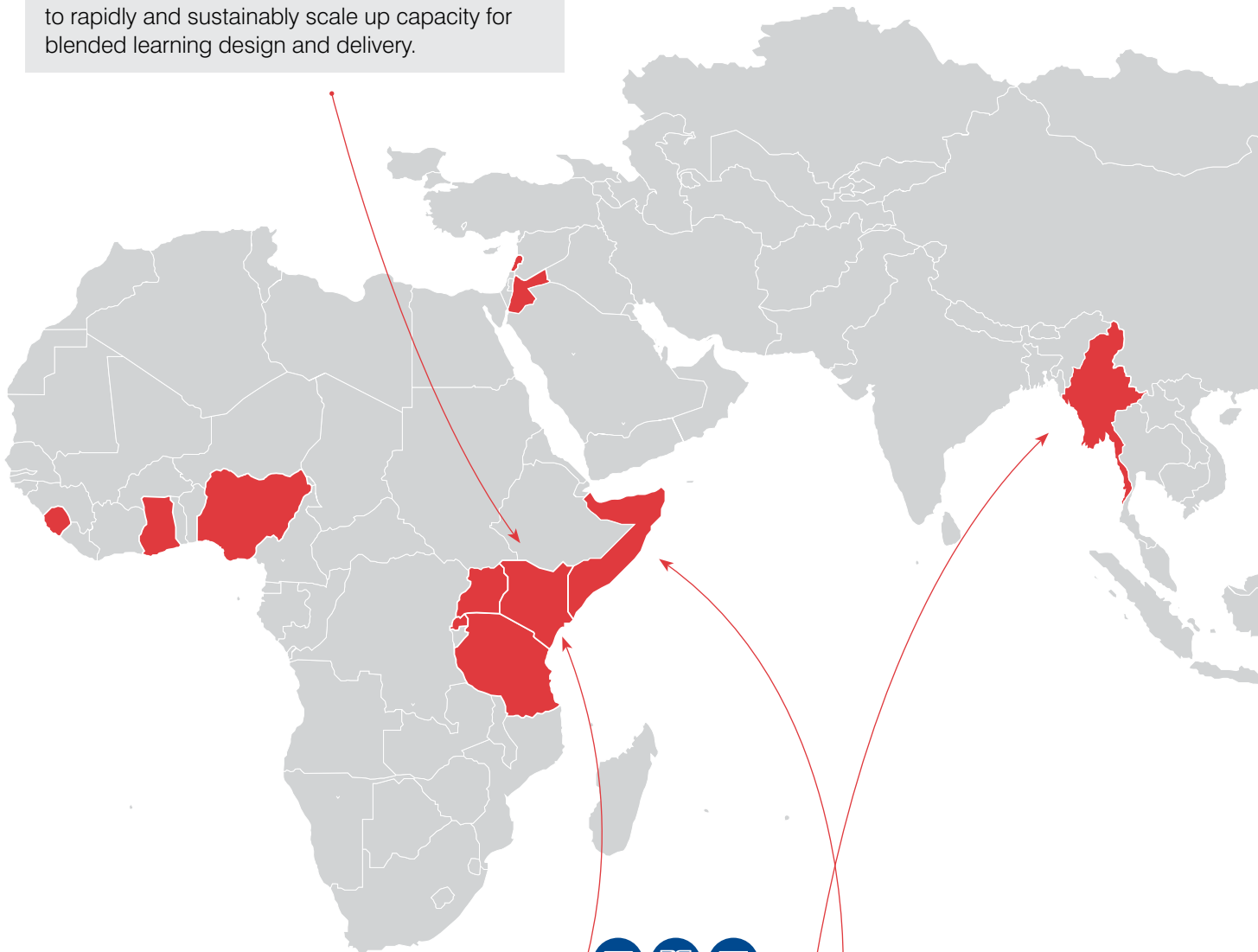
Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA)

TESCEA developed a scalable pedagogical model to help universities across East Africa produce graduates with the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills needed to solve real-world problems.



Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL)

PEBL worked with universities across East Africa to rapidly and sustainably scale up capacity for blended learning design and delivery.



The Lending for Education in Africa Partnership (LEAP)

LEAP is a first-of-its kind partnership which has established a social lending fund providing affordable student finance to young people in Kenya who cannot fully cover the cost of their education through conventional loans, bursaries or scholarships.



Prepared for Practice (PfP)

PfP addressed Somaliland's health workforce challenge through an integrated approach to reform of the health education system, with interventions at individual, institutional and national level to put practice-orientated learning, teaching and assessment at its centre.



Transformation of Innovation in Distance Education (TIDE)

TIDE brought together universities in the UK and Myanmar to improve the quality of distance learning in higher education and produce more employable graduates, with a particular focus on environmental science.

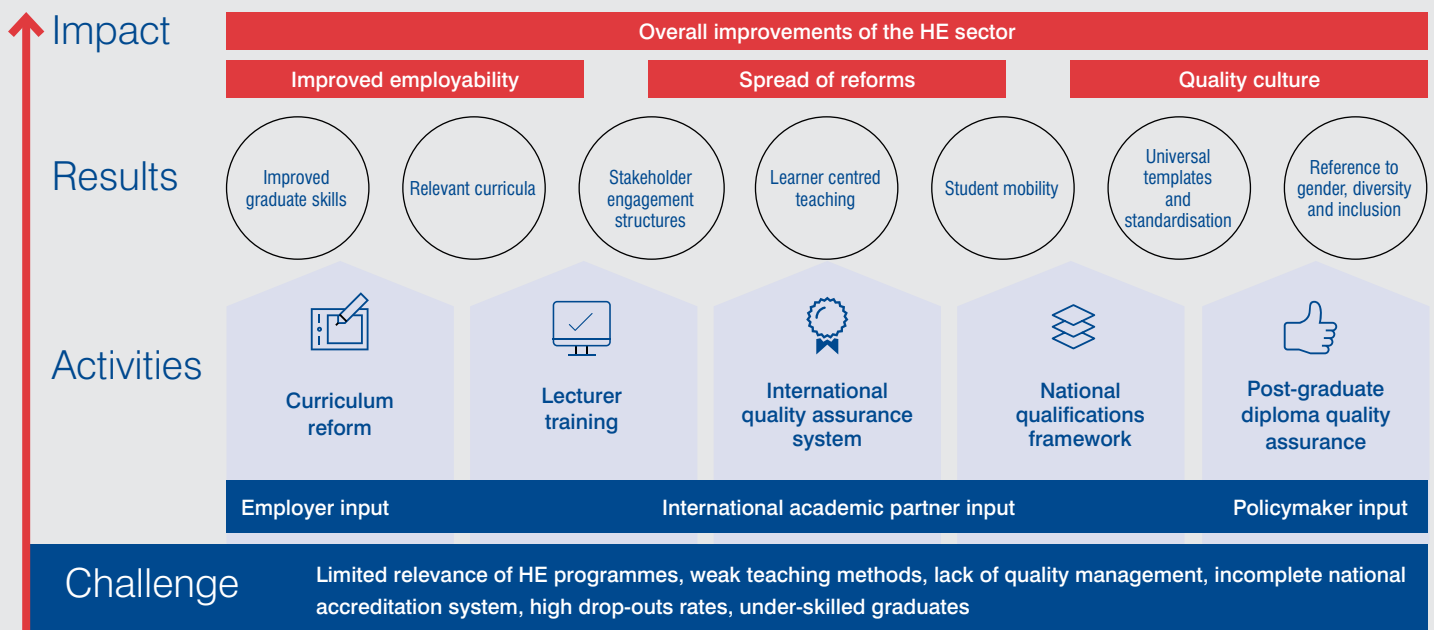
HOW WAS CHANGE ACHIEVED?

SPHEIR impact case studies

Reshaping higher education to meet student and employer needs – Assuring Quality Higher Education in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone’s higher education institutions face challenges shared by many other countries: limited financing and staff training opportunities and a lack of quality management systems. This has created a situation where university course content is misaligned with the needs of students and the job market. Employers find that graduates lack the skills and knowledge needed in the workplace.

The Assuring Quality Higher Education in Sierra Leone (AQHEd-SL) partnership brought together higher education institutions (HEIs), the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) and employers across Sierra Leone to work towards improving graduate qualifications and employability. The focus of the project was to improve HEIs’ capacity to offer quality education through outcome-based, student-centred learning that meets new quality standards.



Key achievements

Students equipped with the skills that employers and society need

Improved relevance of curriculum aligned with employer needs. The project revised and improved eight full degree programmes by integrating practice-oriented activities, soft skills and updated, localised content.

Stakeholder engagement. External stakeholders were actively engaged in the curriculum review process to align degree programmes to job market requirements. The positive relationships built in this way led to a wider engagement of employers with partner universities. Guest lectures, internships and work placements, networking events and support for careers fairs were all catalysed by the project's stakeholder engagement approach.

Improved quality of the HE sector

Establishment of quality management systems at both institutional and national levels. *"It is too soon to see the lasting impact of this project, however what is clear is that the outcomes are outstanding. Quality culture has been established and is being actively sought in Sierra Leone higher education and we at the University of Makeni and more widely on behalf of the Conference of Vice Chancellors and Principals, will work actively to continue the sustainability of these outcomes and indeed to build upon them for a brighter future for our young people and the development of our country."* Vice-Chancellor of the University of Makeni

Creation of a cadre of quality assurance officers

to monitor and evaluate the implementation of revised curricula. A one-year postgraduate Diploma in Quality Assurance was established by the project in 2018 and three cohorts of students – including staff from the TEC and universities in the AQHEd-SL network – graduated within AQHEd-SL's lifetime, with delivery of the course shifting to local instructors. The project's evaluator emphasised that such a strong endorsement of quality assurance was a particular strength of the project: *"In many contexts, HEIs are reluctant to accept QA institutions and processes for fear of having weaknesses exposed. In the context of Sierra Leone however, with various structural problems of the HE sector obvious, QA is seen as a tool of problem solving rather than a danger for institutional reputation."*

Increased collaboration and sense of community between all partners

to work together towards shared objectives. There is now a network of academics and industry professionals across the country who are committed to improving student and graduate experiences and performance and supporting each other professionally. *"SPHEIR was a great platform to bring people/HEIs together and create a common understanding, vision, exchange knowledge, connect with stakeholders and build capacity. This is the first time in the history of Sierra Leone that we are together in one room."* University Quality Assurance Officer



Ice-breaker session at AQHEd-SL's first agriculture networking event

Increase in gender, diversity and inclusion awareness. The inclusion in the AQHEd-SL consortium of The 50/50 Group – a Sierra Leonean NGO working on gender equality – was a “door opener” for future work on gender and inclusion in the higher education sector beyond the SPHEIR project, according to AQHEd-SL’s evaluators. Questions of gender, diversity and inclusion were integrated into all training materials and frameworks and the project trained over 100 gender champions.

Systemic reforms and stronger regulatory framework for HE

National Qualification Framework developed and validated. The project developed the National Qualification Framework for Tertiary Education in Sierra Leone (NQFTESL) to standardise and measure quality, and to provide new pathways for lifelong learning and transfer between institutions. The development of the NQFTESL was coordinated with the parallel design of a tertiary and vocational education framework and validated by the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, all HEIs, Vice-Chancellors, registrars and the TEC chairman.

Adoption of key manuals and regulatory policies. The practical focus on curriculum review, pedagogy, quality assurance and stakeholder engagement was captured in a series of manuals and handbooks. The two curriculum review manuals and the pedagogy training manual have been validated and adopted by the TEC and the quality assurance manual was agreed as a national quality assurance policy by HEIs and the TEC.

Increased regulatory capacity. Capacity development activities have strengthened the TEC through its central role in the project. According to the project’s evaluator, *“the mission and standing of the TEC have been significantly improved along with the level of qualification of its staff”*.

Partners

The AQHEd-SL partnership was led by the University of Sierra Leone, working with partners from Sierra Leone – Njala University, the University of Makeni, Tertiary Education Commission, Sierra Leone Institution of Engineers, the 50/50 Group, Eastern Technical University, Milton Margai Technical University, Freetown Polytechnic, Fourah Bay College, College of Medicine & Allied Health Sciences, Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology – plus, King’s College London and INASP from the UK and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign from the US.

AQHEd-SL in numbers

8

degree programmes updated – including a total of

295

modules – in priority fields for Sierra Leone’s national development: agriculture, engineering, health and management

161

stakeholders from

90

organisations spanning public and private sector employers engaged in curriculum revision and wider support to universities

37

quality assurance officers trained to work at universities and in the Tertiary Education Commission

540

university staff trained in learner-centred teaching, critical thinking, and gender, diversity and inclusion

Creating pathways to higher education for Syrian refugees – Partnership for Digital Learning and Increased Access

Higher education in humanitarian contexts provides young people with vital continuity in educational development, enhancing their ability to make strategic choices about their futures. Since 2016 over 5.6 million people have fled Syria seeking safety in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and beyond. Many of these refugees, alongside people in host communities, live below the poverty line and face major challenges in accessing higher education.

The Partnership for Digital Learning and Increased Access (PADILEIA) helped refugees and displaced young people in Jordan and Lebanon to access higher education through a unique online and blended learning initiative.

Participating students were able to access three personalised and flexible learning offers:



Bespoke short courses



Contextualised foundation programmes for university preparation



Study programmes with university credit-bearing courses



These offers were complemented by support services:



Online mentoring to improve English language skills and support scholarship applications



Peer-to-peer support network linking PADILEIA students with UK university students



LiveChat for academic and technical support



Guidance for transfer into formal higher education



Psychosocial support

Key achievements

Contextualised offer providing pathways to higher education for refugees

- **A functional and transferable learning ecosystem model providing access to higher education for refugees.** The blended learning model – delivered both online and through study hubs at different locations, including refugee camps, university campuses and bespoke spaces in the community – addressed a range of student needs.
- **Student-centred courses accompanied by effective course facilitation.** This resulted in student satisfaction rates of over 80% and high levels of course completion. Students praised the quality of academic support and its impact on their motivation and personal development.
- **A successful mentorship programme which connected students in Jordan and Lebanon with professional volunteers and university students in the UK.** The mentoring programme helped PADILEIA students with scholarship applications, English language and soft skills. The peer-to-peer network enabled UK university students and PADILEIA students to benefit from academic and cultural exchange: *“Making a connection with my mentee - the opportunity to meet someone in a very different situation to yours is always fulfilling. I think we both gained something from this experience”*
Volunteer mentor from Cambridge University
- **Effective transition to online delivery.** PADILEIA’s online support mechanisms and digital foundations enabled a fast response when the Covid-19 pandemic struck. The team provided internet bundles and tablets to PADILEIA students and moved all programmes fully online, whilst maintaining student support.

Impact on PADILEIA students

- **Raised aspirations of students and increased sense of community.** While courses have supported students to develop their confidence and self-efficacy, the establishment of study hubs provided a space to meet peers and form a learning community. *“As a refugee we do not meet lots of people from outside our community, the programme helped me a lot [to] meet new people and feel part of the society.”*
Refugee student at Al al-Bayt University

- **Transferable skills.** In addition to gaining subject-specific knowledge, students gained soft skills – such as communication and teamwork – which will support them in future study and work. 85% of students reported increased digital literacy and English language skills.

Improved attitudes towards, and capacity to deliver, online learning

- **Capacity development in blended and online learning supported partner universities in their wider transition to online learning during the pandemic.** Staff trained in blended and online learning facilitation under PADILEIA cascaded knowledge to colleagues. *“The training that our instructors received on online teaching within the PADILEIA project has helped us to move swiftly and at very short notice to online instruction in response to Covid-19.”*
Ismail Ababneh, Vice President for Administration and Student Affairs, Al al-Bayt University
- **Twelve learning agreements to recognise prior online or blended learning were signed between PADILEIA partner Kiron and universities in Lebanon and Jordan.** In 2019, Beirut Arab University became the first major higher education institution in Lebanon to commit to recognition of prior online study.

Partners

The PADILEIA partnership was led by King’s College London (UK), working with the American University of Beirut (Lebanon), Al al-Bayt University (Jordan), Kiron Open Higher Education gGmbH (Germany) and FutureLearn (UK).

PADILEIA in numbers

8 bespoke short courses
designed and delivered to
PADILEIA students

More than

12,500

students in Lebanon and Jordan studied on
PADILEIA's study programmes and bespoke
short courses online and in the study hubs

444

students graduated from the
foundation programmes

11 million learners worldwide have enrolled on the eight
online short courses developed by PADILEIA

102

students accepted into university to
study over 20 different subjects including
English language, law, civil engineering,
and nursing

58%

of learners who completed
PADILEIA courses were female

3,791

hours volunteered to provide tailored
support to 365 PADILEIA students



Strengthening staff capacity and developing blended learning courses in East African universities – Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning

Scaling up capacity on all aspects of blended learning – including interactive content design, quality assurance and virtual learning platform utilisation – is a recognised priority among higher education institutions across East Africa. The implementation of blended and digital learning is a complex process, presenting many challenges, particularly for institutions in the initial stages of their digital transformation.

The Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL) enabled participating universities to rapidly, and sustainably, scale up capacity for blended learning design and delivery. The project supported 23 universities to develop, deliver, and share blended content – and enhanced the expertise of academic staff to successfully deliver blended learning. The key components of the project were:



Pedagogical development

PEBL academics leading on module development were trained in blended learning pedagogy.

'The PEBL project was an eye-opener to our young university... thanks to PEBL, our university had fully implemented blended learning before COVID-19, and therefore it was possible to move from blended to pure online learning with ease. Our university staff were well trained by the PEBL team and the effect has been good and positive.'
Wanjiku G. Thuita, PEBL team member, Coordinator of Student Affairs, and lecturer at Riara University.



Curriculum design

Academics across the PEBL network developed and rolled out a series of quality-assured, credit-bearing, blended courses in a range of undergraduate and graduate degree programmes: ICT, business, health and applied sciences, and education. All courses were hosted on the open-access platform OER Africa and are available for any university to download for use and adaptation.



Quality assurance

A Quality Assurance (QA) Rubric was produced to standardise the quality assurance process for blended learning content and help academic developers benchmark the features of any blended learning module against defined standards in eight distinct areas, from instructional design and navigation to assessment and student support.



PEBL training session ©The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU)

Key achievements

Creation of a portfolio of 26 quality-assured, credit-bearing blended learning modules shared by universities across the region. Some institutions used the courses as complementary material to enhance teaching while others have gone further – Africa Nazarene University has embedded PEBL modules designed by other universities into its learning management system for use by students on degree programmes where the content aligns.

Establishment of a regional cadre of blended learning experts across Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda delivering high quality training to academics in their own institutions and beyond. PEBL-trained lecturers at Kenyatta University led capacity building activities in online and blended learning for 1,150 other academics at their university and delivered training to other Kenyan institutions. *‘Technology adoption and proficiency among faculty and students have increased drastically,’*

Dr Lucy Ikiara, Director of Quality Assurance at Kenya Methodist University.

Successful adaptation of PEBL institutions to online learning during Covid-19. *‘PEBL became a very useful platform, a useful vehicle to support the institutions’* in Kenya. The training provided by PEBL for academics in 11 institutions across Kenya on how to develop and use blended learning approaches meant that *‘the universities whose academics had been trained became so useful when [Covid-19 created] the demand that they migrated to online platforms and accelerated the uptake of technology.’*

Professor Jackson Too, Director of Research and Development at the Commission for University Education (CUE) in Kenya.

Adoption and adaptation of the project’s QA rubric and institutional QA review tool by universities. Several institutions have developed or adopted blended learning policies drawing on their involvement in PEBL, with more than 50% of the universities in PEBL’s network implementing either a blended learning policy or a blended learning strategy in 2020-2021. The practical capacity developed by PEBL catalysed wider policy and procedural changes in partner and participant universities that were crucial for ensuring a streamlined transition to blended learning.

Partners

The PEBL partnership was led by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (UK), working with Commission for University Education (Kenya), Commonwealth of Learning (Canada), Kenyatta University (Kenya), Makerere University (Uganda), Open University of Tanzania, State University of Zanzibar (Tanzania), Staff and Educational Development Association (UK), Strathmore University (Kenya), University of Edinburgh (UK), University of Rwanda, plus 18 ‘participant’ universities in East Africa.

PEBL in numbers

26 quality-assured, blended modules developed and available on open access platform OER Africa

Over

44,000

students enrolled on PEBL modules, including 8,000 registered for courses outside their home institutions

76

academics trained by PEBL to support online and blended learning, with capacity building cascaded to a further 3,441 lecturers

21

PEBL network universities used the Institutional Quality Assurance Review Tool to assess their blended learning capacity

More than

10

universities adopted or adapted PEBL’s Quality Assurance Rubric to assess blended courses

Improving higher education through innovative student-centred pedagogy – Pedagogical Leadership in Africa

Many academics in African universities face challenges shared by higher education institutions around the world: large class sizes, poor infrastructure, heavy teaching and administrative workloads and weak reward systems for teaching excellence. Teaching staff are highly qualified in their disciplines but there is often limited investment in pedagogical skills. This has a negative impact on the learning environment and on graduates' abilities to use their knowledge to address local needs and find innovative solutions to developmental challenges.

The Pedagogical Leadership in Africa (PedaL) partnership established a network of academics in African universities to help transform graduate education and its outcomes, by embedding innovative pedagogy within graduate social science programmes.

PedaL embraced a unique and holistic approach to teaching and learning:



Capacity development in student-centred pedagogical skills for university teaching staff. This includes “flipped classroom”, contextual case studies, simulations, role plays, and threshold concept tools aimed at maximising learning outcomes among students.



Cascade trainings at university level, made possible through cost-sharing with host universities who invite PedaL to train their staff.



Course delivery through blended learning. PedaL's training was delivered using blended learning approaches and participating academics were also equipped with the digital toolsets to excel in delivering the courses they teach.



Integration of PedaL at institutional level through its adoption as the preferred approach to teaching and learning in social sciences programmes at participating universities.



Key achievements

Transformed teaching and learning practices.

By training over 2,700 academics in 1,056 university departments (336 departments in partner universities and 720 in non-partner universities) across more than 10 countries in innovative pedagogies, PedaL was a driving force leading the shift from traditional lecture methods to participatory teaching and learning approaches. Through the training, academics built pedagogical skills to facilitate deeper learning and produce employable graduates. All PedaL trainings enable teaching staff to redesign courses for enhanced quality, relevance and equity, particularly integrating gender as well as pressing issues in various African contexts.

Successful adaptation of pedagogical training to online platforms.

PedaL was adapted to create the 'PedaL Online: Technology for Transformative Pedagogy' course. The self-paced course was designed so faculty staff from different universities could apply it to design and deliver courses on the different learning management systems used within their institutions. The PedaL Online training was a driving force in moving teaching and learning from a purely face-to-face endeavour to online and blended modes in all participating universities.

Establishment of a community of practice leading pedagogical innovations.

A strong community of practice has emerged around pedagogical innovation. Annual convenings of the PedaL community have proved useful for sharing novel ideas, resources, experiences and lessons learned.

Development of students' 21st century skills critical for employability.

Critical thinking skills, collaboration and teamwork, reflecting and connecting to real life situations, change and adaptability, innovation and creativity, and digital literacy were among the skills that students reported they acquired from the teaching and learning experiences delivered by lecturers who undertook PedaL training. 76.1% of the students surveyed from partner universities expressed satisfaction with their experience with PedaL-supported innovations.

Adoption at institutional level of pedagogical innovations introduced by PedaL.

Both partner and non-partner institutions recognised the relevance of PedaL and its contribution to addressing demands in the labour market, adopting the model and accrediting PedaL training for teaching staff. Partner universities have shared the

costs of PedaL training, embedded it on university learning management systems, established relevant centres for continuous pedagogical training for their staff, and endorsed relevant institutional policies.

Cost-sharing model to support equity within the higher education system

To ensure alignment with its principles of equity and inclusivity, the partnership adapted its approach to ensure that it did not discriminate against small and under-resourced universities. For the most part, the well-resourced universities were committed to a cost-sharing model while extending invitations to teaching staff from smaller universities as part of affirmative action. This model is already bearing fruit with at least six universities outside the original partnership having launched and institutionalised PedaL training based on the cost-sharing model.

A transferable training programme.

At the core of PedaL training is its transferability. The courses that are redesigned by PedaL-trained academics incorporate elements learnt from PedaL such as constructive alignment, mainstreaming gender in the curriculum, technology-enhanced learning, and application of innovative teaching and learning tools.

Partners

The PedaL partnership was led by the Partnership for African Social & Governance Research (Kenya), working with the University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Egerton University (Kenya), University of Ibadan (Nigeria), University of Ghana (Ghana), Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda), Alliance for Research Universities in Africa (ARUA), and Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex (UK). An extensive network of additional universities across Africa also joined the PedaL network and took part in project activities.



Guided practice in PEDAL training

PedaL in numbers

More than

2,700 teaching staff
trained on innovative
pedagogies

PedaL influenced the redesign of

1,752
university courses
delivered to students

Transformed teaching
and learning across

1,056 university
departments,

97 universities,

11 African
countries



Sharing ideas at a PedaL training session

Meeting Somaliland's health needs through practice-orientated higher education – Prepared for Practice

Somaliland's poor health indicators are in part driven by a shortage of well-trained health workers. This health workforce challenge is rooted in issues in the tertiary education sector: critical gaps in the curricula, insufficient expertise within universities to design and deliver relevant courses, limited formal pedagogical training amongst faculty and lack of opportunities for students to develop skills in clinical settings. As a result, graduates often lack the knowledge, skills, behaviours and practical experience to deliver safe and quality healthcare.

The Prepared for Practice (PfP) partnership addressed Somaliland's health workforce challenge through an integrated approach to health education system reform with interventions at individual, institutional and national level.



Improving undergraduate teaching, examination and clinical supervision

- Online tutorials to medical, nursing and midwifery students provided by UK health experts
- Supervision of hospital ward rounds and field trips to health facilities
- Evidence-based examinations



Strengthening capacity of academic staff and teaching institutions

- Certificate, diploma and master's level courses in health education
- Postgraduate certificate in administration



Supporting national policy and regulation

- National medical education policy
- Standardised national medical curriculum



Health Professions Education Certificate participants, undertaking group exercise on clinical teaching and educational supervision in Hargeisa, Somaliland

Photo taken by N. Trenchard Turner, KSP Volunteer.

Key achievements

Quality and relevant learning for students

- Improvements in the learning environment.** Case-based discussions and clinical reasoning on pre-existing courses – such as paediatrics, obstetrics and mental health – facilitated by UK NHS volunteers helped students to feel more confident in their practice. More structured supervision of ward rotations, visits to health facilities and hands-on support to practical examinations have transformed clinical learning. Community visits, for example, enabled new medical and nursing students to experience all levels of the health system and to observe the referral pathways between health centres and hospitals.
- Student readiness to deliver safe and quality healthcare.** The project has strengthened teaching, learning and assessment methods for undergraduate medical, nursing and midwifery students at three partner universities. As well as improving the clinical learning environment, PfP has also enhanced the experience of graduates through the achievement of national, system-wide reforms to the medical internship and its governance.

Faculty and administrative staff development

- Institutionalisation of the HPE courses.** The suite of Health Professions Education (HPE) courses – delivered in person and online and leading to an accredited qualification – have been the first of their kind delivered in Somaliland. Aimed at building the capacity of faculty in the design and delivery of quality education to future health professionals through pedagogy, student-centred teaching and evidence-based assessment, the HPE courses have been adopted

by partner and non-partner universities. 95% of HPE course participants are sharing what they learnt with their peers.

- Increased motivation and confidence.** Through the HPE courses, lecturers studied new teaching approaches and were mentored on evidence-based pedagogy that improved their skills and connected them to a global community of learning. As a result, they became more motivated to continuously learn and improve their teaching practice.

“Before I joined the course, teaching was just an option. But now, because I have learnt more about my job, [...] I feel even happier when I’m in the class. I feel time is always too short for me which felt longer before joining this course.”

Lecturer at Edna Adan University

Staff completing the accredited course in University Administration for Professional Services reported improved ability to meet deadlines, manage budgets, communicate and work as part of a team.

- Improved teaching practice and assessment.** Teachers were exposed to student-centred education and planning and, as a result, started using practical and problem-solving methods. They also felt more confident in structuring and delivering lessons and student feedback mechanisms were introduced. The HPE course *“changed the way we teach from spoon-feeding to actively making the students [...] participate and learn and develop their personal way of learning.”*
- Lecturer at Amoud University.**
- Examiners and teachers also started using evidence-based methods for designing valid assessments and followed consistent marking approaches.



Dr Derie Ereg, Dean of the College of Medicine and Health Sciences at the University of Hargeisa, Somaliland, with some young medical graduates

Long-lasting institutional change

- **Adoption of new policies at partner institutions.** As a result of PfP, new assessment and clinical teaching policies were introduced at partner universities. For instance, a new Assessment Policy based on the guidance provided by the HPE course was adopted at Amoud University, alongside new policies on common standards for clinical teaching. Evidence-based assessments – written papers and Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs) – are now used by all medical schools in Somaliland. Over 320 medical, nursing and midwifery students have been assessed in practical, clinical examinations held independently by their own universities.

An enabling environment

- **Development of the country's first national Medical Education Policy.** PfP played a catalytic role in the Somaliland government developing a policy that outlines how government, regulators, universities and other health-system leaders collaborate to produce a medical workforce that meets the health needs of people in Somaliland.
- **Creation of a National Harmonised Medical Curriculum.** In line with Somaliland's Medical Education Policy and global medical education standards and for use by all medical faculties to standardise the competencies of medical graduates, the harmonised medical curriculum supported by PfP will contribute to a high-quality health workforce, improving the health system and the services provided to the population of Somaliland. The partnership also contributed

to the adoption of standardised national medical examinations.

- **Introduction of independent assessment of medical schools.** To ensure institutions training health workers meet internationally recognised standards, the project worked with national regulatory bodies to introduce assessment and accreditation mechanisms.
- **Strengthened health system.** Through its multi-tiered approach, PfP exceeded its own expectations. The project's external evaluator found that *"The individuals who engage with the PfP project become teachers who pass on knowledge, supervisors who empower students, and stakeholders who take on responsibilities in hospitals and within the Ministry of Health, strengthening the backbone of the health system. This means that the health personnel produced by the system is of a higher, more harmonized quality. The impact of the project is not just in producing better graduates, but rather through the interlinking interventions across teaching, practice and policy, the PfP project is strengthening the Somaliland health system as a whole."*

Partners

The PfP partnership was led by King's Global Health Partnerships, an initiative of King's College London (UK), working with Amoud University (Somaliland), Edna Adan University and Teaching Hospital (Somaliland), University of Hargeisa (Somaliland), MedicineAfrica (UK), and the Tropical Health and Education Trust (UK).

PfP in numbers

1,800 medical, nursing and midwifery students reached, including 838 through PfP's online learning platform

12 unique online courses collaboratively designed and delivered with partners

77%

of medical and 93% of nursing and midwifery undergraduates surveyed feel prepared for practice

16 different departments at three universities positively impacted by the HPE

129 teachers and administrators benefitted from capacity development

144

NHS volunteers delivered online undergraduate tutorials

24 clinical supervisors trained and supported

Widening access to tertiary education through affordable finance – The Lending for Education in Africa Partnership

The lack of access to quality tertiary education is a significant and growing challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa, where enrolment rates for young people are far below those in developed economies. This critical challenge is exacerbated by an acute student financing gap whereby commercial loans are out of reach for most low- and middle-income students and scholarships are only available for a small group of the highest academic performers. This financing gap offers a compelling opportunity to advance social mobility and economic development by addressing the ‘missing middle’ of tertiary education finance, particularly in light of the strong return on investment delivered by each additional year of higher education for an individual’s earning potential.

The Lending for Education in Africa Partnership (LEAP) is a first-of-its kind partnership which has established a social lending fund providing affordable student finance to young people from low- and middle-income backgrounds in Kenya who cannot fully cover the cost of their education through conventional loans, bursaries, scholarships or other means. In addition to direct financial support, the initiative delivers services to support students in their transition into the world of work.

Central to LEAP’s proposition is the revolving nature of its social lending fund, whereby loan repayments from LEAP’s students – or ‘Fellows’ – are redeployed for future cohorts. At the same time, LEAP leverages concessionary funding by raising additional private sector impact funding as it proves its business model.

LEAP’s offer to its Fellows consists of:



Affordable student loan to cover tuition and living costs



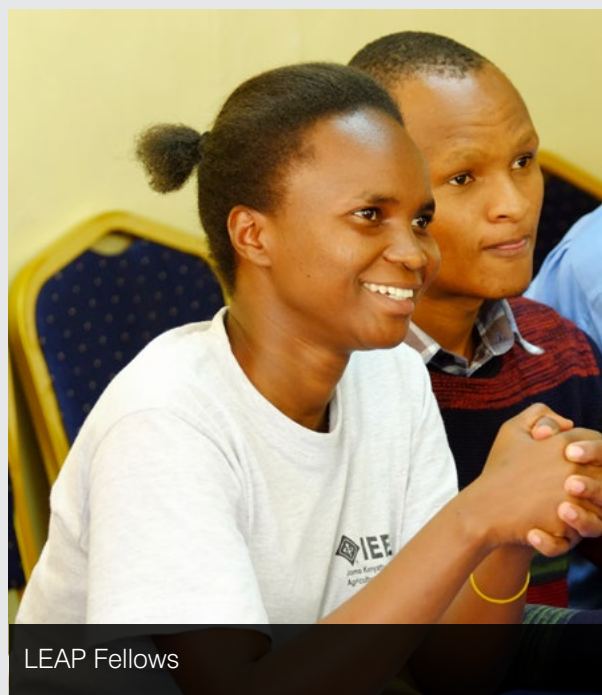
Career readiness support



Financial literacy training



Collaborative peer-to-peer network and alumni community



Key achievements

Establishment of a first-of-its-kind student lending model.

LEAP was able to successfully build and operationalise an innovative social lending fund in Kenya from scratch and transition its management to a Kenyan entity within the lifetime of the SPHEIR programme. LEAP adapted its original plans in response to the operating environment – including working through a Kenyan financial technology, or fintech, firm called Pezesha rather than a bank to disburse its loans and adjusting loan management processes over time as the team learned more about the optimum approach to engaging with students. LEAP has partnered with five Kenyan universities and six technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions to create a diversified portfolio and has secured over £3.5 million of external investment to support its future sustainability.

Provision of equitable access for Kenyan students.

As of December 2021, LEAP had provided an affordable loan to 913 Fellows and 82% of these students were from the bottom three wealth quintiles in Kenya, demonstrating LEAP's success in reaching financially disadvantaged young people. The equity performance of the LEAP portfolio significantly outstrips the benchmark for post-secondary education overall in Kenya, where only 27% of students come from the bottom three wealth quintiles.¹ Nearly half of LEAP Fellows are the first in their family to attend tertiary education, which is important because children whose parents completed at least secondary school are ten times more likely to attend university in Kenya than those whose parents did not² and investment in higher education is a powerful lever for upward socio-economic mobility, with a return on investment of over 20% from each additional year of higher education completed.³ LEAP loans are being effectively targeted at need, with 81% of Fellows reporting that without their LEAP loan they would not have been able to finance their studies and 20% indicating that they have previously discontinued or deferred their studies for financial reasons.

Design of fit-for-purpose student support programme.

LEAP developed tailored support services for its

fellows to improve their readiness for the job market and build their ability to manage their loans and wider finances. Developed in partnership with the African Management Institute, LEAP's online career readiness training helps students to prepare for their careers during their last 18 months of study. All LEAP Fellows are offered virtual training sessions, a career readiness newsletter, town halls, and other networking opportunities. Additionally, LEAP provides financial literacy training via SMS through a provider called Patascore to facilitate access for all students. Fellows average an increase of 20 percentage points from pre- to post-training. *"From the financial literacy trainings I've received, I am able to manage my finances well. I now prepare a monthly budget, make savings goals, repay my interest on time, and manage my priorities better."* LEAP Fellow. LEAP has also established an increasingly Fellow-led peer-to-peer and alumni community, with chapters of LEAP Fellows at participating institutions and connections made between current students and recent graduates to create a support network.

Scalable and flexible student offer.

LEAP successfully shifted its career readiness and financial literacy offer to an online environment in response to the campus closures in Kenya that resulted from Covid-19. This enabled LEAP students to continue accessing the training during the pandemic. The new online offer also allowed LEAP to test a scalable and cost-effective training model as it seeks to scale up its portfolio.

Paying attention to gender.

LEAP employs a gender-sensitive approach across all stages of its loan process and programmatic support in order to intentionally facilitate greater access for young women into tertiary education, as well as providing the necessary support to enable their academic and professional success. LEAP's focus on supporting those studying programmes with strong employment prospects has created a portfolio of Fellows from health sciences, engineering, ICT, and accounting and actuarial science courses. As a result of the uneven enrolment on these programmes by gender, around 28% of LEAP Fellows are female. LEAP is addressing this through new partnerships with programmes with high female enrolment rates such as nursing, as well as through targeted outreach and marketing to specifically target female applicants.

¹ Data taken from the World Bank's Edstats database using data collected during the 2014 Demographic and Health Survey. Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) for quintile 1 is 1.5% and 20% for quintile 5.

² World Bank, Darvas et al, Sharing Higher Education's Promise beyond the Few in Sub-Saharan Africa (2017).

³ The private rate of return to higher education worldwide is estimated at 15% for each additional year of education, with even higher returns in low- and middle-income countries. According to most recent data, the return on investment from each additional year of higher education in Kenya is 22%. World Bank, Montenegro, Claudio and Patrinos, Harry, Comparable Estimates of Returns to Schooling Around the World (2014). Note that private returns to education are typically defined as the estimated proportional increase in an individual's labour market earnings from each additional year of schooling completed.

LEAP in numbers

913 students in Kenya received an affordable loan from LEAP to start or continue their studies

Almost **50%** of LEAP Fellows are the first in their family to progress to tertiary education

82% of LEAP Fellows are from the bottom three wealth quintiles in Kenya and

93% of surveyed students report that LEAP's financial literacy training has helped them to manage their finances better

61% are from households where neither parent or guardian is formally employed

LEAP has secured over **£3.5** million of external investment in its social lending fund



Career readiness and financial literacy training for LEAP Fellows

Partners

LEAP is managed by a dedicated team at the LEAP Programme (Kenya). The SPHEIR project was led by Volta Capital (UK), which continues to provide impact and performance management support. LEAP works in collaboration with a suite of educational, operational, and strategic partners including 11 universities and TVET institutes in Kenya, the Kenyan fintech Pezesha, the African Management Initiative (AMI), Patascore, and strategic partners the Mandela Institute for Development Studies – MINDS (South Africa), InHive (UK), Equity Group Foundation (Kenya), and Lundin Foundation (Canada).

Helping students learn ‘how to think’ instead of ‘what to think’ – Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa

Many graduates in East Africa are ill-prepared to address the challenges they encounter in the modern workplace or to leverage their knowledge and competencies to contribute to society. One of the key contributory factors is a limited focus on critical thinking and problem solving within university teaching and learning. While universities recognise the need to improve the quality and relevance of curricula, to rethink pedagogies and to build stronger connections with communities and industries, the solution is to move beyond islands of good teaching and to bring about change at scale.

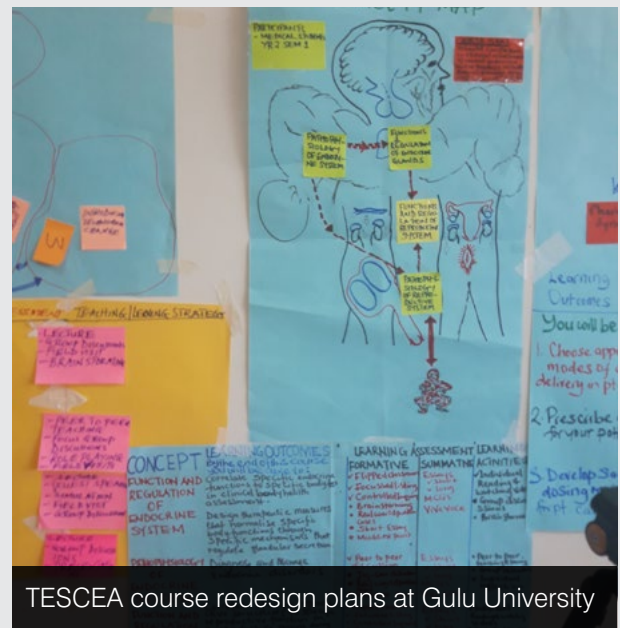
The Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA) partnership brought together universities in Tanzania and Uganda with organisations in Kenya and the UK to develop a scalable pedagogical model to help students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that will increase graduate employability.

The TESCEA model was developed by testing approaches in partner universities and consolidating their experience into a set of practical tools and online courses that offer a complete pathway from programme alignment to learning design in order to transform the employability of graduates.

Woven into the journey to transform teaching and learning practice were:

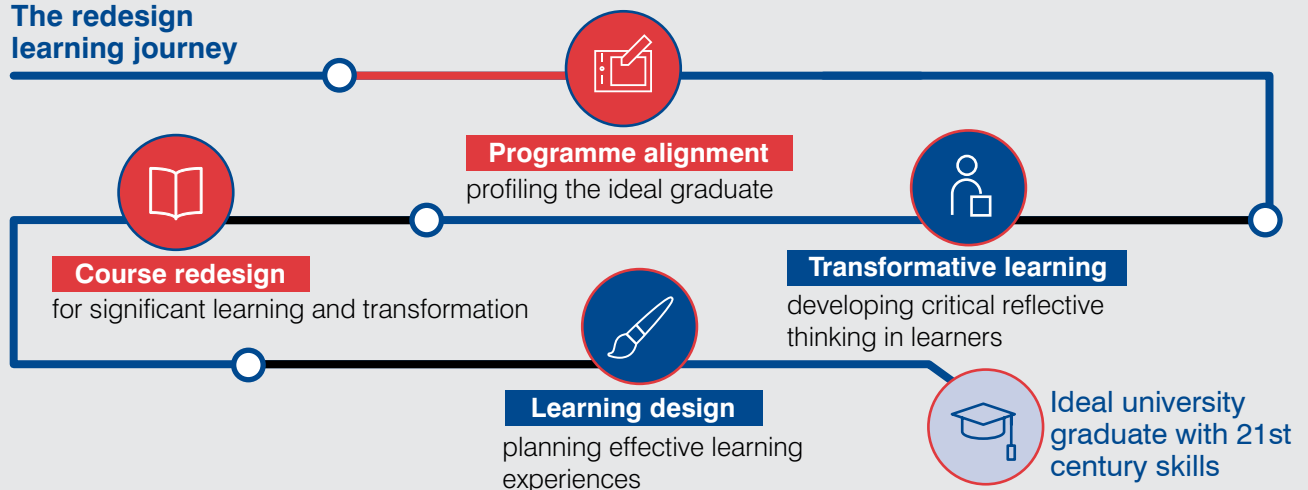
Joint Advisory Groups (JAGs): forums where representatives from local communities, the private and public sector worked together with the university to help shape and deliver learning in and beyond the classroom.

Training of ‘multipliers’: to achieve sustainability, the project trained teaching staff to become facilitators – or ‘multipliers’ – who went on to train their colleagues.



TESCEA course redesign plans at Gulu University

The redesign learning journey



Key achievements

Scalable pedagogical model

- **Development of a contextualised model for transformation in teaching and learning rooted in the experience of East African universities.** Working closely with classroom practitioners, TESCEA adapted existing materials and concepts for use within a resource-constrained environment and developed a gender-responsive approach to teaching for critical thinking and problem-solving skills that leverages greater engagement with employers and communities. The model was published as a scalable methodology of pedagogy and curriculum redesign that can support lecturers and universities working in similar contexts to transform teaching and learning practices.

Transformation in teaching

- **Strengthened teaching practices of lecturers.** Teachers trained in transformative learning used the tools and expertise shared by the partnership to develop their own teaching practices that responded to the specific contexts of their institutions and of East African higher education more widely.

98% of the academic teaching staff surveyed rated their experience with TESCEA as positive.

“Lecturers are now able to define their own visions for teaching and learning and create their own practice.”

Edwin Ngowi, University of Dodoma

- **Improved ability and confidence in digital learning.** The programme delivered specific support to academic staff on how to facilitate online learning and, in doing so, it delivered greater proficiency and confidence in teaching through digital platforms. This was precipitated by Covid-19 but enabled by the ability of the project team to adapt quickly and boldly to the situation in order to meet new needs.

Positive changes in students' learning

- **TESCEA's pedagogical approach puts students at the centre of their own learning and created new channels for their voices to be heard.** As an example, the University of Dodoma incorporated student experience measures into its quality assurance procedures for the first time. The collaborative evaluation conducted by the TESCEA partnership evidenced *“significant changes in the attitudes, learning styles and learning activities of students”*. As one TESCEA student highlighted, *“This kind of learning is very, very, very important for the future of this world. It should continue.”*

Innovation in stakeholder engagement

- **Establishment of new mechanisms to connect universities with external stakeholders – business, public sector and surrounding communities.** The Joint Advisory Groups established at each of TESCEA's partner universities were embraced by the institutions as offering opportunities to improve the relevance of teaching and learning, to help universities understand their key stakeholders better, and to strengthen outside understanding of the value of universities. *“As a platform, it has allowed for a lot of dialogue. Students, lecturers, university leadership and industry stakeholders can all make their voices heard.”*
Albogast Musabila, Mzumbe University
- **Enhanced external engagement in university life.** Joint Advisory Group members have contributed to TESCEA universities beyond formal meetings by offering student placements, providing advice on curriculum revision and university policies, giving guest lectures, and mentoring students. Uganda Martyrs University created interdisciplinary clubs for students to engage with issues of employability and entrepreneurship outside of the classroom, with lecturing staff as coaches and industry members as regularly engaged mentors.

Impact at institutional level

- **Establishment of a cadre of expert trainers and mentors in partner universities.** These experts – or ‘multipliers’ – constitute an institutional mechanism to support continued staff development, including by facilitating transformative learning and course redesign workshops and running sessions on gender-responsive pedagogy. *“I have shifted my mental model about learning... I cannot begin to express how enrolling in this program has positively and powerfully impacted my life on all levels. It is the best thing I have ever done and I am so grateful for the experience. I am definitely changed and I am in alignment with my life's path more than I have ever been. It's very exciting!”*
Gloriana Monko, TESCEA multiplier at University of Dodoma
- **Adoption of institutional policies, processes and structures supporting the pedagogical development of teachers.** By engaging with senior leadership and explicitly planning for institutional change, TESCEA succeeded in promoting the adoption of policies, plans, tools and guidelines to support innovation in teaching and learning. Gulu University developed and launched a postgraduate certificate in

transformative teaching and learning which will be completed by all lecturers and will count towards job promotion. TESCEA's other partner universities now include gender-responsive pedagogy and teaching for critical thinking and problem solving in their staff appraisal criteria. Additionally, Mzumbe and Uganda Martyrs Universities have both proposed the development of centres for excellence in teaching and learning.

Partners

The TESCEA partnership was led by INASP (UK), working with Mzumbe University (Tanzania), University of Dodoma (Tanzania), Gulu University (Uganda), Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda), Association for Faculty Enrichment in Learning and Teaching (Kenya), and Ashoka East Africa (Kenya).

TESCEA in numbers

565 lecturers across four universities trained by TESCEA in course re-design and transformative learning

87%

of students surveyed had a positive experience of TESCEA's transformative teaching and learning approaches

29 multipliers who can now train and mentor their colleagues in course redesign, transformative learning and gender-responsive pedagogy

91%

of surveyed academics use gender-responsive pedagogy and 80% use critical thinking techniques in their teaching

39

institutional policies, plans, tools and guidelines introduced to support teaching and learning innovation – including the establishment of Gulu University's Gender Unit and Uganda Martyrs University's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning



Students at University of Dodoma

Advancing environmental science in Myanmar via distance learning – Transformation by Innovation in Distance Education

Prior to the February 2021 military coup, Myanmar was experiencing a significant deficit in the supply of skilled graduates to meet employment needs. With the country being highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, skills for sustainable management of Myanmar's natural resources were a priority.

The Transformation by Innovation in Distance Education (TIDE) partnership aimed to improve the quality of distance education in Myanmar and produce more employable graduates by:



Enhancing the capacity of academic, teaching and support staff



Working at policy level to strengthen the higher and distance education systems



Enhancing academic programmes with a particular focus on environmental science



Supporting the digital transformation of education in Myanmar at a national level

With over 500,000 students accessing higher education through distance learning, reform of higher and distance education in Myanmar was a priority at the time when TIDE was designed.

TIDE focused on enabling educators to deliver improved learning outcomes for students, with a particular subject focus on education for the

environment and sustainable development. The project also supported the development and use of the growing information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure in Myanmar's higher education sector through offering training on online education platforms and facilitating online courses designed to enhance digital literacy. An emphasis



on the use of open educational resources (OERs) and associated open educational practices for teaching and learning was one of the most important aspects of TIDE. The TIDE project was closed early following the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021.

Key achievements

Support to national-level reform of higher and distance education.

TIDE engaged strongly with policy and strategy in Myanmar from its inception and was part of a major structural change in the higher education system. The partnership supported the implementation of the national One Campus Two Systems initiative and developed approaches to professional development that could be replicated across Myanmar's Arts and Science universities. TIDE actively engaged with government and policy actors, including through workshops to explore options for reform and system strengthening. A key recommendation that emerged was a proposal to establish a Myanmar Open University. TIDE also contributed to the process of developing Myanmar's National Education Strategic Plan II (2021–2030), with a focus on distance and online education.

Development of roadmap for Myanmar Open University.

TIDE's scoping work led to the creation of a roadmap for the establishment of a Myanmar Open University in 2020, which was approved by the then Union Minister for Education, and a steering group planning for the legal establishment of a new

university. This work had not been completed at the time of TIDE's closure in 2021, although it was never anticipated that a Myanmar Open University would be fully realised within the project's lifetime. TIDE supported the development of prototypes for the online learning environments and systems that the university would require.

Development of innovative ICT pilots.

TIDE aimed to develop a strategic response to the opportunities presented for digital technologies to enhance the design and delivery of distance education in Myanmar. An ICT working group was established to bring together public and private universities with e-learning companies, and practical collaboration with educational technology firms was promoted through the delivery of four ICT pilots. As an example, the pilot delivered by ATG and Patheingyi University led to the trial of a student registration system that used ICT software to replace a paper-based system. The insight generated by the pilots, in addition to several workshops, led to the production of the TIDE Digital Strategy report which fed into the National Education Strategic Plan II consultation and into plans for a Myanmar Digital Education Platform which were fast-tracked in response to Covid-19.

Capacity of academic and support staff strengthened.

TIDE built the capacity of staff at 40 Arts and Sciences universities across Myanmar through the development and delivery of training and professional development activities focused on academic subject knowledge, educational and

TIDE in numbers

All
40 Arts and Science universities
and degree colleges in Myanmar
participated in TIDE

88%

of trained academic staff reported applying
approaches to support the development of
21st century skills for their students

More than
650
academic, teaching and support staff were
trained directly, with an estimated 3,000 more
reached through cascade training

12,400

students accessed online courses developed
by TIDE and 95% of students surveyed said
they had learnt new skills from these courses

technical practices to support face-to-face and distance education. As one participant in the natural ecosystems course commented, *“I found this course very exciting and informative. I learned a great deal about valuing ecosystem course and its complex challenges. Ecosystems courses are a way of thinking about – and evaluating – the good and services provided by nature that contribute to the well-being of humans.”* TIDE’s capacity strengthening activities led to the adoption of improved teaching and learning models by participating universities, with a more learner-centred approach, greater interaction in the classroom and increased use of group work and presentations.

Promotion of open education approaches.

TIDE introduced the concept and practical application of online OERs to university staff in Myanmar. Staff capacity in the use, adaptation and authoring of OERs was developed considerably from a low baseline. Creative Commons licensing was introduced as both a conceptual and functional approach to generating teaching content.

Delivery of change management workshops.

The partnership recognised that capacity strengthening for academic and support staff needed to be accompanied by wider institutional change and developed a change management strand in response. Participating universities focused on topics like quality assurance and employer

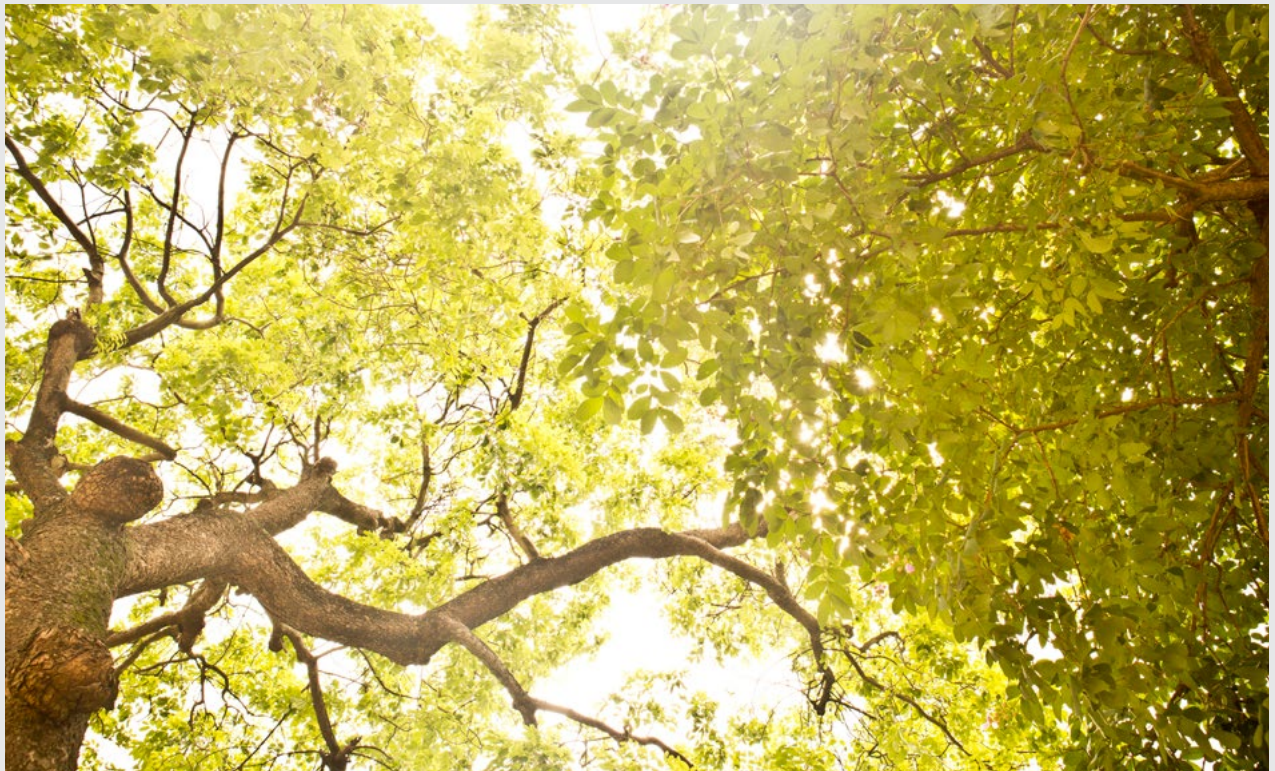
engagement and online workshops were delivered by change management experts. The focus on employer engagement led to a team from Dawei University working with the local tourism authority to develop a new short course on tourism.

Successful pivot in response to Covid-19.

In response to the pandemic, TIDE effectively pivoted online and adapted its training materials to deliver a self-access, self-paced experience for participating staff in Myanmar, supported by regular interactive sessions online. The partnership also provided support to the wider response to Covid-19 in the higher education sector in Myanmar by developing online ‘Gateway’ courses helping staff and students to transition to online learning and teaching. When the Myanmar Digital Education Platform was established as a national response to Covid-19, transition was relatively easier for universities participating in TIDE due to the training they had already received.

Partners

The TIDE partnership was led by The Open University (UK), working with Yangon University (Myanmar), Yangon University of Distance Education (Myanmar), Yadanabon University (Myanmar), Irrawaddy Policy Exchange (UK), Oxford University (UK) and the University of Manchester (UK).



LESSONS FROM SPHEIR

Achieving traction in higher education reform and transformation

- SPHEIR represented a shift in the approach to higher education partnerships by supporting a smaller number of higher-value and longer-term projects to test the proposition that these would deliver impact. By allowing time for partnerships to develop and deliver change and results at different levels, SPHEIR demonstrated **the importance of long-term investment** to support higher education transformation. Given the long-term nature of the outcomes of higher education reform for students and graduates, measurement of impact should also be long-term and provision should be made for graduate outcomes to be tracked after the end of funded interventions.
- A structured approach to the **engagement of policy makers** supports progress towards system-level change. The projects within the SPHEIR portfolio which achieved system-level change or made significant progress towards it – notably, PfP, TIDE and AQHEd-SL – did so by approaching policy engagement in a planned and intentional way. By consciously aligning their interventions with national policy priorities and involving regulatory bodies and government actors either as formal partners or as key stakeholders who were actively engaged and consulted as the projects progressed, they succeeded in influencing change at the system level. On the flipside, it is also important to manage expectations through clearly defining the scope of any policy intervention.
- At the institutional level, processes of change are complex and require intentional planning. The TESCEA partnership exemplified this by **engaging with senior university leaders** from the outset to ensure that change was shaped, owned and led by the institutions involved and that the policy changes needed to support the change being made by TESCEA champions in the classroom were explicitly reviewed and discussed. In this way, the project succeeded in promoting the adoption of policies, plans, tools and guidelines at an institutional level to support the innovation in teaching and learning that was driven through its capacity building approach.
- The pathways to improvements in higher education institutions are varied and the **demonstration effect** of applying new approaches in practice in order to prove their value is another strategy which proved successful for several SPHEIR projects. In PedaL, for example, the clear demonstration of positive results from pedagogical innovation led to the accreditation of formal study programmes or mandatory professional development training in several partner universities which adopted the project's approach to pedagogical development.
- The importance of **developing guidance and frameworks** to facilitate the adoption or replication of new approaches was validated by the experience of several SPHEIR projects. The quality assurance rubric developed by PEBL was taken up by institutions either through direct adoption or by development of frameworks based on the PEBL model. In Sierra Leone, AQHEd's two curriculum review manuals and its pedagogy training manual were validated and adopted by the national Tertiary Education Commission and its quality assurance manual became a national policy.
- From the experiences of AQHEd-SL and PfP in particular, successful implementation of reforms at institutional level can catalyse change at national level. This is particularly possible in **single country projects** where relationships and shared agendas can be developed over time. In both cases, processes of curriculum reform focused on specific universities played a key part in national initiatives – for Sierra Leone, successful revision of target degree programmes to promote outcome-based education informed the development of a National Qualification Framework for Tertiary Education and, in Somaliland, the process of initiating curriculum reform in medical schools catalysed the country's first national medical education curriculum.
- The **engagement of key regulatory** bodies was a success factor in several SPHEIR projects, facilitating the adoption of frameworks and templates developed by the partnerships for application to the wider higher education system in the cases of the Tertiary Education Commission in Sierra Leone and of the Commission for University Education in Kenya as part of PEBL. The Sierra Leone project also built traction for its reforms through strong ownership of the agenda by the Sierra Leonean universities involved and through a structured approach to engaging

political actors. The leadership of the University of Sierra Leone and the involvement of key national universities meant that the project responded directly to the needs of the higher education sector and created local ownership of its results, which – in turn – supported sustainability and enabled positive engagement with policy makers.

Promoting gender equality, access and social inclusion

- Investing in **initiatives targeted at particular under-represented groups** promotes greater access and inclusion for these groups. The selection of the LEAP and PADILEIA projects meant that the SPHEIR portfolio included two partnerships with a focus on improving higher education access – for students whose economic situation was a barrier to access to or retention in higher education in the case of LEAP, and for refugees and marginalised host communities in Jordan and Lebanon for PADILEIA. The success of these two initiatives underlines the importance of allowing space within programmes for the development of bespoke, needs-based approaches that can respond to the circumstances of specific groups as well as encouraging an emphasis on mainstreaming gender and social inclusion considerations across all projects.
- A number of common lessons around promoting access to higher education for specific target groups arose across LEAP and PADILEIA, namely: the need for structured feedback loops and repeated needs assessment to adjust and **contextualise interventions** to ensure their relevance to students' changing needs; the importance of seeing students' educational experience holistically and providing appropriate psychosocial support; the value of creating supportive peer-to-peer communities and mentoring opportunities; and, the value of working with other practitioners targeting inclusion of the same student groups to leverage the networks and delivery capacity of other agencies.
- Across the SPHEIR portfolio, the **digital divide** that was highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic, whereby access to a reliable internet connection and to appropriate devices are unevenly distributed amongst both students and university staff, arose as a key consideration for access and inclusion and one which will remain a key challenge into the future.
- **Mainstreaming gender considerations** was effective in promoting change within and outside projects. TESCEA's conceptual framework included gender-responsiveness from the outset and this was integrated into the project's pedagogical model but the project's attention to gender issues went beyond pedagogy. By consistently addressing gender throughout its activities, TESCEA was able to raise gender awareness more broadly and to catalyse changes in university policy and resourcing – including, notably, the establishment of a dedicated Gender Unit at Gulu University in Uganda.

Story of change

Mohamed Mukhtar Ali – University graduate

Prepared for Practice

“I gained greater confidence when approaching patients”

The project is enabling us to connect with experts from around the world who are teaching us important skills which we do not cover at university, such as how to read and understand medical research and clinical trials. Discussing personal growth and being able to ask questions to specialists was very important. When I was allocated to a hospital ward, I learned how to approach patients confidently, how to take a patient's medical history and conduct a physical examination. This practical experience was invaluable.

“This project is important long-term to our country”

We learned about the importance of collecting data and doing studies when patients come to the hospital. This will help us to understand some basic environmental and ecological determinants of diseases that are commonly occurring in our community. This project is important long-term to our country as our generation of doctors will be able to transfer the skills we learned to the next generation.

Improving safeguarding in higher education

- SPHEIR was committed to ensuring that everyone involved in the programme was protected from sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment by creating a **strong culture of safeguarding** across the portfolio of projects. The Fund Manager developed a tool for all SPHEIR partners to assess their progress against [the enhanced safeguarding due diligence standards](#) set out by the Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office and then worked with the lead partners of each project to identify existing good practice and gaps and to provide targeted support and guidance, including a series of webinars open to all partner organisations. Each project subsequently submitted a revised self-assessment against the due diligence standards and there were positive shifts in the ratings for seven of the eight projects.
- The increased focus on safeguarding throughout the programme lifespan led to an increase in the number of safeguarding incidents reported by SPHEIR projects, a positive indication of **effectiveness in awareness-raising** amongst partner organisations and their respective participants.
- The self-assessment exercise revealed varying levels of understanding and practice around safeguarding across the SPHEIR portfolio, particularly in contexts where key concepts were unfamiliar. **Greater contextualisation of capacity strengthening approaches** and more opportunities for sharing practical experiences would be useful in deepening engagement and improving practice.
- The partners' self-assessment of both policy and practice informed appropriate action within the programme. However, the analysis was resource-intensive and required appropriate safeguarding expertise. It would be advisable to **allocate resources for safeguarding capacity development** for all partners in future higher education and development initiatives.
- The importance of **integrating safeguarding considerations from the outset** of any future higher education programme is clear. SPHEIR's work on safeguarding was an example of the value of focusing on a particular area for capacity strengthening in a sustained way in order to drive improvement in both policy and practice. This supported lead partners to actively engage across their partnerships and to better manage safeguarding risks and create a safer environment. Feedback from partnerships indicated that the power of focusing on safeguarding practice on

Story of change

Kale Lydia Mukhwana – University graduate and LEAP Fellow

The Lending for Education in Africa Partnership

“Without it, I wouldn't have been able to complete my degree”

It was a relief for me to find out about LEAP because – after putting my education on hold to look after my siblings – I didn't know how to pay to continue my education. Thanks to LEAP I didn't have to worry about financial problems while studying. The programme also enabled me to develop financial literacy skills and access a supportive group of peers. This provided me with a sense of belonging, I felt heard and helped.

“Empowering people with education will eventually build the economy”

LEAP is a unique programme which allows people to reach financial empowerment. While I was studying, I started working as an accountant in the farming industry, which is an area that is growing. Long term my dream is to open a shop, employ someone, invest the income and pay taxes and this will ultimately improve the economy. It makes me feel good to be part of a bigger picture – paying back the loan will help someone else.



PfP training course

behalf of a funder helped to bring about further change, including within UK institutions, which they may not otherwise have been able to achieve as quickly.

Fostering equitable partnerships

- The **partnership approach** was a strength of SPHEIR, with organisations working together to achieve more than they could achieve alone and leveraging complementary experience and expertise across diverse partner organisations to enhance their delivery and build momentum for change.
- A recent research study published by the British Council and the Association of Commonwealth Universities concludes that **international higher education partnerships are particularly powerful in delivering impact**, with universities and external actors working together to address all of the Sustainable Development Goals⁴.
- The SPHEIR experience demonstrated that **building trust and shared ownership** within a partnership, with explicit acknowledgement of power dynamics and consideration of decision-making structures, increased effectiveness in projects. Projects actively considered partnership dynamics in their governance structures and ways of working and, where there were tensions in these areas, performance was often adversely affected.
- Establishing trust and **effective partnerships can drive value for money**. The trust developed through longstanding partnerships like that of King's College London with medical schools in Somaliland tended to increase resilience, while the African-led Pedal project was able to develop a context-responsive model for pedagogical improvement and to model collaborative leadership with its regional network of higher education institutions.
- **Equitable partnerships are powerful but difficult to achieve**. The investment of time and effort required to build a genuine partnership ethos should not be underestimated. When working through grant mechanisms and across partners from the Global North and South, it is important to acknowledge that power dynamics are at play. The enabling factors for effective partnership should be carefully considered by funders and implementers in the design of grant management and oversight processes.

The role of UK higher education institutions in development partnerships

- All of the eight SPHEIR projects involved at least one UK organisation, often in the role of lead partner, and the **UK partners within the portfolio contributed valuable expertise to their projects** – from King's College London's medical education excellence in PfP to the Open University's distance education capabilities in TIDE.
- The UK's investment in higher education reform provides **opportunities for UK universities to deliver on their global civic missions** and to build new international relationships, as well as supporting the UK's renewed commitment to acting as a force for good in the world.
- The value of **leveraging the strengths of the UK higher education system** in development partnerships needs to be balanced with attention to the design of grant and governance structures in order to promote equitable partnership and ownership of project outcomes by relevant actors within target countries.
- Reflecting on their experience of SPHEIR, UK higher education partners highlighted that:
 - The programme's **partnership emphasis added value** compared to other development interventions and, in some cases, enabled them to build on longstanding relationships. Allowing time for new partners to build relationships during the inception phase was important.
 - The fact that some SPHEIR projects were **led by partners from the Global South** was regarded as a strength which set it apart from other higher education and development initiatives.
 - The open framing of the SPHEIR call for proposals allowed applicants to be creative and propose new ideas to contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which resulted in a **diverse and innovative portfolio of projects**.
 - The **management of international development projects and funds** differed significantly from the universities' experience of managing research projects, which posed a challenge but also enabled institutions to develop their future capacity in this area and to build transferable skills among their teams,

⁴ Role of international higher education partnerships in contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals: Final report for the British Council and the Association of Commonwealth Universities; Technopolis Group and King's College London (January 2022); <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/he-science/knowledge-centre/partnerships-collaboration/international-higher-education-partnerships-and-sdgs>

particularly in relation to monitoring, evaluation and learning.

- The **positive experience of UK universities** highlighted that programmes like SPHEIR have the potential to establish the UK as a world-leading contributor to the development of higher education systems internationally.

Delivering effective online and blended learning

- Successful initiatives to strengthen the design and delivery of blended learning require a **thorough needs analysis** to consider attitudes, skills, capacity, and incentives at the individual, institutional and national systems levels. The ICT skills of academic staff and students and the learning management systems utilised in institutions need specific consideration to ensure solutions are sustainable.
- Capacity building activities should consider both the **development and delivery of blended learning content** and should be extended to students in order to support their transition to become effective blended learners. Digital natives are not automatically effective digital learners.
- A **holistic approach to blended learning** – including digital pedagogy, learning design and quality assurance – is essential for students to have a positive experience. Engaging students in the design of blended learning contributes to high satisfaction rates.
- Assessment is an area which is often neglected but feedback channels and the **development of appropriate assessments** are important considerations in designing effective blended learning.
- Blended learning **approaches need to be tailored to subjects** and moving existing content and materials to online platforms should not substitute effective online learning design. Active facilitation of online learning is crucial to a positive experience and the user experience on different devices is another key consideration in learning design.
- The cost and quality of internet connectivity and access to appropriate devices remain key challenges in accessing online learning resources. Significant financial investments are needed to expand and strengthen ICT infrastructure and connectivity to improve accessibility for all students and teachers – both on and off campus – and to address the **digital divide**.

- Standardisation of **quality assurance and accreditation frameworks** across universities is key to the sustainability of blended and online learning delivery and requires engagement with national regulatory bodies so that appropriate standards are agreed and monitored.

- Despite a positive shift in **attitudes towards online learning** as a result of Covid-19, further work is needed with universities to encourage recognition of credits gained through online learning and to address common barriers such as a lack of clear rules around credit transfer and reputational concerns relating to academic quality in other institutions. Recognition of prior online learning can be particularly important in creating viable pathways to higher education for marginalised groups such as refugee students.

Effective adaptation to Covid-19

- The [mid-term evaluation of SPHEIR](#) highlighted the **effective adaptation** of the active projects to the Covid-19 pandemic, with all able to adapt their activities in order to continue delivery and several pivoting rapidly to respond to changing needs and ways of working.
- The reforms promoted through several projects – notably where these focused specifically on delivery of online or blended learning or on broader pedagogical skills which encouraged flexibility and student-centred approaches among academics – were recognised as **supporting universities in their response to Covid-19** and, as such, these projects were able to gain even stronger traction for their work.
- Programme structures which promote adaptation can enhance resilience in the face of a crisis. SPHEIR's emphasis on **adaptive management**, which was underpinned by its monitoring, evaluation and learning approach, and the systems in place to enable regular improvements through revision of activity milestones and budgets supported the SPHEIR projects to adjust in response to Covid-19.
- The fact that the pandemic happened at a point when the SPHEIR projects were relatively advanced in their delivery meant that **partnership relationships** were well developed and, therefore, more resilient.
- The ongoing impact of the pandemic means that the need to **strengthen the resilience of higher education systems** post-Covid-19 through

building regulatory, institutional and individual capabilities to design, deliver and quality assure effective online and blended learning will remain highly relevant and the successful approaches developed by several SPHEIR projects will continue to have broader applicability.

Promoting graduate employability

- Approaches to **engaging employers and other external stakeholders** in order to improve the relevance of higher education and enhance graduate employability took different forms across the SPHEIR portfolio. In TESCEA, the partner universities established Joint Advisory Groups at the university level as fora to discuss linkages between universities and the world of work, whereas in the AQHEd-SL project employer representatives were engaged directly in the process of curriculum revision for targeted degree programmes based on the sectors where graduates might seek employment in the future.
- Both approaches gained impressive traction, with educational institutions, employers and other stakeholders who were engaged seeing them as conduits to build understanding and create feedback loops. Although the purpose and focus of the engagement was different, both were **successful at stimulating other positive contributions from employers** – such as guest lectures, attendance at careers fairs, and work placement opportunities for students.
- It was notable that employers were keen to engage with the efforts of higher education institutions to improve the quality of their graduates. The fora for dialogue between universities and external stakeholders that were established through TESCEA's Joint Advisory Groups generated trust and understanding through their holistic approach. Rather than focusing on narrow and instrumental engagement to extract advice from stakeholders, the groups enabled a **wide-ranging engagement** that was shaped by all participants and led to unanticipated collaboration opportunities.
- LEAP's tailored support to individual students and graduates to find employment, as well as the project's experience of designing online career readiness training and developing a framework to assess university career service offerings, generated considerable insight into **what works to support students to make the transition from education to employment** in Kenya. The support required varies considerably depending on the nature of a student's degree programme – for example, with those on more vocational

Story of change

Sullayman G. Mansaray – Lecturer, Eastern Technical University of Sierra Leone

Assuring Quality Higher Education in Sierra Leone

"I started to facilitate learning instead of lecturing"

My background is in civil environmental and structural engineering, and I had no background in pedagogy. I used to lecture my students but after going through the AQHEd-SL pedagogical training, I started to facilitate and use active learning processes. I can now establish learning outcomes using Bloom's taxonomy and align activities and assessments. My way of teaching moved away from being teacher-centred and has become student-centred.

"The knowledge we developed in curriculum revision enabled our polytechnic to gain university status"

Curriculum development is another key area of the AQHEd-SL project. We learned how to use templates to ensure that curricula are relevant and aligned to international standards. After taking part in the training, I became part of the team who led the process of revising 55 programmes within the institution to ensure they are aligned to the requirements of the Tertiary Education Commission and meet international standards. This enabled our polytechnic to gain university status. The professional gain is that I became a curriculum expert, and I am now consulted by other institutions to develop their own programmes.

courses finding less value in generalised career readiness support – and LEAP intends to further adapt its student support models in future in response.

- The experience of delivering student support services to its Fellows taught LEAP that building their soft skills and, specifically, **encouraging students to take ownership of their learning** are critical elements of the training that prepare them to enter the world of work.

- LEAP found that **building relationships with a diverse spectrum of employers** is important but that engaging employers on an individual basis is time-intensive and often too narrowly focused. Instead, the project adjusted to work through employment accelerators in Kenya to provide its students with direct support to connect to the job market.

Management of a higher education and development fund

- The SPHEIR calls for proposals invited applications that responded to a **broad set of themes in higher education reform** – access, affordability, relevance, scale and quality. This open approach to selection created a diverse and innovative portfolio of projects which set out to test new ways of addressing challenges within higher education and which successfully engaged new actors in higher education and development. The benefits of this approach could potentially have been complemented by a narrower set of defined challenges informed by political economy and needs analysis of targeted national higher education systems and by the stronger involvement of national-level stakeholders at the project design stage.
- A **strategic, programme-wide approach to managing key external stakeholders** is important from the outset to maximise sustainability and scalability, particularly when system-level change is desired. The identification and involvement of key influencers and decision makers at the point of selection or design of individual projects, including possibly as formal partners, can enable reforms at the level of national higher education systems and there are important roles to be played in stakeholder engagement by funders, fund managers, and project partners and delivery teams.
- A **structured approach to capacity strengthening for partner organisations** is a key consideration for fund management. Through its management processes, SPHEIR built partner capacity in a number of areas – including financial management and monitoring, evaluation and learning. This was particularly valuable given that some partner organisations, including higher education institutions, were relatively new to managing development assistance funds. Capacity could have been further enhanced in areas like downstream partner management or gender and social inclusion had capacity strengthening itself been a more explicit objective for the fund. Future capacity strengthening

could draw on more structured sharing of expertise between partners and contribute to the development of stronger national capabilities.

- SPHEIR's **emphasis on monitoring, evaluation and learning processes** as an integrated part of project delivery to create feedback loops and encourage adaptation rather than solely as a performance assessment or compliance exercise was a key strength of the programme and one which supported adaptive management.
- SPHEIR encouraged **learning exchange** across its projects, including through public webinars and additional small grants to promote inter-partnership collaboration. This could have been further enhanced by the design of more structured and specifically resourced opportunities for projects to share learning and expertise across the portfolio in key areas such as gender and social inclusion, reform processes and policy engagement, including possible investment in a digital platform to enable collaboration.

Transformation in pedagogy and curriculum

- **Academics are powerful change agents** within higher education institutions. The SPHEIR projects demonstrated that, in order to catalyse sustainable change in teaching and learning or curriculum content, it is important to motivate academics to become champions of new approaches. Across the portfolio, the role of academics in delivering change in the classroom was pivotal in demonstrating the value of change to senior management within higher education institutions. This points to a wider lesson around the importance of working with practitioners to demonstrate the positive impact of change in practice in order to then influence supportive changes in policy at an institutional level. Whilst support from senior leadership and external partners is important, academic staff need to feel motivated, empowered and confident to change their practice.
- Well-designed **capacity building approaches can act as a catalyst for wider change** as trained staff champion new models. The example of PfP's three-stage Health Professions Education (HPE) course for teaching staff in Somaliland is notable in this regard – with graduates from these courses improving their own classroom teaching and assessment approaches but also cascading learning to others and playing an active role in the establishment or rejuvenation of structures like teaching and learning centres to continue delivering the HPE programmes and expand these into other faculties within their universities.

- **Senior leadership support for innovation** in teaching and curriculum is important at the institutional level to put in place effective processes and structures for continuous support – including sufficient time – that allow teaching staff to apply innovations and share expertise with others. In the case of PedaL, involving university leadership in the design, implementation and evaluation of capacity building activities improved uptake and sustainability and even unlocked university resources to support increased PedaL training through a cost-sharing model.
- There is **strong complementarity between curriculum reform and pedagogical capacity strengthening** – with both aiming to improve the quality and relevance of study programmes. The centrality of the curriculum revision process to the AQHEd-SL project demonstrated the potential for this to be a driver of wider change. Curriculum revision was the vehicle for engagement of external stakeholders and employers and pedagogical capacity building was delivered to cohorts of teaching staff from the degree programmes being revised in order to promote teaching practices that supported the outcome-based emphasis of the revised degrees. The creation of templates and manuals for the curriculum review process enabled these improvements to be institutionalised and to spread into non-targeted departments and institutions.
- The importance of **relevant, contextualised training content** to engage participants and promote uptake was evident in several SPHEIR projects. TESCEA grounded the development of its materials and tools in the context and practical experience of East African higher education practitioners to ensure its relevance both within and beyond the project. By ensuring that its approach was suitable for use in resource-constrained settings, TESCEA created a model of transformation in teaching and learning with particular value for academics and institutions working with similar constraints around large classes and limited funding and facilities. The demand for PedaL’s pedagogical training was consistently high throughout the project and the PedaL Online variant developed in response to Covid-19 equipped teaching staff with skills for online course design, facilitation and assessment. PedaL’s model was replicated horizontally across disciplines – going beyond its remit of social sciences into arts, humanities, and STEM subjects – and was transferable to the undergraduate level. The contextualisation and ‘Africanisation’ of the PedaL curriculum was key to its applicability.

Story of change

Dr Tupokigwe Isagah – Lecturer, Mzumbe University

Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa

“Students became part of the learning journey”

I took part in the TESCEA workshop on how to facilitate learning. I was able to develop new strategies to ensure that students acquire the right skills. For instance, we have class discussions and encourage students to bring material. This approach is changing the way students respond and think in the class: students are more open and engaged, contribute with new ideas and feel they are part of the learning journey. We

don’t just build the technical skills, but we create confident graduates who can compete and create opportunities for themselves.

“The link with the industry created by the project allowed me to understand the challenges that employers face and address them when redesigning courses”

The Joint Advisory Group – linking academia and industry – was an opportunity to hear from employers about the challenges they face and what they expect from graduates. We came back to our academic unit and tried to address these challenges when redesigning courses. By building the capacity of academics, I believe that graduates can acquire the right competences and we will have a better society.

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