

# Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform (SPHEIR)

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

Supported by



# INTRODUCTION

When the previous SPHEIR brochure was produced in 2019, no one imagined how much the higher education landscape was to shift beneath our feet.

This edition is dedicated to the hundreds of educators, policy actors, university administrators, community stakeholders, employers and students, who not only remained engaged within their SPHEIR partnership, but demonstrated commitment and resilience in adapting higher education reforms in the midst of a global pandemic.

All SPHEIR partnerships are different and distinct, but also share common features, such as attention to good teaching through pedagogical capacity building, curriculum design, blended and distance learning, technology enhanced learning, quality assurance, employer engagement (private and public), enhancing graduate employability, and enhancing access and equity.

Almost every reform activity under SPHEIR was adapted and moved online as institutions closed, travel ceased, and teaching staff and students remained at home due to Covid-19. As illustrated in SPHEIR's webinar series on '[Varieties of Online Higher Education](#)', some projects had from their inception a focus on online delivery of teaching, capacity building or student support. For these projects, adaptations had a head start, often focused on ramping up the level of activity, or enhancing access to online resources. For other projects, Covid-19 restrictions precipitated new ways of thinking and working.

The presence of creative and dedicated expertise within each partnership, and the growing bank of knowledge about higher education reforms, will drive the SPHEIR community's effort to share lessons for global higher education. Projects are now in their final year of activities, and we will use virtual and, hopefully, face-to-face events, to engage national policy actors, and exchange knowledge through forums such as the British Council's 2021 [Going Global conference](#).

Please visit the [SPHEIR website](#) and join the [SPHEIR mailing list](#) to find out about events, blogs and other information on specific partnerships, including our '[Knowledge Bank](#)', a new feature that provides access to papers, reports, articles, videos, etc. on key topics, such as pedagogical reform, blended learning, equity and other subjects.

Enjoy.

**Kate Joyce**

Director of Higher Education and Science,  
British Council

# ABOUT SPHEIR

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

Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform (SPHEIR) is a UK-aid funded programme that supports higher education transformation in focus countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

SPHEIR brings together higher education institutions, employers, civil society groups and other organisations to transform the quality, relevance, scale, access and affordability of higher education.

Launched in 2016, the programme is managed by a consortium of organisations, led by the British Council in association with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and Universities UK International (UUKi).

## The SPHEIR approach

SPHEIR aims to transform higher education in low-income countries by providing support to projects delivered by partnerships of diverse collaborators.

Working in partnership is central to the programme's approach and enables SPHEIR to tackle challenges that require the collaboration of actors from different sectors to design and deliver innovative solutions for transforming higher education systems.

## Delivering transformative change

The SPHEIR partnerships are based on mutuality. They draw upon the UK's world-leading capability and expertise in higher education and innovation, as well as knowledge and expertise from the Global North and South.

By nurturing innovation and scaling up effective solutions, SPHEIR delivers strategic and transformative change in higher education systems – enabling them to meet the needs of students, employers and society.






You can find out more about SPHEIR and sign up for the SPHEIR newsletter via the website [www.spheir.org.uk](http://www.spheir.org.uk).



PADILEIA students displaying their graduation certificates  
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# GLOBAL COLLABORATION

SPHEIR supports a diverse portfolio of higher education partnerships. Each one brings together higher education institutions, 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 is increasing access to higher education for refugee and disadvantaged host communities in Jordan and Lebanon through new online and blended learning programmes.



## **Assuring Quality Higher Education in Sierra Leone**

Bringing together higher education institutions and employers across Sierra Leone to improve quality management in higher education, and to ensure that courses deliver the skills and outcomes that employers and society need.



## **Pedagogical Leadership in Africa (PEDAL)**

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



## **Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA)**

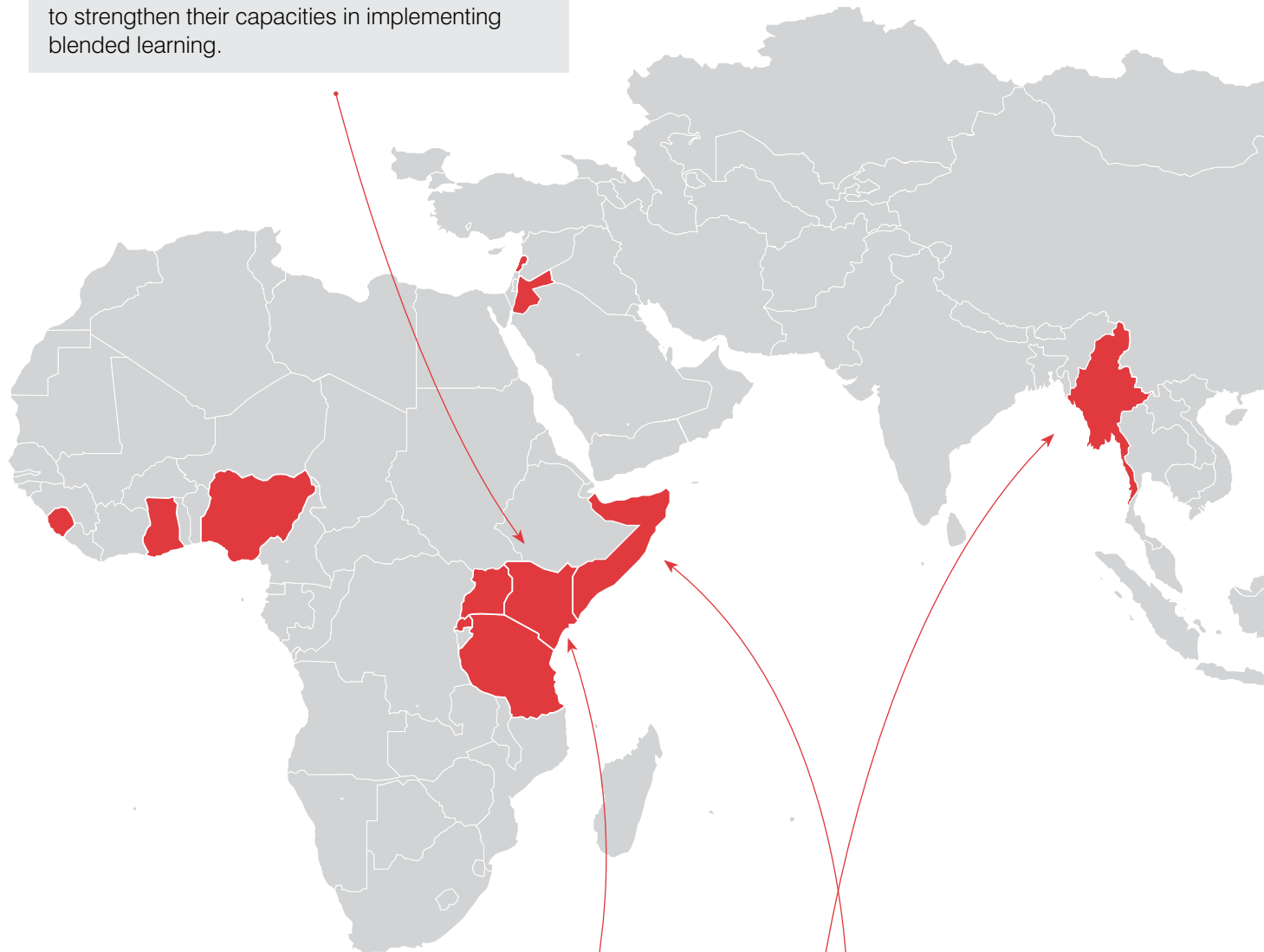
TESCEA is developing a scalable pedagogical model to help universities across East Africa produce graduates with the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills needed to solve real-world problems.





### Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL)

PEBL works with universities across East Africa to strengthen their capacities in implementing blended learning.



### Prepared for Practice (PfP)

PfP is addressing Somaliland's health workforce crisis by transforming health education, putting practice-orientated learning, teaching and assessment at its centre.



### The Lending for Education in Africa Partnership (LEAP)

LEAP is piloting a non-profit social lending fund that provides student financing to otherwise un(der) funded talented youth across Sub-Saharan Africa.



### Transformation of Innovation in Distance Education (TIDE)

TIDE brings together universities in the UK and Myanmar to improve the quality of distance learning in higher education with particular focus on environmental science.

# SPHEIR HIGHLIGHTS

SPHEIR brings together

58

partner organisations from

16

countries to work together across

8

partnerships.

Key highlights:

PEDAL trained staff have redesigned over

1,100

course modules, already directly influencing the learning outcomes of over 1,200 students in PEDAL's targeted social science degree programmes and up to 100,000 more across the hundreds of university departments reached by the project across Africa.



Sharing ideas at a PEDAL training session

As of January 2021, PEBL's blended learning modules have benefitted over

10,000

students across 11 universities in East Africa. Of the students who responded to a recent survey, 89% stated that the PEBL modules helped them to improve their technical skills.

# 1/3

of the first cohort of graduates from the foundation course designed by the Partnership for Digital Learning and Increased Access (PADILEIA) to provide pathways to higher education for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon are enrolled in university or employed. The courses have received a 95% recommendation rate from participants.

Since launch in 2017, PfP has delivered online distance education courses to over

# 700

medical, nursing and midwifery students in Somaliland, and has supported the development of Somaliland's first national Medical Education Policy to meet the country's health needs. Volunteers from the UK's NHS and universities have so far donated volunteering hours worth over £1.53 million to the project.

After launching in 2018, the Lending for Education in Africa Partnership (LEAP) currently supports more than

# 830

students across five Kenyan universities and two technical and vocational education and training institutions, helping them to access education through affordable finance.



PADILEIA students celebrating graduation  
© AUB CCECS

# SPHEIR IMPACT CASE STUDIES

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

Somaliland has some of the worst health indicators in the world, driven in part by a severe shortage of well-trained health workers. In 2015, a health workforce survey estimated that 197 doctors, 1,256 nurses and 344 midwives were serving the population of around 3.5 million, falling far short of the WHO-recommended minimum threshold of 23 health workers per 10,000 population.

Whilst systemic challenges across the health system contribute to poor health outcomes, Somaliland's health workforce crisis is rooted in challenges in the tertiary education sector. The country's first university was not established until 1998 and, whilst several health schools have since been set up, they are in their early years of graduating medical students. Critical gaps exist in the curricula and, for many core health subjects, there is currently insufficient expertise within universities to design and deliver courses.

Many academics have had no formal pedagogical training; their teaching practices focus on passive, didactic learning and students lack opportunities to develop their skills in clinical settings. As a result, graduates lack the knowledge, skills, behaviours and practical experience they need to practise safe and quality healthcare.

Led by King's Global Health Partnerships, Prepared for Practice (PfP) is addressing Somaliland's health workforce crisis through an integrated approach to health education system reform. The project has

three strategic aims:

- Improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in medical, nursing and midwifery schools;
- Strengthening the capacity of lecturers and management of medical, nursing and midwifery schools; and,
- Strengthening national governance and management of education for health professionals.

Project activities – from the development and delivery of courses, to curriculum development and technical assistance – are delivered by over 100 volunteers who take time out of their work in the UK's National Health Service and university sector to make this work possible. Since the start of the project, UK Volunteers from the UK's NHS and universities have so far donated volunteering hours worth over £460,000 to the project.

### Supporting students' skills and experience

At the student level, PfP is addressing gaps in the curriculum by delivering weekly online tutorials to medical, nursing and midwifery students at three of the country's leading health schools – Hargeisa, Amoud and Edna Adan universities. These online courses are delivered by UK health workers through an online education platform designed by MedicineAfrica, covering core subject areas in internal medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, radiology, mental health, communications skills, nursing and midwifery.

Small class sizes and live, interactive tutorials maximise discussion and feedback – an approach shown to be effective in developing clinical competencies. Students also participate in clinically supervised hospital ward rounds and field trips to health facilities to gain practical experience in a clinical setting.



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.



Since the project launched in 2017, PfP has delivered online distance education courses to over 700 medical, nursing and midwifery students and examined over 500 students.

“*The way of teaching is different than face-to-face – discussion of cases is very useful in preparing us for interventions.*”

**Nursing student,**  
Edna Adan University

The partnership has also supported partners to implement an evidence-based examination process that tests students' clinical skills and behaviours against international standards, and has overseen the conduct of written and practical exams, ensuring only those students who are ready enter the health system.

### Building the capacity of staff

At the institutional level, PfP is building the capacity of Somaliland's higher education personnel. The partnership has developed certificate, diploma and master's level courses in health education – the first of their kind in Somaliland. These new courses are being embedded in universities so they will be available to lecturers in the future. PfP's postgraduate certificate in administration also equips university administrators with the knowledge and skills to lead improvements in the management of their institutions.



PfP training course

As of December 2020, PfP had trained over 100 academics on student-centred teaching, pedagogy, assessment and curriculum development. This has contributed to significant improvements in how medical, nursing and midwifery students are taught and assessed: 100% of lecturers participating in the project report making changes to the way they plan lessons, teach and assess students.

At the national level, PfP has supported the Somaliland government in developing the country's first national Medical Education Policy. This policy outlines how government, regulators and universities can collaborate to produce a well-trained medical workforce. The partnership has also supported the development of a new national undergraduate medical education curriculum and standardised national medical examinations, and supported independent assessment of medical schools in Somaliland for the first time, ensuring institutions training health workers meet an internationally recognised standard.

In the future, the partnership seeks to scale up its work on health education in Somaliland. PfP has proved to be a successful model for strengthening the quality of education and there are opportunities to replicate interventions in those medical, nursing and midwifery schools that the team hasn't yet worked with and to transfer the learning to other cadres, such as public health and pharmacy. In addition, the partnership hopes to support national plans to increase the number of health workers trained in specialties such as mental health, trauma and critical care, by providing support to postgraduate health education.

The PfP partnership is led by King's Global Health Partnerships at 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).

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

In East Africa, there is an emerging need for academic training on all aspects of blended learning, including the design of interactive content, quality assurance and use of virtual learning platforms. To implement blended learning effectively, especially in a post-Covid world, staff capacity needs to be enhanced.

Blended learning – online course delivery with some face-to-face interaction – offers a promising approach to addressing the changing needs of staff and students in East African universities. Nonetheless, uptake is a complex process, presenting many challenges, particularly for institutions in the early stages of their digital transformation.

To tackle this, the Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL) brought together universities from across East Africa and partners in the UK and Canada to rapidly scale up capacity for blended learning design and delivery in the region. The project has supported 23 universities in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda to develop and share quality-assured, credit-bearing blended learning courses, while building a solid base of expertise amongst academic staff to support the successful, and sustainable, implementation of the blended learning model.

PEBL covers three main areas: development of blended learning courses; pedagogical training; and quality assurance.

### Blended learning course development

Guided by the Staff and Educational Development Association, a core team of over 50 academics across the PEBL network were trained in blended learning pedagogy and curriculum design. Together, they have developed and rolled out a series of quality-assured, credit-bearing courses in the areas of ICT, business, health and applied sciences, and education. All courses are hosted on the open-access platform OER Africa and are available for any university within and beyond the PEBL network to download for use and adaptation in their own contexts.

As of January 2021, PEBL modules have benefitted over 10,000 students across 11 universities in East Africa. Of the students who responded to a recent survey, 80% reported satisfaction with the content and format of the modules while 89% believed that the use of PEBL modules helped improve their technical skills.



PEBL training participants

Credit: The Association of Commonwealth Universities. Photographer Faustin Niyigena

## Training of staff

PEBL academics leading on module development were simultaneously trained in blended learning pedagogy by the Staff and Educational Development Association with support from the Commonwealth of Learning and the University of Edinburgh.

Trained staff have cascaded their knowledge to over 1,000 additional teaching staff in their universities. This approach enabled PEBL teams to serve as sources of expertise within their institutions, laying the foundation for further in-house training and sustained improvements in blended learning practice beyond the lifetime of PEBL. The impact of this approach was evident at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, when campus shutdowns necessitated rapid, large-scale shifts towards online teaching.

Dr. Ian Wairua, Associate Director of the Centre for Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation at Strathmore University, Kenya reports:

*“We managed to move all courses online within a week [of Covid-19 campus closures] and training has been rolled out for faculty to increase the capacity of lecturers in the use of online tools. In this, the Strathmore PEBL team has been instrumental in training faculty to mount and deliver courses and online materials.”*

## Quality assurance framework

Leading on the quality assurance aspect of the project, the Commonwealth of Learning has produced a Quality Assurance (QA) Rubric in collaboration with PEBL universities to standardise the quality assurance process for blended learning content. This innovative tool is intended to help academic developers benchmark the features of any module against defined standards for eight distinct elements, from instructional design and navigation to assessment and student support.

The Commonwealth of Learning also led on the collaborative development of a QA Institutional Review Tool, enabling trained staff at PEBL universities to ensure that sound QA processes are applied at all steps of the module development cycle.

## Scaling up the project

In light of the recent successes during Covid-19, there is strong potential for PEBL's collaborative model to be scaled upwards and to transform the wider practice of technology-mediated learning with renewed impetus. Through various capacity strengthening initiatives, PEBL has established a network of experts and leaders, who are equipped to upskill and support peers with implementing blended learning. By building momentum for collaboration, skills training, and stakeholder engagement in blended learning, PEBL is working towards a future of resilience and preparedness for a greater number of universities.

Professor Robert Gateru, Vice-Chancellor of Riara University in Nairobi, Kenya, reported that:

*“PEBL has given us access to immense resources that are helping us overcome varied challenges in our shift towards blended learning. Hitherto, our courses have been mainly face-to-face with very limited internal capacity to even think of transitioning to blended learning. The support structures in the project, as well as the collective learning across the partnership, have been invaluable to us. The capacity being built in us will tremendously help us transition to a campus that is more responsive to the learning needs of modern-day students.”*

The PEBL partnership is 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), and the University of Rwanda.



## 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 graduates lack skills and knowledge needed in the workplace.

The Assuring Quality Higher Education in Sierra Leone (AQHEd-SL) partnership, which includes higher education institutions (HEIs) across the country, was set up to tackle some of these challenges by supporting the introduction of outcome-based education and improving quality management systems.

The ultimate aim is to establish a student-centred focus within higher education across Sierra Leone, leading to a more responsive and capable national workforce.

### Outcome-based education

The AQHEd-SL partnership initially focused on the curriculum revision of four undergraduate degree programmes in Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM), Health, Management and Agriculture, aligning the programme content and pedagogical approaches with employer needs. The revised curricula include new syllabi, lesson plans and curriculum mapping templates, plus new teaching, learning and assessment methods. The process led to the development of a template for curriculum revision, rolled out to all Sierra Leone's HEIs by September 2020. This provides a standardised, best-practice approach to curriculum development.

The work is now picking up speed: by the end of October 2020, 123 modules had been revised across the first four degree programmes, with four additional degree programmes now being revised. A further 27 programmes across the seven HEIs participating in the project are independently revising their curricula using templates and support from AQHEd-SL staff and systems.

The partnership has also set up a Skills Development Network (SDN) representing employers from key sectors in Sierra Leone. The SDN is now working with AQHEd-SL to advise on degree programme content and curriculum design, and to provide guest lectures, networking and internship opportunities.

Effective delivery of outcome-based, inclusive education depends on staff having the right skills. Through AQHEd-SL, 136 staff have been trained in new pedagogical techniques and critical thinking, plus gender, diversity and equity best practice by partners at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the 50-50 Group and INASP.

### Quality assurance

AQHEd-SL has been working to improve quality management systems. The project brought together Sierra Leone's education experts to develop a Teaching, Learning and Assessment manual. This document provides a clear framework for quality assurance assessment and guidance on revising policies, processes and systems to internal quality assurance units established at every HEI in Sierra Leone.

In addition, AQHEd-SL's postgraduate diploma in quality assurance has effectively trained quality assurance champions for each HEI. These champions are now implementing what they have learned based on the needs of their institutions:

“ I was able to influence the review of examination procedures to ensure quality in the examination process. This has restored trust among stakeholders handling examinations test items, also it has enhanced timely submission of test items for the conduct of examination and eliminated the issues of missing grades or incomplete grades

**Musa Kargbo,**  
Milton Margai College of Education  
and Technology



In September 2020, a High-Level Task Force including government officials, universities and businesses was launched to implement AQHed-SL's reforms across Sierra Leone, and to scale up the project's work on employer engagement, quality assurance and staff training nationally.

At the launch of the task force, the Hon. Minister of Technical and Higher Education Prof. Aiah Gbakima said, "I am happy for this initiative for not only helping in reviewing our curriculum but also for building and sustaining synergies and collaboration among higher institutions of learning and involvement of the private sector and civil society."

### Online challenges

Until December 2020, Sierra Leone's experience of Covid-19 was relatively mild, with the country coming out of local lockdown quickly. However, the lack of international travel affected the project's capacity building plans in pedagogy, critical thinking and quality assurance.

In addition, phone and internet network coverage does not reach many parts of Sierra Leone or can be poor and intermittent, posing challenges in terms of moving work online. In response, AQHed-SL partners created pre-recorded videos to be shown offline at trainings and utilised WhatsApp and YouTube to interact with participants and allow learning to continue. The project plans to continue creating video resources for future capacity building activities – despite the challenges, the pandemic created opportunities to improve sustainability.

Looking ahead, AQHed-SL is working on documenting and disseminating the tools developed for curriculum revision, capacity building and stakeholder engagement. External quality assurance officers at the Tertiary Education Commission will assist the partnership to tackle challenges in processes, policies and systems affecting higher education at the national level. The partnership will develop a National Qualifications Framework for tertiary education in Sierra Leone which, along with the quality assurance manual, will help to address quality issues.

The Assuring Quality Higher Education in Sierra Leone partnership is 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 Polytechnic, Milton Margai College of Education and Technology, Freetown Teacher's College and 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.



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

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

After putting herself through medical school for the past five years, Mercy is about to drop out of her programme just shy of graduating, having exhausted all possible options to pay for tuition.

On the other side of Nairobi, Peter dreams of becoming an engineer, but he is the oldest of six, and would be the first ever in his family to pursue a tertiary degree. The government's support will reduce his tuition fees greatly but will not cover his housing off campus or the laptop he needs. At 18, with no income or collateral of his own, he was turned away empty handed when applying for a commercial loan.

### Opening access to higher education

The Lending for Education in Africa Partnership (LEAP) is a social lending fund that provides affordable finance to Peter and Mercy, along with hundreds of other young people from low and middle-income backgrounds in East Africa who are pursuing higher education and cannot access conventional commercial loans nor benefit from bursaries or scholarships.

LEAP is managed by a dedicated team at Volta Capital, in partnership with the Mandela Institute for Development Studies, InHive, Equity Group Foundation and Lundin Foundation.

LEAP has been active since 2018 and, as of January 2021, has over 830 Fellows enrolled in its programme, across five Kenyan universities and two TVET (technical and vocational education and training) institutions. Just over 40% of the Fellows are enrolled in Health Sciences programmes, followed by Engineering, ICT and Accounting/ Actuarial Science.

Central to LEAP's business model is the revolving nature of its social lending fund, whereby loan repayments from Fellows are re-deployed for future cohorts of Fellows over time. At the same time, the LEAP fund leverages concessionary funding by raising additional private sector impact funding as it proves its business model.

### Supporting Fellows' transition into the workforce

In addition to its tailor-made loans, LEAP also offers its Fellows vital training and support, and forges partnerships to create pathways to gainful employment for its supported students. The training was moved fully online in 2020 in response to Covid-19 campus closures.

Developed in partnership with the African Management Institute (AMI), LEAP's online career readiness training helps students in their last 18 months of study to prepare for a career, whilst financial literacy training helps students to manage their finances and the LEAP loan.

LEAP provides financial literacy training through an SMS-based delivery approach to facilitate access for all students. As of December 2020, 774 Fellows had completed these virtual training modules, achieving an average 20 percentage point increase in financial knowledge over the course of the training.

### LEAP's impact

As of January 2021, 82% of LEAP Fellows come from the bottom three wealth quintiles in Kenya, 62% from the bottom two quintiles, and 34% from the poorest quintile.<sup>1</sup> In the most recent annual survey, 79% noted that, without their LEAP loan, they would not be able to finance their studies, and 18% indicated that they have discontinued or deferred their studies in the past due to financial need.

This has far exceeded LEAP's initial expectations: students from the top wealth quintile in Kenya enrol in higher education at a rate 13 times higher than Kenyans from the bottom quintile, and only 27% of Kenyan post-secondary students come from the bottom three wealth quintiles.<sup>2</sup>

At present, nearly half of all LEAP Fellows are the first in their family to attend tertiary education, and 28% are from a household where neither parent or guardian completed secondary school. This is of particular importance for two key reasons:

1. Wealth status of Fellows is determined using the Equity Tool: <https://www.equitytool.org/>

2. Data pulled from the World Bank EdStats Database, using data collected during the most recent 2014 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS)

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

First, children whose parents completed at least secondary school are ten times more likely to attend university than those whose parents did not.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, investment in higher education is a powerful lever for upward socio-economic mobility. According to the most recent data, the return on investment from each additional year of higher education in Kenya is over 20%.<sup>4</sup>

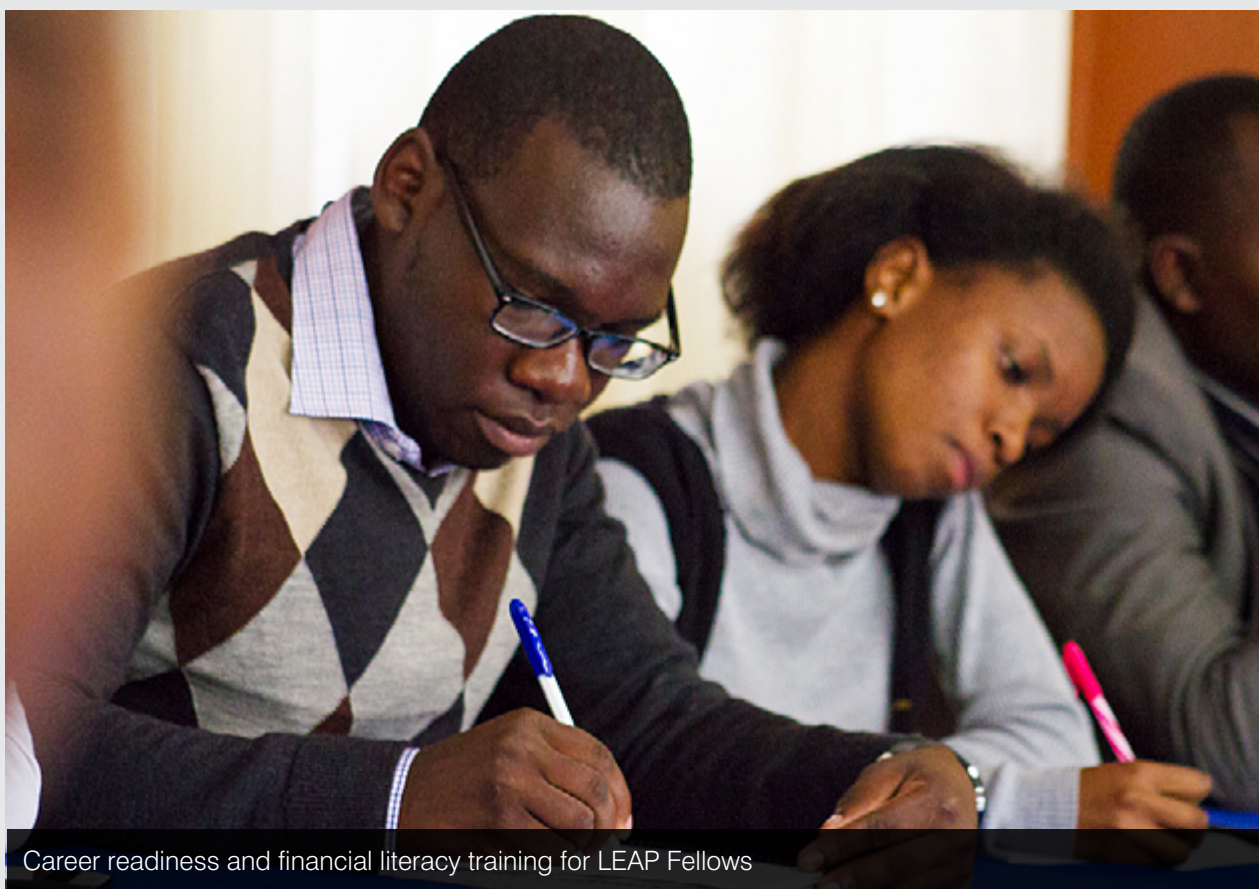
### Looking ahead

The partnership is looking to expand its offering to over 1,500 Fellows by the end of 2021, with expansion across the higher education and vocational training sectors.

In particular, LEAP aims to increase uptake among women by enhancing and expanding its gender strategy for engaging young women through its outreach, including pathways for young women transitioning from secondary to tertiary education, like those supported through the [Girls' Education Challenge](#). LEAP is also working to expand its support for learners in other forms of post-secondary training, including through its collaborations with Health Sciences programmes in top TVET institutions, and with the Moringa School, a high-quality ICT training college, amongst others.

“The support LEAP has given me in my academic journey is worth a big applause and I would want another person like me to take the same opportunity.”

LEAP Fellow



Career readiness and financial literacy training for LEAP Fellows

4. World Bank. 2014. Montenegro, Claudio & Patrinos, Harry. Comparable Estimates of Returns to Schooling Around the World. Note: 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.



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

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

The programme was created to tackle challenges that confront universities across the world – including academics being overburdened because of large class sizes and faculty members lacking training in innovative pedagogies.

### PEDAL approach

Since its launch in 2018, the PEDAL partnership has designed and delivered participatory, student-centred pedagogical training that has enhanced the educational experience for instructors and thousands of learners in graduate programmes, generating demand outside its formal partner universities and in subjects beyond its social science focus.

PEDAL has embraced a unique and holistic approach to online teaching and learning that integrates course planning and design, creative facilitation and assessment. Educators are trained via a blended approach, with face-to-face sessions plus online engagement through the PEDAL Africa online platform. The learning process incorporates flipped classroom as well as the use of case studies, simulations, role plays, and threshold concept tools such as concept maps aimed at maximising learning outcomes among students.

“*This programme challenged us to think critically to deliver to our students. It prepares us for the next moment in our academic life which is centred on improving teaching methodologies to help students become useful graduates.*”

**Dr. Kwame Asah-Asante,**  
Senior Lecturer, University of Ghana

The PEDAL training applies best practice on inclusivity – such as equitable class participation and seeking the voices of marginalised groups to bring issues that affect them to the centre of learning. There is also particular attention to gender dynamics in the content of modules and selection of teaching and learning materials, as well as interactions within sessions.

### Online learning

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, PEDAL was successfully adapted to create the ‘PEDAL Online: Technology for Transformative Pedagogy’ course. The programme was designed around four areas: course design, course planning, online facilitation, and innovative assessment. It is a self-paced course accessible from mobile devices, with a mix of online and off-line activities, access to recorded sessions, peer mentorship and guided support. The training was designed so faculty staff



Guided practice in PEDAL training



from different universities can apply it to design and deliver courses on the different Learning Management Systems used within their institutions.

The PEDAL Online training has been a driving force in moving teaching and learning from a purely face-to-face endeavour to online and blended modes in all participating universities. The project has pioneered the development of draft pedagogical standards that could be applied at a national level.

### A successful model

PEDAL's structure, expert contributors, and inclusive leadership have been core to its success. The structure of the partnership – a consortium of highly reputable universities promoting participatory methods – contributed to the scale and depth of buy-in and impact, which is far greater than any individual university or small project could have achieved.

The partnership has been collaborative, iterative and equitable; all partners have a sense of ownership over the project and have built it up together by recognising and harnessing each other's strengths. The project is scalable and is acting as catalyst for change at an institutional and national level through engagement with university leadership and national higher education commissions on pedagogical training approaches for academic staff.

The Centre for Teaching and Learning Innovation at the University of Ghana was inspired by PEDAL. Similarly, the University of Nairobi's Centre for Pedagogy and Andragogy has strengthened its capacity through PEDAL training. A policy on pedagogical training has been approved at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania; and the University of Ibadan in Nigeria has adopted the PEDAL framework for curriculum design for all of its postgraduate programmes.

### Project achievements

As of December 2020, 1,460 teaching staff from over 70 universities across ten African countries had received PEDAL training, exploring pedagogical strategies plus tools and techniques for technology-enhanced learning. Participating staff have gone on to redesign over 1,100 course modules, already directly influencing the learning outcomes of over 1,200 students in PEDAL's targeted social science degree programmes and up to 100,000 more across the hundreds of university departments reached by the project across the continent. Over 80 participants have become trainers, sharing the learning from PEDAL with other members of teaching staff in their host institutions as well as in universities based in other countries.

A dedicated [PEDAL channel](#) is available on the Association of African Universities TV and a [pedagogical leadership series](#) is available on YouTube.

Looking ahead, the partnership is now addressing the growing demand for PEDAL training by working with individual universities to institutionalise the approach in centres of teaching excellence. The PEDAL partnership will sustain the network, support virtual staff exchange and quality assure the training against established standards.

PEDAL is 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).

## Breaking down barriers to higher education for Syrian refugees – Partnership for Digital Learning and Increased Access

Across Lebanon and Jordan, many talented young people aim to study for a university qualification but face significant barriers.

In response, the Partnership for Digital Learning and Increased Access (PADILEIA) is helping disadvantaged and displaced young people to access higher education through a unique online and blended learning initiative. Participating students can work towards micro-credentials in relevant fields and are supported with tailored student services and affordable pathways into locally-delivered formal academic qualifications.

Higher education is often neglected in traditional humanitarian response strategies but gives displaced young people vital continuity in their educational development – and enhances their ability to make strategic choices about their futures<sup>1</sup>.

In Lebanon and Jordan, thousands of young people want to study for a university qualification but face major challenges. A needs assessment conducted amongst prospective students by PADILEIA found most participants in the study had no prior experience of online learning and, although smartphones were widely available, a stable internet connection was not.

With a shared interest in innovative digital pedagogy, student support models and transferrable skills, the PADILEIA partnership brings together three universities – King's College London in the UK, Al Al-Bayt University in Jordan, and the American University of Beirut in Lebanon – as well as Kiron Open Higher Education, a digital education NGO, and FutureLearn, a leader in online learning.

PADILEIA provides higher education opportunities to refugee communities via three learning offers:

### One month 'taster' courses:

Designed by King's College London academics and hosted on the FutureLearn platform, these one month rolling courses offer students 'taster'-style introductions to English, digital skills, business and healthcare.

The aim is to help students improve their language skills, gain experience in university-level education, familiarise themselves with online learning, and build their academic knowledge and skills in their chosen subject.

The courses can accommodate unlimited numbers of students and act as a stepping-stone to university access. As of December 2020, over 687 refugee students based in the region had completed the courses and received a certificate from King's College London and FutureLearn.

### Eight-month foundation certificate courses:

These blended learning courses are delivered online and in classrooms at the Al Al-Bayt University and American University of Beirut. The aim is to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and certificates they need to meet entrance requirements for universities in the region and abroad.

Alongside academic learning – in subjects such as maths, science and English – students also receive career counselling and mentoring on university and scholarship applications.

In total, 283 students have graduated since 2017, and another 175 students are currently enrolled in the new year of the programme. As of December 2020, 54 of the Foundation course graduates had earned scholarships and the courses had received a 95% recommendation rate from participants.

### Online six to 24-month university credit-bearing courses:

Delivered online by Kiron, these short courses can be stacked to receive credits equivalent to up to a year of higher education. Students can choose from two tracks: Business and Economics, or Computer Science.

The Kiron platform provides students with support including live chats, enabling peer-to-peer discussions, real-time feedback from support staff, a virtual desk helping with credit transfer and pathways, and language support.

Over 3,000 students had completed courses on Kiron's platform as of December 2020. As well as academic study, students also benefit from guidance on transferring to local or international universities.

1. Dryden-Peterson, S., and W. Giles. "Introduction: Higher Education for Refugees." *Refuge* 27, no. 2 (2010): 3–9.

Through these offers, PADILEIA is increasing access to high-quality education – providing a foundation for further higher education learning, and enabling students to acquire the skills they need for future work.

All of these pathways include wrap-around support services such as psychosocial support, English language support, and mentoring for scholarship applications. These programmes boost students' confidence, increase their soft skills and prepare them for their onward pathways.

Although the online courses can be studied alone, the team recognised the significant benefit of blended learning. This is available at the PADILEIA Campus, based in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, enabling students to engage with the course in a group setting. Facilitators with subject knowledge guide students through the courses, and offer support on digital and English language skills. This created a community feel and provided students with access to the necessary equipment to study online.

One student commented

*“I really like the way we communicate with teachers... The fun time we spend in the class with friends has become a beautiful memory for me.”*

The PADILEIA team is also working with Relief International to deliver an additional foundation programme and short courses to cohorts of students in the Zaatari refugee camp, Jordan, and create an additional campus for students there.

PADILEIA's online support mechanisms enabled the project to respond fast when the Covid-19 pandemic struck. The team were able to quickly provide internet bundles and tablets to PADILEIA students and to move all study programmes fully online, whilst maintaining student support.

As Ismail Ababneh, VP for Administration and Student Affairs at Al al-Bayt University highlights:

*“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.”*



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

Across the world, many graduates are ill-prepared to address the challenges they encounter in the modern workplace or in meeting today’s social needs. Often, this stems from a lack of 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 challenge is to move beyond islands of good teaching and to bring about change at scale.

Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA) is a partnership of four universities in Tanzania (University of Dodoma and Mzumbe University) and Uganda (Gulu University and Uganda Martyrs University) working alongside supporting organisations in Kenya (AFELT and Ashoka East Africa) and the UK (INASP). Together, they are developing a scalable pedagogical model to help universities across East Africa create an improved learning experience for students. This improved learning experience will foster the development of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, and allow for practical learning beyond the classroom to improve graduate employability.

### TESCEA approaches

TESCEA partners started out by identifying skills gaps between what students typically learn in universities and what employers and wider society look for from graduates. After reviewing literature related to graduate skills and employment, the partners developed a skills matrix. They used this to guide them in embedding critical-thinking and problem-solving skills into university courses through a series of workshops.

To allow for practical learning beyond the classroom and align changes with improved graduate employability, the universities involved in TESCEA set up Joint Advisory Groups. These Joint Advisory Groups bring university leads together with key local businesses, communities and government to help shape and deliver learning in and beyond the classroom.

*“This transformative project is all about encouraging graduates, whether doctors, teachers, or farmers, who creatively seek alternative and better ways of doing things. As a university, we need interaction with the business community and other community partners to achieve these goals and build a stronger community.”*

**Professor George Openjuru,**  
Vice Chancellor, Gulu University,  
Uganda

The TESCEA approach is based on transformative learning. In workshops, lecturers were invited to reflect on their teaching approaches and how to give students more opportunities to interact with their topics and develop their skills.

This insight from the workshops fed into the next step, course redesign. With the support of INASP and AFELT, lecturers reviewed and redesigned selected programmes and courses, embedding critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, along with gender responsiveness. The redesign approach can be adapted and scaled across degree programmes.

Key to achieving sustainability with this work is building the capacity of teaching staff who have been through the process to facilitate others to do the same – so TESCEA also trains what are called “multipliers”.

TESCEA aims to create an improved learning experience for both female and male students. Teaching staff participating in the curriculum redesign workshops also received gender-responsive pedagogy training and gender sensitisation.



“*I witnessed a student teacher reorganising the sitting arrangement during school practice after he realised that girls were seated on one side and boys on the other. And to me, that is positive change in the way the students approach the issue of gender-responsive pedagogy.*”

**Agrace Atwikirize,**  
Uganda Martyrs University

Covid-19 has impacted teaching staff in being able to deliver their redesigned courses. However, the pandemic also gave an opportunity to advance development of the online components that are key for the long-term project output. In 2020 workshops were transitioned from face-to-face to entirely online. In addition to continuing to deliver the core work of TESCEA, there was also an opportunity to provide wider capacity development for teaching staff who now found themselves needing to interact with their students online.

### Improved learning experiences

So far, the TESCEA partnership has trained 148 members of teaching staff in pedagogical skills and teaching methods that effectively support student learning. Over 150 courses – in subjects ranging from programming with Java to special needs education – have been redesigned. As of January 2021, 2,967 students have benefitted from TESCEA-supported innovations in teaching and learning and 94% report satisfaction with their educational experience.



A TESCEA course redesign workshop at University of Dodoma

Students have also had wider opportunities to engage with their communities in their university and beyond. Examples are the student clubs established at the University of Dodoma in Tanzania which resulted in a conference on entrepreneurship; agriculture students at Gulu University in Uganda supporting a pig farmer to refine feeding, improve management of hygiene and vaccinations; and education students at Uganda Martyrs University working with a school for deaf and blind students.

### Supporting transformation beyond the life of the project

Scalability and sustainability are important components of TESCEA. The partnership is developing a model for transforming employability for social change. This model will include toolkits, case studies and online training to support other lecturers, academic leaders and universities to transform their teaching and learning. The aim is to support universities to continue to make a difference to graduates' readiness for employability and social change throughout Tanzania, Uganda and elsewhere in East Africa.

“*Transformational learning has created lively relationships with my students, personal growth, and shared knowledge. I have established a shared vision for a course with my students, creating experiential lessons that go beyond the boundaries of the classroom*”

**Humanities and Social  
Sciences lecturer,**  
Tanzania

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

Myanmar is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the impacts of climate change. After years of low investment in the country's higher education system, there is now a demand for skilled graduates to meet new employment needs, particularly in relation to managing Myanmar's natural resources sustainably.

The Transformation by Innovation in Distance Education (TIDE) partnership, which is coming to a close, involves universities in the UK and Myanmar working to increase the quality of distance education and produce more employable graduates, by focusing on:

- Improving student outcomes
- Enhancing academic knowledge in the environmental science subject area
- Developing the capacity for sustainable delivery of quality distance learning
- Supporting Myanmar's digital education transformation at a national level.

### Enhancing staff capacity and academic programmes

Within Myanmar, a high proportion of university undergraduates – around 60% – are taught by distance education. Open educational resources (OERs) – educational materials that are in the public domain – are set to play an important role in the digitalisation of Myanmar's education curriculum.

Central to the TIDE partnership's work is training academic and support staff in all 40 of Myanmar's Arts and Science universities. The objective of the training is to help staff develop subject-level knowledge in Education for Environment and Sustainable Development (EfESD). The training also covers pedagogical knowledge and skills, plus how to develop and use OERs more effectively with students.

TIDE training is primarily delivered through Residential Schools run by TIDE partners including the Open University, University of Oxford and University of Manchester, but following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, this has moved online. Participants at Residential Schools increased steadily over time, with the last event in November 2019 involving more than 200 academic and support staff.

The TIDE training was built with scalability in mind: a TIDE Master Trainer Programme was set up to train TIDE champions on key aspects of the project. 100 participants have completed the training and will be able to train other staff at their institutions after TIDE.

Participants supported by TIDE have put this training into practice: 15 in-depth online courses were produced by 35 teams of TIDE-trained staff across the project's partner institutions and exemplars of courses were created that demonstrated how a future Myanmar Open University might work. One course – in water, sanitation and hygiene – was produced and another, in sustainable tourism, is being finalised.

### Embracing digital change

Digital technology has the potential to radically enhance distance education in Myanmar. The TIDE strategy was designed to inform future policy on the use of digital technologies. This exploratory work was conducted through pilot projects funded by TIDE and delivered by private sector partners. TIDE's small-scale ICT pilot projects generated learning for potential national-level ICT and digital initiatives. Likewise, TIDE's e-learning pilots built participant expertise in supporting distance education through the use of innovative educational technology.

The speed of change in digital education can, however, be quite overwhelming. As such, TIDE worked with selected senior managers – called 'Change Champions' – providing them with mentoring and training to help them manage change within their institutions.

The partnership also provided hands-on support when Covid-19 struck, by developing online courses to help staff and students transition to online learning and teaching. These courses have already received more than 10,000 unique visits.

Courses for staff to create and deliver distance education that were previously delivered in person were quickly moved online, with 194 participants enrolled as of February 2021.

Following the escalating situation in Myanmar in early 2021, the online, self-access components of the TIDE offer that were developed in response to Covid-19 will be central to sustaining the project's positive legacy for staff and students in the country.

TIDE is 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 University of Manchester (UK).

