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Global Platforms for Equitable Knowledge Ecosystems (GPEKE)

Executive Summary - 2020

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Executive summary

The Global Platforms for Equitable Knowledge Ecosystems (GPEKE) project seeks to build stronger and more equitable research systems both between North and South, and in three focus countries: Uganda, Ethiopia and Cambodia. The project supports INASP's researcher support platforms at the global level, and at the country level it supports partnerships with the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences (EAS), Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), and Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP). These are focused on gender equity, equity in research publishing and equity in research skills development.

At the global level, in 2020 GPEKE focused on enhancing and sustaining the content and structure of our online researcher support platforms, AuthorAID and Moodle. Key results this year included:

- In response to increased interest in online capacity development approaches resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 we scaled up our offering, delivering three MOOCs instead of the planned two, with a total of 7,265 participants, and a completion rate of 47%.
- We also expanded our online offer in response to specific needs identified through the AuthorAID community, producing four new online resources focused on proposal writing, policy engagement for early-career researchers, critical thinking skills, and online facilitation.
- Our learning and communications work in 2020 helped us improve our understanding of equity issues faced by researchers in the Global South, including through the first Voices of Early Career Researchers survey, which polled 752 researchers in 94 countries about their experiences of equity.

We also continue to lay groundwork for the sustainability of our global platforms through adaptations to our model and partnership structure. The AuthorAID platform is taking an increasingly community-led approach, with a new Stewards Team formed this year which has started to advise on the strategic development of the platform and contribute to curriculum development as well as build mechanisms to ensure ongoing community co-creation. In 2020 we also continued to refine our co-sponsorship model to support the longer-term sustainability of the AuthorAID MOOCs, with 10 organisations sponsoring our courses during the year.

At country level (Outcomes 2 and 3), GPEKE has been focused on strengthening capacity and equity within national research systems in Ethiopia, Uganda and Cambodia, in partnership with EAS, UNCST and RUPP. We have seen increasing progress towards more sustainable, organisational level changes. Key results in 2020 included:

- A total of 365 participants completed at least one of the seven modules of our online Journal Editors course, with a 10% increase on female participation from the previous year (36% in 2020 compared to 26% in 2019).
- A National Steering Committee has been formed by UNCST with 18 members from 15 research organisations to oversee the development and running of the Uganda Research and Journal Repository and has produced draft guidelines.
- In Uganda and Ethiopia, the Gender Alliance and Gender Forum continued to grow, welcoming 25 and 27 new institutions respectively. In Uganda, the Alliance has been formally registered as an NGO and is developing its own online platform. In Ethiopia, a coordinator has been recruited to support the development of the Forum.
- In Cambodia, RUPP and INASP were able to identify joint priorities and conduct a small pilot training exercise together on research communications entirely remotely, as well as hold an After Action Review to decide on next steps.

In addition to the global context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 GPEKE's main challenges have been delays related to navigating political and governance dynamics in Uganda and Ethiopia, at the same time as shifts in organisational leadership and strategy for UNCST and EAS. However, in both countries GPEKE has been able to continue to make progress towards our key country-level outcomes on research publishing and gender equity, with a particular highlight of the project in 2020 being the strong ownership taken by both EAS and UNCST in the gender strand of work. Both gender and research publishing are taking different approaches according to each country context, but in each case there has been close integration both to the mandate and goals of the partner organisations, as well as clear relevance to the broader national context.

Ethiopian Academy of Sciences perspective

"The year 2020 started with a fruitful collaboration between the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences (EAS) and INASP with the launch of a Gender Champions Workshop in February 2020 at Getfam Hotel in Addis Ababa. The workshop participants were drawn from higher education and research institutions and key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

"The workshop was successful in terms of broad attendance as it was able to bring together many women academics and researchers as well as Gender Units from the various HEIs and research institutions based within and outside Addis Ababa. The discussions were lively, the issues raised pertinent to women's success in research and academic pursuits, and the recommendations of the workshop were relevant for a systematic and institutionalized approach to promote gender equity in research and academic life. The main agenda of the workshop was therefore one with which EAS could easily identify and promote.

"To set the legal framework for the formation and operation of the Forum, EAS and the core members of the gender learning forum have prepared a draft statute to be discussed and endorsed by those that attended the February 2020 Gender Champions Workshop. Due to COVID-19 and political instability in the country this has not yet been achieved, but is planned for 2021."

Uganda National Council for Science and Technology perspective

"INASP and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) implemented three work packages in the GPEKE project in 2020: ensuring gender equity in research; development of a national research eco system; and AuthorAID research writing MOOCs. Despite the challenge of the pandemic, UNCST and INASP ensured effective communication while working remotely, a work method that has built stronger synergies, collaborations, and partnerships.

"Ensuring effective and timely communication mechanisms is a lesson we have to carry forward. Our work with INASP has enabled more effective regulatory, management and coordination of research programmes in Uganda. The Gender Equity in Research Alliance is being well appreciated and has spread to about 150 research institutions and universities. Also the Uganda Research and Journal Repository Platform has picked up although its progress was hindered by COVID-19 as we could not hold face-to-face dialogues."

Key lessons learned in 2020 include:

- **The last year has reinforced the importance of strong co-design with partners and ownership over country-level work**. While these principles have been important to us for a long time, this year we learned how critical they are for maintaining momentum and navigating contextual changes when we were unable to work together face to face or hold in-person workshops. The different paths that the gender and publishing work have taken in Uganda and Ethiopia have also illustrated the ways in which such partnerships can give rise to approaches that are closely tailored to each context.
- **The 'pivot online' which was necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic affected different areas of the project in different ways.** It was easier to adapt at the global level, and even presented some new opportunities in this area for INASP, but more challenging to do so at country level where the strand of work on working with institutional partners to help them adapt, host and run their own online courses in research writing and proposal writing has not yet started.

- **There is more for us to learn about equity issues within research systems in Uganda and Ethiopia**. We are particularly interested in learning more about the unique needs of early-career researchers and those in the 'non apex' institutions our work is increasingly reaching.
- **Adaptive management and budgeting are critical to help us understand and respond both to learning from our own work, and to changes in the external context which affect this work**. In 2020 we explored a number of ways to better connect learning to project decisions and keep pace with changes in the external context.

Cover pictures (clockwise): AuthorAID MOOC participant Dung Nguyen; journal editors course participant Sonam Tashi; participants at Ethiopia Gender Champions workshop, February 2020; AuthorAID MOOC participant Aleya Sanyal