



The TESCEA approach to external stakeholder engagement

CASE STUDY

October 2021

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Higher education change transformation needs to go beyond the people directly involved at the university. Engaging with wider stakeholders ensures that changes are relevant to and accepted by the wider communities.

1 Introduction

For education transformation to be effective and lasting, it is important to engage the wider community. One key approach to this is to establish Joint Advisory Groups (JAGs), as discussed in another case study.

However, the TESCEA universities also undertake other engagement activities, building upon established structures within their institutions. As Dr David Monk from Gulu University reflects, TESCEA has provided universities with the opportunity to make these structures and processes *“more explicit and intentional... integrating them into the learning process”*.

This case study showcases some of the experience of the University of Dodoma in Tanzania and Gulu University in Uganda in stakeholder engagement.

2 University of Dodoma (UDOM)

UDOM has a strong culture of inviting programme stakeholders, including alumni, industry members, and representatives from other universities to participate in curriculum review. During TESCEA, their role developed to advising on the delivery of the project and participating in curriculum redesign workshops, thus strengthening the link between theory and practice. In addition, direct relationships between external stakeholders and students continue to be forged, through internships, guest lectures, and industrial mentorship opportunities.

Despite challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this varied approach has allowed UDOM to maintain engagement despite restrictions. What is more, while establishing an institutional budget for an advisory group will take time, the UDOM team emphasise that there are different, less financially demanding, ways of involving stakeholders within university processes.

One example is hosting guest lectures and inviting stakeholder participation at crucial elements of curriculum review can provide important ways to boost engagement. Furthermore, inviting inspirational speakers from the industry is also another way of engaging the industry.

TRANSFORMING EMPLOYABILITY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN EAST AFRICA

Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA) is helping young people in Tanzania and Uganda to use their skills and ideas to tackle social and economic problems. With partners in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, TESCEA supports universities, industries, communities and government to work together to create an improved learning experience for students – both women and men. This improved learning experience fosters the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and allows for practical learning beyond the classroom that improves a graduate’s employability.

The TESCEA partnership is 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).



Participants discussing a guest lecture at University of Dodoma

3 Gulu University

Gulu University is striving to become a sector leader in community engagement and takes a multi-pronged and intersecting approach to integrate stakeholders into the functioning of the institution:

3.1 Research

Gulu University champions community-based research, a deeply engaged approach designed to inform practice and teaching. All research projects undertaken by staff and students are expected to have relevance to community needs and challenges. In the Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, for instance, staff are involved in conducting community action research projects tackling issues from primary production to value addition, marketing, and sustainable management.

3.2 Internships

Student internships at Gulu University are designed to equip learners with the requisite skills in the world of work. Premised on the innovative student-centred outreach model, internships place the centre of interactive learning between the university and the community. This interactive, two-way learning process has ensured that the interest of both the community and the university are met in the internship process.

When a Gulu University student undertakes an internship placement, their starting point is to identify an existing problem or challenge within the community. The identified problem/challenge becomes their focus during the internship as they try to provide solutions/answers in consultation with the faculty staff. Finding answers/solutions to identified community problems in most cases requires a research undertaking, which then becomes the student's research project. This way, the internship placement addresses the real needs of the community, hence creating relevance in the community.

3.3 Volunteering

While doing their internships, students volunteer their time and work with the community. Most students remain working with the community beyond the period required for the internships. In addition, many students have been offered employment at the organisations where they interned. Supervision of students is done collaboratively by the community and university. While it is a mandate for the university to supervise students, the community volunteers their time and resources to supervise and mentor the students during internships, too.



Gulu University agriculture students at a pig farm. Image credit: LIWA

3.4 Advisors

At the management level, external stakeholders and the community are invited to join the administrative bodies responsible for decisions at the institution, including the University Senate and Council. At the implementation level, individual farm/firm owners are constantly consulted on how to improve on the internship programme and process. Especially, the opinions of advisory group members at Gulu University are often sought to guide the internship process.

3.5 Programme design

External stakeholders play an active role in shaping what is included within the university curriculum. For example, the Faculty of Agriculture and Environment recently launched a new Masters programme as a result of community demand for sustainable water systems. Design and review of curricula is done in consultation and with the involvement of the community.

4 Challenges with stakeholder engagement

While engaging with external stakeholders, universities addressed the following challenges:

4.1 The pandemic

As was the case across the world, the pandemic caused significant disruptions to activities. As such, some plans have taken longer to realise than initially anticipated and others have not been possible. However, this has also led to innovation and adaptation, for example, hosting meetings online and ensuring engagement is maintained through other virtual means wherever possible.

4.2 Time

“The greatest challenge - especially because of covid but not exclusively - is finding time for relationship development both in the form of lecturer and community stakeholders and also for sharing and mobilizing the knowledge that the students have gained in their experience of learning in the field.”
Dr David Monk, Gulu.

4.3 Mindset change

While universities strive to be engaged with their community, the need for personnel who have a passion for and understanding of community engagement can be challenging. Often, there is a need to “reorientate” staff toward this approach and advocate its merits.

4.4 Cross-sector communication

“One thing we have come to realize is that the community often does not know how to contact the university independently to help them solve problems. We have tried to begin to design a portal to showcase the areas of research expertise and have a space for stakeholders to connect with university members. A large area for growth here is being able to showcase what research and expertise has been done and can be done by the university. There are a number of INGOs that work in northern Uganda, but for some reason they are not compelled to seek out the experience of the university - which is a natural space for continuity of experience and documentation of learning across a fractured NGO world.”
Dr David Monk, Gulu University.

5 Looking forward

Both universities featured in this case intend to maintain their relationships with stakeholders, both with advisory groups and in the myriad of other ways described above. As emphasised by UDOM, adaptability within this process is crucial, especially when facing budget restrictions. At Gulu, the establishment of a directorate of Community Engagement will be integral in this process of institutionalisation of community engagement.

“I think creating [a] budget and space for regular relationship building activities between stakeholders and lecturers and students - to share learning experiences outside of the technical area of focus are really important.”
Dr David Monk, Gulu University.

For more case studies of TESCEA approaches see
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October 2021

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Cover image: Engagement with a guest lecturer at University of Dodoma

Credit: University of Dodoma

Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA) is funded by the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) as part of its SPHEIR (Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform) programme.

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