Global Platforms for Equitable Knowledge Ecosystems (GPEKE)

Executive Summary (2021)

Mai Skovgaard (mskovgaard@inasp.info), Jon Harle, Andy Nobes, Joanna Wild, Tabitha Buchner

Executive Summary

The Global Platforms for Equitable Knowledge Ecosystems (GPEKE) project works with Southern researchers and research organizations to develop stronger and more equitable research systems.

Globally, it aims to achieve greater equity by enabling Southern researchers to develop knowledge, skills and confidence through INASP's AuthorAID community and Moodle learning platform, so that they can develop their careers, publish their work, and build new collaborations. In **Ethiopia and Uganda**, it supports national-level initiatives, through partnerships with the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences (EAS) and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), that aim to make research more visible, develop online learning, and overcome gender biases. In **Cambodia** the project is providing modest support to researchers at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP).

At the global level (Outcome 1), we enhanced our online learning curriculum and resources on our AuthorAID and Moodle platforms and strengthened the community-led aspects of AuthorAID as part of our transition to a more sustainable model. Key results this year included:

- In response to the continued increased interest in online learning due to the pandemic, we ran **three Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)** on research writing and grant proposal writing on the AuthorAID platform, with a total of **7,706 participants from 131 countries**, and a completion rate of 37%. **44% of the course participants were women**.
- Our collaboration with UNCST and EAS to promote the MOOCs to researchers in their networks resulted in our **highest ever number of participants from Uganda and Ethiopia:** a total of 614 Ugandans (with a 45% completion rate) and 608 Ethiopians (with a 28% completion rate) took part in our courses.
- We continued to expand our online offer in response to needs identified through the AuthorAID community. We developed and piloted **a new course on 'Communicating Research for Policy Influence'**. A total of 85 people completed the course (31 of which were women). 90% of the completers reported satisfaction with the course, and on average a 50% increase in confidence regarding key topics. We also designed a five-week course on '**Foundational Research Skills'** which we will be piloting in 2022.
- As part of our transition to **make AuthorAID a more community-led platform**, and in collaboration with our Stewards team, we developed a 'community progression' model to recognize different levels of involvement from AuthorAID members such as writing blogs, recommending resources, mentoring, facilitation, and leadership. We published 15 new articles written by AuthorAID members in 2021 covering topics like research collaboration, using statistics, artificial intelligence, plagiarism, and data integrity.

At country level (Outcomes 2 and 3), GPEKE is focusing on strengthening capacity and equity within national research systems in Ethiopia and Uganda, in partnership with EAS and UNCST, and supporting researchers at Cambodia's principal university, RUPP. We continue to see progress towards more sustainable, organizational level changes. Key results in 2021 included:

- UNCST began the development and setup of an **online research platform called "National Repository of Uganda"** (NRU). The platform has had over 2,000 submissions and will collect, store, make readily accessible, and coordinate research information to strengthen Uganda's Open Science Programme. UNCST intends to link the repositories of all research institutions and universities in Uganda to the NRU.
- **In Uganda and Ethiopia, the Gender Alliance and Gender Forum have continued to grow**. UNCST has incorporated the Gender Equity in Research Alliance (GERA) into its strategic plan for 2021/22-2025/26 and considered the aspirations of the alliance in their Gender Policy.

Training of Trainer and gender champion workshops were held for members of both GERA and the Ethiopian Gender Learning Forum, **engaging staff of 41 Ugandan and 29 Ethiopian institutions.**

- In Cambodia, INASP and RUPP collaborated on **a learning report to gain insight into the situation of online learning at RUPP**, and the shifts precipitated by the pandemic. Through one of the MOOCs, we also provided bespoke support to 11 PhD students in the RUPP social science faculty who needed training in proposal writing and research writing.

Uganda National Council for Science and Technology reflects on the partnership with INASP

"In all, 2021 was an operationally challenging year owing to the effects of COVID-19 on several aspects of UNCST's work. However, working with INASP enabled UNCST to overcome some of these challenges, especially with new meeting modes, new forms of stakeholder engagement and a new paradigm for good science. The UNCST received extensive support from the INASP team who were always on hand and available to engage and provide technical support under the different thematic areas. As this final year of the GPEKE Program rolls out, UNCST hopes that all these gains can be consolidated within a stable framework to ensure sustainability of the achievements and take forward the learning so far. The mainstreaming of these initiatives is a priority and UNCST looks forward to extended partnership with INASP in meeting the challenges of Uganda's rapidly evolving STI landscape"

Although the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on project implementation and delayed some planned work and activities; our country-specific work continued to be characterised by strong partner ownership. Designing for sustainability has been a priority throughout and will be a particular focus as we enter the final year. In our three focus countries we will concentrate on building on and sustaining work that has already shown good promise, including continuing to strengthen the gender networks in both Uganda and Ethiopia.

Key reflections and lessons learned in 2021 include:

- **Responding to the context and local needs of our in-country partners continue to be of vital importance for the success and sustainability of the activities we are implementing**. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our partners in Cambodia, Ethiopia, and Uganda differently and has created varying degrees of impetus for online learning. Understanding this impact and what it means for how best to deliver our work is paramount to the sustainability of the project activities.
- **While the immediate impacts of the pandemic on researchers and their institutions have been clearly seen**, including financial pressures for institutions, the pressures of disrupted teaching schedules, and delays to research, **the longer-term impacts are still emerging.** Lockdowns seems to have created an impetus for and increased familiarity with online learning, we have seen this in Uganda in particular. However, we are also seeing indications that participants in our online courses have been more stretched for time in 2021 than in previous years. This could be a long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic starting to affect academics.
- **Building awareness, commitment to and local ownership of efforts to address issues of gender equity in research is key and takes time and effort.** A workshop is rarely enough to fully change perceptions of gender, but awareness does build incrementally over time through continued training, interaction, and discussions with colleagues. Both UNCST and EAS have made sure to build strong involvement in the gender networks both within and outside of their organizations to keep the momentum of and commitment to the gender networks strong.

Cover pictures: Sitasma Sharma (AuthorAID member) conducting interviews in rural Nepal (top left), participants in Ethiopian Gender Learning Forum gender champions workshop in April 2021 (top right), Adelakun Odunyemi (AuthorAID member) at a drug-resistant tuberculosis clinic in Nigeria (mid left), Angélique Dusabe from Rwanda (MOOC Research Writing in the Sciences participant) (mid right), Ravichandra Mondreti (AuthorAID member) conducting seabird research on Pitti Island in India (bottom left), Betelehem Bilata Woldeyes (AuthorAID member) doing astrophysics research in Ethiopia with her team (bottom right)