



Transforming higher education for social change in East Africa: improving employability and business creation through targeted, scalable interventions

A consultation on Phase Two of the TESCEA programme convened by INASP and the Inter-University Council for East Africa

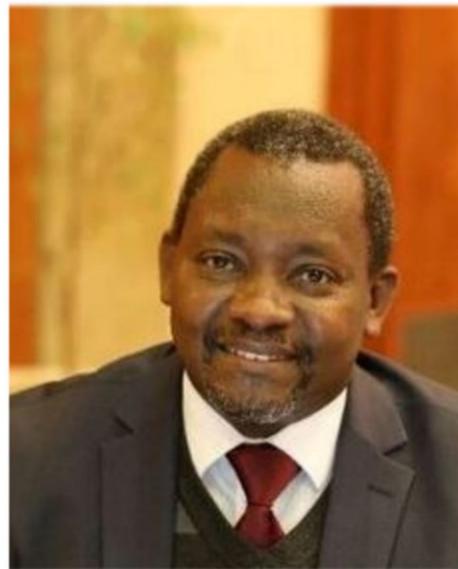
26th April 2023

The event was opened by **Jon Harle**, Director of Programmes at INASP, who welcomed participants and introduced the speakers. Jon explained that TESCEA – Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa – was a programme co-conceived, co-designed and co-led by a partnership of East African universities – Dodoma, Mzumbe, Gulu and Uganda Martyrs – and several supporting agencies including INASP, Ashoka, and the Association for Faculty Enrichment in Learning and Teaching in Kenya. Its first phase was funded by a grant from the UK government through the Strategic Partnerships in Higher Education Innovation and Reform (SPHEIR) programme. The TESCEA partnership have more recently joined forces with the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), with whom the stakeholder consultation was co-convened, to scale the programme to more universities across the East African Community.



The challenges for teaching and learning in East Africa

Professor
Gaspard Banyankimbona



Prof. Gaspard Banyankimbona, Executive Secretary of the Inter-University Council for East Africa, launched the discussion, emphasising the importance of the issues being considered and the timeliness of the event.

Transforming higher education, and undergraduate teaching and learning, could make a significant difference to the region's socioeconomic development and help both individuals and communities to “pave the way towards the brighter future”, he explained.

“Education is the foundation upon which future generations will build a prosperous and equitable society... we must focus on transforming teaching and learning to ensure that we equip our students with the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies to drive socio economic development in East Africa”

As Prof. Banyankimbona noted, many of the skills that students currently learn will be out of date even before they graduate. The urgency of updating curricula and teaching methods could not be overstated and was essential to any efforts to improve education. “The skills required of graduates to succeed in employment and to create entrepreneurial intrapreneurs are constantly evolving”, he noted. “There is an urgent need for universities in higher education as a whole to be digitally skilled and empowered to produce graduates with digital competence in order to fit into the digital labour market... and the digital society in general”.

But, as he recognised, doing so would not be easy. “We face a difficult journey towards shaping local ecosystem for employment and business creation”, he explained. “The task of harmonisation of the education system and the curriculum, of building capacity of faculty for innovative teaching and assessment, and of promoting appropriate technology for teaching and learning has been overwhelming”.

Prof. Banyankimbona highlighted the importance of multi-stakeholder efforts to achieve this transformation. “We need to work together to build a robust and integrated landscape of higher education in East Africa that foster innovation, research and intrapreneurship,” he urged. “The next five years are very critical” he said, “and we need your collective support to ensure that we remain on the right path of achieving a prosperous and integrated Africa defined by adequate knowledge and skilled human resources.”

Prof. Banyankimbona closed by urging participants to work together to seek new solutions and deliver change.

“I wish to make this final appeal to you all to join this initiative to transform the higher education ecosystems in East Africa. We have this significant opportunity to transform teaching and learning in East Africa. And we must embrace this challenge and work towards a brighter future for all East Africans.”



A view from university leadership

Professor Flora Fabian



Prof. Flora Fabian offered a perspective from university leadership. Prof. Fabian is founding **Vice Chancellor of Mwanza University**, Tanzania, and previously co-lead of TESCEA at the University of Dodoma, where she was Director of Research and Consultancy.

“In 2018, we had questions to ask ourselves,” Prof. Fabian explained, as she introduced the thinking that lay behind the first phase of the TESCEA partnership. “We asked ourselves about the challenges of universities in the region,” with a particular emphasis on universities away from the largest cities, especially those in rural areas, and including smaller private universities, she explained.

“We asked ourselves, higher learning institutions who were ambitious to grow and to become competitive, [do we do that] by increasing the numbers of students and programmes, and by having our higher learning institutions being trapped in traditional methods of teaching and learning, despite advances in innovation and technology? We went further, and asked ourselves about our teaching practices, and the efforts to improve the rigour and relevance of teaching and learning”

The TESCEA partners, Prof. Fabian noted, were motivated to explore their teaching practices, their existing efforts to improve the quality and relevance of teaching and learning, and of research. “Does this give us the ability to solve the needs of our communities, the youth and our nations?” was a key question that the partnership asked itself, Prof. Fabian explained. This led the team to forge new relationships with the private sector, government and regulatory agencies, and local communities, through newly established “Joint Advisory Groups” (JAGs), with which they organised regular dialogues.

“Could we use innovative teaching and learning methods... change the mindset of our university management, lecturers and students, and in the process, definitely serve the needs of our youth and the immediate community, in our surroundings?”

Working with the JAGs, university teams looked at their existing teaching practices, and considered the structures and pedagogies needed to foster critical thinking, problem solving and inclusiveness, Prof. Fabian explained. There was a specific concern to ensure learning was gender-responsive, and this led faculty – both men and women – to recognise the need to apply a gender lens to teaching and learning, including inclusiveness of language, classroom management and interaction, the way students were organised in the classroom, and the learning activities that were used.

“If we can introduce the model - the TESCEA model, then we know that change will not only happen in few universities but will happen in more universities in East Africa and beyond. We know the model was tested, and it was found effective. We are positive that this model can be as big as the East African region and the rest of the African continent.”



A view from the classroom

Dr Harriet Mutonyi &
Dr Albert Luswata



We then heard from **Dr Harriet Mutonyi**, INASP Associate and formerly Dean of Education at Uganda Martyrs University, one of the four universities that led the first phase of TESCEA.

As Dr Mutonyi noted, it is widely recognised that most university teachers gain their positions because they have expertise in a particular subject, but not because of their pedagogical abilities. “When they come into university, they realise that teaching for transformation requires much more than just giving the students the content... they need to know how to communicate, how to plan activities, how to assess innovatively, how to transform the learning environment into something that the students can get transferable skills from” she explained.

Dr Mutonyi remembered an occasion at Uganda Martyrs University where students complained we “have the head knowledge but... don’t have the practical skills”, but that lecturers didn’t know how to “infuse the theory and practice, for the students to gain the practical skill and transferable skills, which were critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, the ability to even speak to what it is that they have learned.”

“It was eye opening for us”, she remembered, and as they began to think about their teaching differently, “we focused particularly on how to design for effective learning. What kinds of activities do we embed critical thinking, using cases, ... how do you move away from pen and paper to constructive thinking through a problem and having a solution”.

“Seeing the students more engaged in the classroom and ready to share their knowledge was very powerful for us.... But the transformation in the classroom also meant that the lecturers themselves should be willing to participate, because we know that teaching for innovation requires investment of the person is its time and attitude into wanting to focus on the learning of the students much more than just the delivery of what it is that they already know.”

Dr. Albert Luswata, a lecturer and director of the Institute of Ethics at Uganda Martyrs University, offered his experiences. “I was one of those who started teaching at university without any prior training and teaching”, he explained, “like many other colleagues, I used to teach the way I was taught”. Dr Luswata explained that, since he had been taught in what Paulo Freire described as the “banking” approach to teaching – where knowledge is “deposited” in the heads of students – he took a similar approach himself. “I used to focus so much on myself, how I can teach well, I was like a sage on the stage and considered my students as spectators”.

“I came to realise that students were not learning that way... I had put in a lot of effort. And then they realised there was something missing. It is this project that opened my eyes that I was using the wrong method because I was focusing so much on me and not on the learners.”

The impact of the changes that were made through the TESCEA approach were quickly visible, Dr Luswata explained, and in end-of-semester evaluations students were much more positive, and felt they were learning new skills.

“The engagement with the members from the industry and the community really opened our eyes because it helped me to discover the skills that are really needed in the world of work.”



Dr Darius Ogutu

**Director for Higher Education
Ministry of Education, Kenya**



We were fortunate to hear from **Dr Darius Ogutu**, Director for Higher Education in the Ministry of Education, Kenya. As Dr Ogutu noted, Kenya’s higher education system is intertwined with changes at the regional level, and he expressed his wish to work closely to support regional transformation. The relevance of higher education and the preparation of graduates to succeed in the regional economy was critical, he noted. “We talk about job creation, we talk about wealth creation. But the issue is how are our higher education institutions preparing products for the job market?” he asked. Dr Ogutu went on to reflect on conversations with the Deans of medicine and nursing at the Aga Khan University in Nairobi, to illustrate the tensions inherent in changing curricula for future cohorts of students, when better equipped graduates were needed for the challenges of today.

Dr Ogutu hoped that East African universities would “get to a level where we can say what we are coming up with is quality, and comparable to the best anywhere else in the globe”. Issues related to regional accreditation and quality assurance were important, he noted, but also demanding attention were “whether

we are able to account for the time taken to produce graduates in our institutions, and how they positively contribute to the economy of this region” he emphasised.

“This is an issue that has to go back to the curriculum that we offer, how relevant? ... looking at the future and having that future. Trade for, prepared for, now, not tomorrow, because technology is rapidly changing... How do we keep track of the developments by producing graduates who can fill those positions? Even as we talk about the new developments, artificial intelligence and other matters, then how do we prepare students in the higher education institutions to be able to talk with us now? Are they going to be wealth creators, job creators, or are they going to depend on being recruited?”

Dr Ogutu noted the underpinning challenge of how to fund and resource a higher education system to do this, and the difficulties of depending on public financing to meet those needs. “Is that sustainable?” he asked, “how else can we have innovative financing models for universities that are sustainable?” Dr Ogutu welcomed the initiative of the IUCEA and reiterated the importance of regional collaboration to raise standards and increase relevance, and to identify new ways of meeting common challenges.

“In terms of the graduates you're producing, maybe it is time, we will look at how we train and who we are training for. Maybe they are then we can be able to have a roadmap on how to tackle education of the future.”



Plenary: If you want to go far, go together

Professor Michael Mawa



Prof. Michael Mawa, Chief Principal, Quality Assurance & Qualifications Framework at the IUCEA, rounded up the discussions with reflections on the importance of collaboration. “The transformation of teaching and learning and the transformation of the higher education in East Africa requires the collaboration of many key stakeholders moving forward”, he emphasised. “We need to work together and so that we can be able to walk far.”

A frank and open acknowledgement that the quality of education is still below the desired benchmark of excellence was, he argued, an important starting point, because this was holding back the region's progress. “We have very large number of students in our universities, but many of them are not receiving the kind of education they need to compete very favourably in today's global economy” he noted.

“We need to work together, to share our knowledge, to share our expertise, and to share our resources” he urged. He was positive about the potential to do this but noted that there were not inconsiderable obstacles to effective collaboration, including competition for resources, bureaucratic obstacles, and sometimes a lack of trust among stakeholders.

“Transformation of the education system, and particularly of the undergraduate teaching and learning in East Africa is very critical. And it remains critical really, for the region to progress. We need the support of all stakeholders to achieve this goal. And let us work together to provide our students with educational environment and the educational opportunity to realise their full potentials.”

Further contributions were made by several participants

Dr Tashmin Khamis, Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning at Aga Khan University, based in Nairobi, noted that the prevailing quality assurance frameworks in the region did not place sufficient attention on teaching and learning, relative to other aspects of programme delivery. Dedicated units for teaching and learning, working alongside existing quality assurance units, could be important institutional partners in this process, she noted.

Prof. Idris Rai, Deputy Executive Secretary at the IUCEA welcomed Dr Khamis' insights and agreed that it might be necessary to revisit existing QA frameworks, to ensure that teaching and learning, and connections to business and community at classroom level, were given sufficient emphasis.

Ranj Majumdar, senior advisor to INASP, noted that the lack of adequate financing for HE in East Africa underscored the importance of collaboration and that it “needs stronger coordination, it needs stronger purpose, it needs sharing of evidence and knowledge” and multi-stakeholder initiatives to make that happen. Collaboration would, he hoped, drive increased investment, which is badly needed, but was also essential to make the best of the limited money that is available.

Susanna Carmody, of the British Council, noted that the nature of higher education – with several years of study, and additional time for graduates to establish themselves once they have completed their studies, means that impact takes time to materialise. The “beauty of the TESCEA approach” she felt, was that it acted at two levels in parallel, engaging institutional managers and national policymakers in efforts to develop the necessary institutional frameworks for longer-term change, while also seeking to change classroom practices, so that the learners benefit. “You're not kind of waiting to put the framework in place before it starts to have an impact on those who are doing this day in, day out...” This enabled educators to build the evidence for the case that they were making, while also having an impact directly on young people.

Vincent Otieno Odhiambo, Regional Director for Ashoka East Africa returned to the issue of funding, noting that the initial investment in TESCEA by the UK government had been the “fuel of the ecosystem that we were able to bring together”. Secondly, he noted that we need to ensure that the policy and regulatory frameworks are sufficiently aligned to create the operating environment for change within the ecosystem, and thirdly, that “human capital” is vital, with teams of expert, motivated academics joining forces with “movers and shakers of policy”.

We wrapped up the event by emphasising the scale of change that we hoped to drive in TESCEA's second and third phases, with the ambition to reach 17,500 students by 2026 in 16 universities across six East African countries, and 70,000 students in 52 universities by 2023 (see below). Jon ended by acknowledging the challenges and the complexities of navigating this change in HE systems with limited resources but emphasised that we can't afford to push things down the road or be trapped by the short-term horizons that projects entail. Instead, we must “think with ambition for scale and spot the tipping points and see if we can leverage to take some of these positive developments into much wider change.”

Contacts and further information

Jon Harle, Director of Programmes, INASP – jharle@inasp.info

Prof. Michael Mawa, Chief Principal, Quality Assurance & Qualifications Framework, IUCEA - mmawa@iucea.org

Results and impact of TESCEA phase 1: [How TESCEA made learning more relevant and built new partnerships for employability and social impact](#)

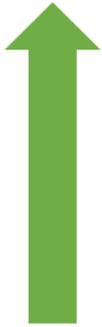
Transforming Higher Education for Social Change – a model from East Africa: www.transformHE.org

TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION IN EAST AFRICA: OUR STRATEGY TO ACHIEVE CHANGE BY 2030

GOAL: East African universities delivering change, producing skilled graduates & enabling societies, economies & communities to thrive

By 2030: 70,000 students 8,000 academics 52 universities 3,250 courses 7 countries

Phase 3: Systems Change – embedded across EAC, globally recognised



Universities recognized regionally and globally for the impact of their teaching on employability

Data and model used to improve HE systems across Africa

Alumni networking platform established

36 new universities added across all seven countries

National systems embed TESCEA as a central model for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching

By 2026: 17,500 students 2,000 academics 16 universities 700 courses 6 countries

TESCEA embedded in HE systems across the EAC. Tracking, evaluating and benchmarking impact in student completion, attainment employability, business creation, university staff retention and gender equity

Phase 2: Systems Strengthening – deep dive in the EAC with IUCEA



Four new countries

12 new universities

Closer relationships with governments, the private sector and communities

Greater focus on gender equity and digital learning

Cross-institutional cooperation among academics and students



By 2021: 3,800 students 565 academics 4 universities 212 courses 2 countries

Phase 1: Pilot – Tanzania & Uganda

2018



Founding partnership: INASP, AFELT, Ashoka, Uganda Martyrs University, & Gulu University (Uganda), University of Dodoma & Mzumbe University (Tanzania). Funded by UK FCDO. Significant increase in critical thinking, problem solving & practical skills, more gender responsive teaching, and new relationships with business, government & communities.

CALL TO ACTION: Ensure that undergraduate teaching in African universities provides the foundation for young women and men to develop new skills and forge meaningful careers to build knowledge-based economies and transform socio-economic development