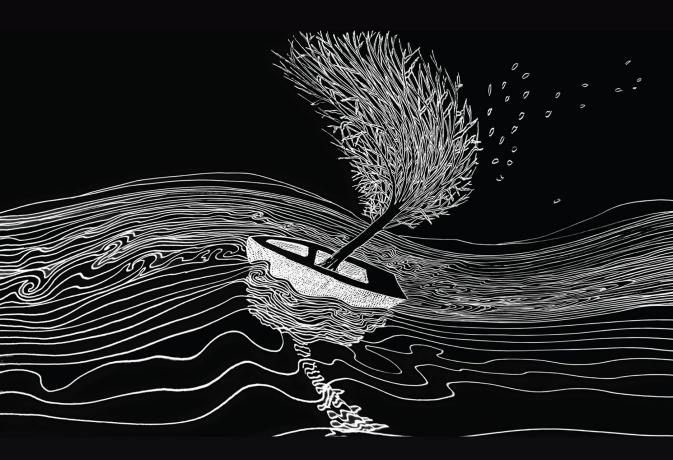# Higher Education for Good

Teaching and Learning Futures

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22. Collaboratively reimagining teaching and learning

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Introduction

In 2020, the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development proclaimed Africa would only attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) if "universities in Africa collaborate in research, teaching and community or societal engagement" (Ligami, 2020). In 2022, the UNESCO World Higher Education conference called on universities to "reshape ideas and practices in higher education to ensure sustainable development for the planet and humanity" (UNESCO, 2022). While there are regular calls for African universities to improve their teaching, finding ways to do this within the resources and the available time in already stretched institutions, at the scale required, have proven elusive. This chapter is a reflexive exercise, discussing the work of an international partnership, *Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa* (TESCEA), that aimed to reshape habits of teaching and learning in institutions of higher education.[1] We, as TESCEA partners and authors of this chapter, hope that our example can make a significant contribution towards understanding how change can happen in higher education, and particularly in resource-constrained settings. We begin

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1 See https://www.inasp.info/project/transforming-employability-social-change-east-africa-tescea

by presenting our approach and then offer reflections on the change we observed, the ways in which this was achieved, and the challenges we encountered along the way.

Context: problems and partnership

Higher education institutions in East Africa face multiple challenges, including: the quality and relevance of university learning; the challenge of graduate employability (McCowan, 2014; Nganga, 2014); how universities can more effectively and visibly serve their communities; and the ability of academics and university leaders to create the institutional environment for this to be possible — particularly enabling students to develop their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (McCowan et al., 2022; Schendel, 2015, 2016) and addressing gender inequities. In response to these interconnected challenges, a group of academics, learning designers, social entrepreneurs and facilitators from East Africa and the UK gathered to identify shared goals and approaches. In 2017 the TESCEA partnership was formed, with funding from the Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform programme.[2]

The TESCEA partnership

The four universities in the TESCEA partnership are: Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda), Gulu University (Uganda), Mzumbe University (Tanzania), and University of Dodoma (Tanzania). The four universities are a diverse group. Three are public institutions (Dodoma, Gulu and Mzumbe) and one is private (Uganda Martyrs). They range in size from 4,000–5,000 students (Gulu, Mzumbe and Uganda Martyrs) to over 30,000 (Dodoma). Each institution has a clear commitment to serving its community and its nation, but conceives of and expresses this differently:

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2   The Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform programme (SPHEIR) was funded by the UK Department for International Development (subsequently the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office), and operated by a fund management consortium led by the British Council with Pricewaterhouse Coopers and Universities UK International: see www.spheir.org.uk.

- Mzumbe University, in eastern Tanzania, traces its origins to a training school for local administrators established in the 1950s, becoming a higher learning institution in the 1970s and a full university in 2001. Mzumbe aims to serve the "socio-economic development of the people" (Mzumbe University, 2017).

- Uganda Martyrs University, based in central Uganda, was established in 1993 by the Catholic Church. Uganda Martyrs seeks to work "for the betterment of society guided by ethical values" (Uganda Martyrs University, n.d.).

- Gulu University, in northern Uganda, was established in 2001, admitting its first students in 2002, with a mission to help the region rebuild after a protracted and devastating conflict (Monk et al., 2020). Working "for community transformation" is at the heart of Gulu's mission (Gulu University, n.d.).

- University of Dodoma, the youngest of the four universities, was established in 2007 as a large multi-faculty institution in central Tanzania. Dodoma aims to contribute to the "economic growth, reduction of poverty, and improved social wellbeing of Tanzanians" (University of Dodoma, n.d.).

Notwithstanding their differences, change was to be achieved through redesigning established programmes in established institutions, not introducing new courses or establishing new centres. Across all four universities (as in so many places), most lecturers had received little, if any, preparation to teach. Most lecturers used a memorisation and exam model of teaching. Staff struggled to balance the competing pressures of teaching, research, and administrative duties, and had little time for professional development or additional student support.

Joining these universities in the TESCEA partnership were three organisations who support and facilitate change in higher education, each with their own histories. Established in 1992, INASP (UK)[3] has been working with East African universities to strengthen research and teaching for over 25 years. Ashoka East Africa (Kenya) was established

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3   An original member of the partnership was Linking Industry with Academia (LIWA) based in Kenya. LIWA left the partnership during its second year.

in 2001 as a hub of the global network of social entrepreneurs. The Association for Faculty Enrichment in Learning and Teaching (AFELT, Kenya) emerged in the mid-2000s seeking to support improvements in teaching and learning across Kenya's higher education system (Brewis & McCowan, 2016).

INASP was the lead partner. Although a natural continuation of INASP's original convening role, it was also necessitated by funding requirements which stipulated grant management experience that was difficult for other partners to satisfy. Our efforts to counter the structural inequities that this introduced are discussed below.

Gathering evidence

Our evidence is drawn from several sources, the largest being a collaborative, utilisation-focused evaluation (Dooley et al., 2021). The evaluation sought to identify significant changes in the practices, knowledge, and attitudes of students, academics, and university stakeholders, from a baseline conducted in 2018. The evaluation employed quantitative surveys of lecturers and students and qualitative, open-ended questionnaires[4] amongst senior management, lecturers, students, and external stakeholders (totalling 766 individuals). It also drew on a body of data and evidence (including 40 documents) systematically gathered through partnership learning processes. Each university had a dedicated team member whose role was to ensure that evidence was gathered, synthesised, and learnt from. They coordinated quarterly learning reports which formed the basis of regular learning sessions. Additional evidence comes from project working documents, including student portfolios, interviews with students and lecturers, reflective blog posts, course outlines, site visits, interviews and focus groups with community stakeholders.

Our intention had been to test TESCEA's impact on teachers' practice through peer observations, and on student learning outcomes through a critical thinking assessment (Schendel, 2015). Both were thwarted by pandemic-initiated closures and subsequent pressures on teaching.

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4   Qualitative, open-ended questionnaires were refashioned from planned interviews, because the pandemic and the additional pressures it created prevented interviews from being conducted.

Nevertheless, the systematic approach to data generation and learning throughout the project gave us a robust and diverse data set from which we can examine the effects of our work. To weave this evidence together the authors engaged in meta reflexive work. This was done by sifting through the evidence, and meeting for a series of cross-partnership reflective sessions, asking ourselves:

- What was significant in enabling change and motivating colleagues?

- What proved difficult and why?

- Where were we less successful?

TESCEA's approach, philosophy, and methodology

Our understanding of change

The TESCEA partnership worked to an overall theory of change. At the impact level, we wanted graduates to develop the skills, competencies, and dispositions that they needed to secure future opportunities and contribute to their societies.

We identified three mechanisms through which this change would be realised:

- Enable academics to teach for critical thinking and problem-solving, rather than for the acquisition of knowledge, and to redesign their courses in line with this new approach.

- Ensure degree programmes are relevant to the challenges that students would face beyond their studies.

- Enable active, real-time learning to enable the partnership to adjust its approach.

For this to occur, academics would:

- Need to be inspired and supported as individuals, be given the space to safely explore how to teach differently and have opportunities to engage with stakeholders beyond the university.

- Create appropriate learning environments, requiring input from students, communities, and employers.

- Observe the results of the changes they were making, and to learn from these, to maintain enthusiasm, momentum and maximise professional learning.

- Need to ensure that new practices could spread beyond the initial core of departments and academics, and that institutional processes and policies were revised. This would require a core pathway for all institutions, with the flexibility for each to adapt to their own needs and contexts.

- Embrace the challenges of facilitating significant change and adapt as we progressed through interrogating the efficacy of our work within the context of a strong learning framework and a culture of continuous learning.

Two further enabling factors were also central to our understanding of change:

- Change needed to emerge from a process that was rooted in East African universities, and the experiences and knowledge of African academics and their students.

- Educators themselves needed to be the ones leading that change.[5]

Our partnership approach: mutual trust and equitable governance

Three aspects were important to our approach to partnership. The first was an understanding that we could only achieve significant change by combining diverse talents and experience to generate new solutions to common problems. Partnership thus entailed an intentional effort to create something that neither organisation could achieve alone, and to develop an approach that if successful would draw greater validity,

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5   This was a deliberate attempt to situate expertise within the region, rather than in academics of Northern universities who are commonly invited to train African peers through university partnership programmes, scholarship schemes or other externally funded initiatives.

because it had been tested in several institutional contexts. The second was a way of working together to achieve that change which centred on principles of mutual respect and trust, of valuing each other's knowledge and expertise, of collaborative working practices and consensus-based decision making.[6] The third was a commitment to learning, so that we could revise and adjust our approach, as we learnt what was effective, and what additional or alternative steps were needed to effect change (Nzegwu, 2018).

The grant required contracts with the funder, and between the lead and other partners, a process of financial due diligence, quarterly reports on expenditure and activities to claim funding in arrears, quarterly audits, and progress reports at six monthly intervals. These were taxing reporting and management processes, which strained all partners, and made it additionally difficult to facilitate change. Conscious of the hierarchy that the grant arrangements introduced, the problematic way in which one partner was placed in a position of contractual authority over others, and the power dynamics this could create, we sought to establish the most equitable governance structures that we could. We established a project leadership team, a monitoring and evaluation and learning (MEL) team, and a series of working groups, each composed of representatives from all partners. The latter included groups for communications, stakeholder engagement, finance, curriculum design and gender. Many team members were in several groups. The leadership and MEL teams came together in April 2018 to reassess, adjust, and agree on project plans. Subsequently the teams met online separately each month[7] and jointly every quarter, to discuss progress, consider new information, make decisions, and agree on any adaptations needed. Project leads came together each year for a deeper review meeting, initially in person and virtually during the pandemic. The summative evaluation was also undertaken by the MEL team (with external quality assurance) to ensure that it was a process owned by the universities.

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6 While many of these were implicit in the ways in which we chose to work, they were also detailed in a "partnership framework document", developed during the planning process, and which became a useful touchstone to which we could return if necessary.

7 During the pandemic we met weekly or fortnightly for an extended period, to support each other and navigate the uncertainty and complexity that it introduced.

Our approach to teaching and learning

We approached transformative learning on multiple fronts: individually, structurally and culturally. We worked with academics to think about what it meant to teach for transformative learning, and we considered how universities could be transformed, by examining the wider learning environments, policies, and culture. We drew on established theorists to identify transformative learning as a process of critical self-reflection, reflective thinking, and meaning making (Fink, 2013; Freire, 2017; Mezirow, 1997, 2000). Our hope was that if academics and management were helped to think differently about learning, they would in turn provide a new type of environment for their students.

Rather than redesign whole programmes, we worked at the course level. Each institution identified four undergraduate programmes and selected courses within these, with the intention of building, testing, and refining an approach that would allow more rapid improvements to learning and provide a foundation to scale it in the future.[8] Selected programmes covered agriculture, medicine, education, business, social work, and IT. In each university, courses from additional programmes were redesigned as faculty embraced the process. To begin, we convened a series of workshops with lecturers and administrators to encourage them to formulate their own philosophies of learning and to explore how a transformative learning approach might offer new starting points. We argued that it was their role to facilitate a process of engagement and critical reflection with their students, rather than to transmit a body of knowledge. Workshops introduced critical readings on teaching and learning, exercises that engaged academics in reflective observation and active experimentation (TESCEA, 2021b). To ensure that local capacity to lead change was developed, we identified early enthusiasts and created a cadre of "multipliers"[9] (Mutonyi & Dryden,

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8   This has since been published as "Transforming Higher Education for Social Change: A model from East Africa". See www.transformhe.org

9   Multipliers are members of university teaching staff who are trained in transformative learning and gender-responsive pedagogy, and can deliver course redesign workshops.

2021c) who initially took the role of co-facilitators and subsequently became lead facilitators, travelling to work with staff at other campuses.

This was followed by a process of programme alignment and in-depth sessions to redesign courses and create detailed lesson plans. To guide the development of learning outcomes, we consulted the relevant literature and key stakeholders to identify the skills, competencies, and dispositions that graduates needed, and mapped this to Fink's taxonomy of significant learning (Fink, 2013; Wild & Omingo, 2020). This process spanned several days of intensive workshops, a subsequent online course, and mentoring (Wild, 2022) during which lecturers mapped concepts and crafted their learning outcomes and teaching and assessment strategies (Laurillard, 2012, 2013; Mutonyi et al., 2021b, 2021a; Omingo et al., 2021b, 2021a; Wild, 2022). Lecturers were introduced to the digital Learning Designer[10] tool. The creation of teaching plans in the tool has allowed us to collect examples of designs representing a variety of pedagogic principles, including social learning, experiential learning, and active learning that can be used by others as inspiration for their teaching (TESCEA, 2021a).

In parallel we began to explore the ways in which gender intersected with learning. We first sought to build a common understanding of and commitment to gender equity — emphasising that it was not sufficient for women and men simply to be present in the classroom, they both needed to be involved in the learning process. We then developed an approach to gender-responsive pedagogy. We drew on a framework developed by African educators for schools (Doroba et al., 2015; Mlama et al., 2005) alongside other resources (Frei & Leowinata, 2014), to identify seven teaching and learning spaces and six dimensions of gender-responsive practice (Chapin et al., 2020; Chapin & Warne, 2020). Lecturers were encouraged to think about how to organise the classroom, ensure that all students were enabled to take on speaking and/or leadership roles, address any bias in case studies and content, and use language and tone to reinforce positive gender attitudes.

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10   https://www.ucl.ac.uk/learning-designer/

Our approach to employability and community engagement

Employability was a central concern, but we wanted to avoid the sense that education was simply about preparing young people for the labour market. We used "employability" to explore the types of graduates that the universities wished to see emerging from their programmes, and the types of learning experiences that would require, defining it as "a person having the mindset, potential, attributes, skills, purpose, ability and agility to define their path and create their own future".

While each university had channels through which to engage stakeholders, these were often fragile and temporary. To create more enduring mechanisms for dialogue and collaboration, we established a series of Joint Advisory Groups (JAGs). These convened representatives from business, employer bodies, community groups and government in configurations determined by each university (Mutonyi & Dryden, 2021a; Wild & Nzegwu, 2022). An Ashoka fellow was identified to participate in each JAG, helping to introduce new ideas on learning for social entrepreneurship. The JAGs acted as regular forums for discussion between external stakeholders, university management, and academic and student representatives. JAG members participated in the course redesign processes, advising on the competences they felt were needed in professional settings, gave guest lectures, helped to prepare placements, and mentored students. In the process, our concept of partnership was expanded; as one Dodoma team member observed, they could not remain stakeholders, but needed to be recognised as partners too.

Navigating change — Successes and challenges

The overall results of the TESCEA partnership are clear. Academics and institutional managers have enthusiastically embraced the process. By December 2021, over 565 lecturers had participated in the programme, over 100 departments had introduced new teaching models, 212 courses had been redesigned, and universities had revised 39 university policies and process guidelines. Most importantly, 3,800 students had benefited from better teaching.

In this section, however, we reflect on *how* change happened in three domains: amongst academics, students, and institutions. While we present the experiences of the entire partnership, we also reflect on the nuances of change in each institution, and how it was enabled by specific cultures, environments, and histories.

Changing teaching practice

As academics prepared to teach their redesigned courses, we observed a growing wish to engage students in the learning process. In some cases, the process elicited particularly strong reactions: one academic at Uganda Martyrs suggested that the university should apologise to students for its previous teaching, while a brave lecturer in Dodoma wrote an open letter to his students, explaining that they were going to approach learning differently and inviting them to become partners in the process (Wild, 2022). Further testimonies from academics indicated similar sentiments.

> Students are not empty vessels; they have a lot in their minds, they have their assumptions, they have their imaginations. When you give them the opportunity to interact, to share what they have, they will learn how to solve problems themselves. (Lecturer 1, University of Dodoma)

> Students have now gotten used to (not sitting) in position for two hours or so in my class because I use blended learning activities [...] one commented 'we don't sleep off because it is very interactive and we understand right from class'. (Lecturer 1, Gulu University)

Since institutional policies were still to be revised, this was evidently the result of personal changes made by lecturers, not changes enforced from above. It marked an emergent shift in teaching culture. Academics were engaging in a process of critical self-reflection that in turn opened new discussions with their colleagues and students (Mezirow, 2000). They came to reflect on both the content of what they taught, and how to assist students to make meaning from their learning. The proportion of academics who believed that lecturing was the most effective approach dropped by 21 percentage points, while those that believed that teaching for concepts and principles mattered more than conveying facts increased by 13 percentage points (Dooley et al., 2021). One lecturer explained:

> I have loved my experience. I have shifted my mental model about learning... I came in with the view that the lecturer would relay information and knowledge and that I would take it in and would then have learned what I was supposed to... It's very exciting! (Lecturer 2, University of Dodoma)

Multipliers proved particularly important. In Dodoma, they became a group of motivated champions who in turn trained and motivated fellow lecturers and middle level managers. Gulu was strategic in the selection of its team: the acting dean of education was enrolled as a multiplier and subsequently developed the teaching and learning centre. During the difficult months of 2020, multipliers also offered significant, informal support to their colleagues. At Uganda Martyrs they were tasked with training the whole university to adapt its teaching to online modes, allowing the university to remain open when it would otherwise have struggled to do so.

In addition to attitudinal shifts, we identified changes in teaching practices. The pandemic prevented significant observational work, but lecturers' own accounts indicated that their use of critical thinking and problem-solving techniques had increased by 43 percentage points, the use of active learning strategies (such as role plays, fishbowl debates and peer teaching) by 37 percentage points, the use of problem-based and team-based learning strategies by 15 percentage points, and the use of gender-responsive pedagogies by 45 percentage points. Conversely, the proportion of those who preferred students to listen and take notes had decreased by 21 percentage points, and the proportion who assumed that their students brought little knowledge of their own decreased by 26 percentage points. 94% of lecturers believed that the new approaches were more effective, enabling them to develop more relevant courses, more learner-centred teaching and assessment strategies, and provide better quality materials to their students (Dooley et al., 2021). One lecturer commented:

> When we are in class, let them think what we are teaching, think on the scenarios, think on the problems facing society, think on the problems facing their offices if they are employed in a company. (Lecturer 3, University of Dodoma)

A cross-partnership peer review team assessed lesson plans, looking for quality learning designs which demonstrated clear learning outcomes,

realistic learning activities, clear assessment methods, a focus on key skills and were designed to foster dispositions such as social responsibility. They judged 72% to be good or very good, and one in three detailed learning designs was judged to be excellent, with a complete sequence of teaching and learning activities (Dooley et al., 2021).

Through carefully facilitated discussions about gender stereotypes and power, we encouraged significant shifts in attitude. Gender equity and responsiveness came to be appreciated as an integral part of teaching and learning (Mutonyi & Dryden, 2021b; Skovgaard et al., 2021). Academics reported that they guided the use of language in their classrooms, developed materials with gender in mind, adjusted classroom layouts and encouraged students to think about gender in their assignments. They also observed changes in the way students interacted, with greater respect for each other and with an observable increase in confidence amongst female students (Dooley et al., 2021). In a reflective session at Gulu, lecturers identified the practice of gender responsiveness as their most significant change. Dodoma identified a group of champions and brought them together to explore gender more deeply. While conversations on gender led to observable change, there was also resistance from some staff, often where gender was still perceived to be "about women", or where they were reluctant to initiate difficult conversations.

These significant changes generated discomfort for many academics, who pointed to the lack of time to absorb new ideas and insufficient support to embed them in their teaching. Some Dodoma staff felt that the new approach required too much time and that it wasn't possible to prepare detailed learning designs. At Mzumbe, the difficulties of trying to teach within lecture halls with fixed seating frustrated staff. Across all universities, the lack of infrastructure, particularly of internet connectivity was a common constraint, interrupting workshops and requiring creative approaches when power and internet connections failed. As facilitators, we found ourselves at times insufficiently prepared to deal with the range of needs presented and unable to provide sufficiently tailored support, including the digital skills needed to make effective use of tools such as Google Classroom and Learning Designer. These problems were heightened during the rapid, uneven digital shifts precipitated by the pandemic.

Changing student learning

Surveys of students, as well as observations made by their lecturers, suggested that students made shifts in their thinking, recognising their own agency, becoming more engaged in their learning, and using critical thinking and problem-solving approaches. There were positive increases in the proportion feeling equipped to: apply facts, theories, and methods in practice; examine their own views on issues and understand another's; change the way they thought about a concept; formulate their own questions; connect ideas from their studies to their own experience; clarify personal values and ethics; and understand the consequences of their actions (Dooley et al., 2021).

> ...the classroom environment is free. You have the opportunity to express yourself and present ideas in a free manner [...] I am used to the type of learning, where the teacher delivers, and students only listen. Getting used to open communication and guided classroom discussion really changed my academic perspectives and thinking. (Student 1, University of Dodoma)

> Me as a learner being involved made me feel like I am valued [...] If I say something it can be listened to. I have a platform to air out my needs [...] this is what I feel is lacking in the education system [...] Every time you involve learners in the change making processes it makes them feel like they are valued. (Student 1, Gulu University)

> [It] made me more responsible with my own learning. I felt being empowered to manage my own learning. In the past, I felt that it is the responsibility of lecturers to teach us everything. But now I know that I have to contribute to my own learning. (Student 1, Mzumbe University)

Critical to managing this change and the disorientating effect it had on some students, there were efforts to involve students in the process (Mutonyi & Dryden, 2021e). Lecturers explained what would be changing and why, students were involved in JAG meetings, and they were encouraged to develop "student clubs" to explore issues themselves. A lecturer at Gulu noted initial resistance, with students complaining that they were asked to do the work of their teachers. But as the semester progressed, views began to shift. Although there was some discomfort, students played an important role in encouraging change through their response to new classroom practices. In some cases, they

began to express a preference for lecturers who, as one student in Gulu explained, "allowed [students] to speak out, contest, argue, participate in our learning".

A significant obstacle was that assessment practices were difficult to change. Most students are still assessed predominantly through terminal exams, and while these can be altered to ask thinking questions or incorporate practical demonstrations, it can reinforce the sense that learning is to pass an exam, and not to contribute to society.

Changing institutions

While institutional change was a core strategic goal, we sought to shift cultures by demonstrating success, by actively engaging senior management, and using this to push for further structural and policy change (Mutonyi & Dryden, 2021d). Ultimately, universities were able to pass policies and develop guidelines covering safeguarding, whistleblowing, gender equity, quality assurance, effective teaching, and community-university engagement. Dedicated centres for teaching and learning, and gender began to emerge at Uganda Martyrs and Gulu. Gulu developed a new certificate course (completion of which provides merit for promotion at the university), and a focal point for gender-related concerns. University leaders recognised and encouraged their staff by awarding certificates in public ceremonies. Academics and university managers note that there is still a significant distance to travel if new approaches are to become fully embedded across institutions, but there are nevertheless signs that thinking has shifted, including at senior levels. Senior managers were positive about the changes underway, with 94% feeling they were very important to their institution, and two thirds very supportive of institutionalising changes.

Securing the support of senior managers was critical in all institutions. While Gulu's vice chancellor was directly involved in the partnership, a workshop on transformative learning with deans, directors, the academic registrar, and others proved important to engage other influencers on campus. Many became part of a core steering group, taking responsibility for specific areas such as students, community engagement, or policy review. Uganda Martyrs took a similar approach, running a transformative learning workshop for its management and deans; they were sufficiently

impressed to ask the team to run it for the whole institution, and invited them to input into several strategic and policy processes.

At Dodoma, the inclusion of middle level managers in the core project team proved significant, creating a group who could influence colleagues at similar levels and work upwards to influence senior leadership. The team resolved early on that the directors of quality assurance and undergraduate studies should be invited to workshops, and it proved a decisive step, helping to ensure that changes were reflected in the redevelopment of core university processes, including efforts to understand the student learning experience through new feedback mechanisms. A direct alignment with the university's strategy, and a feeling TESCEA could help them respond to the "employment problem" helped to secure the support of Mzumbe's leadership.

Also, the JAGs played a vital role in fostering an environment for change. By asking university leaders to chair meetings, it drew them into the change process, while also giving them an opportunity to position their institutions as champions of employability and community engagement. Ashoka helped university teams think about how to facilitate the groups and leverage the expertise they brought. The JAG was Mzumbe's first framework for regularly engaging such a diverse group of stakeholders and helped to create a sense of a wider institutional project. At Dodoma, the JAG offered leaders a regular space to meet their stakeholders, who in turn encouraged leaders to do more. At Gulu, JAG members helped to identify gaps in graduate skills and suggested changes to classroom practices. By involving representatives of national regulators and ministries of education, JAGs also sought to open conversations that would enable wider policy change:

> It has been a dream to bring together in one room, students, employers, industries, and lecturers… Lecturers got to hear directly from employers about the challenges facing graduates and students at the same time heard what is expected from them… It was really an amazing experience. (Lecturer 1, Mzumbe University)

Changing policies and processes took time, and their misalignment with new teaching approaches created significant frustration and disincentives. At Mzumbe, policies were due for review, but it was either difficult to introduce new elements or the process took longer than

anticipated. In contrast, Gulu found itself able to move more swiftly because key decision makers were already part of the project.

How we achieved change: Concluding reflections

Finally, through a process of collaborative reflection, we have identified several factors that shaped our successes and disappointments:

Beginning from aligned visions and a common purpose: From early conversations, the TESCEA partnership sought to respond to each university's vision and strategy, and to develop an approach which was anchored in their needs and concerns. Each university articulated these differently, but framed by broader East African concerns and strong social commitment, they found a clear alignment and complementarity. This foundation proved invaluable when we encountered difficulties because we could return to our common purpose. It was not always smooth, and at times we had to work hard to appreciate each other's knowledge and expertise. It took time for universities to appreciate the value of expertise from AFELT, for Ashoka to build relationships with universities, and for universities to appreciate the expertise Ashoka could bring. This required concerted encouragement and facilitation of the conversations that were needed, and a willingness to listen on both sides. We frequently returned to the principle that INASP, AFELT and Ashoka were not bringing solutions to the universities, but expertise and experience that could assist universities' own problem-solving efforts and enable the partnership to develop something new.

Trust and humility as the foundation of equitable partnership: Partnerships can be a powerful vehicle for initiating and facilitating change, despite the many inequities that they can bring. Innumerable guidelines and toolkits seek to guide those who would build better, more equitable partnerships, but simple acts of respect, of listening, and of humility are what underpin the creation of fairer governance and decision making structures. A commitment to listen and to learn, to recognise that each partner had expertise to bring, and to be open and transparent in decision making, all helped to foster a culture of respect and trust, a collaborative spirit that helped to resolve problems, and a willingness to challenge and be challenged. While trust was built within

the partnership, the significant and regular scrutiny of expenditure by the funder was felt to be disproportionate and distrusting of the universities, and this was demotivating and fractured trust within extended university teams during an intense period of change.

If open and unfettered conversation enabled our successes, the converse was true for many of our challenges. The team experienced many pressures because of the complexities involved in the change process, the need to balance these alongside demanding jobs, and the co-dependencies of partners. Tensions emerged in roles and responsibilities, and there were sometimes disagreements, challenging discussions about budgets and resources, and dissatisfaction with the role that a partner was playing. It led to one partner leaving the partnership in 2020, but only after exhausting all avenues to repair relationships and support them to play their role. Leaders were called upon to steer their teams through institutional hierarchies and politics, to address gender-based inequities and dynamics of power, to manage expressions of discontent and frustration that threatened to damage relationships, and to resolve disagreements. Yet, even when there was contention, our capacity to retain a genuine respect for differing views enabled us to find ways through. Partners forged organisational and personal relationships, and these strong cross-institutional and interpersonal bonds allowed the partnership to adapt and thrive despite significant challenges, particularly those posed by COVID-19.

Rooting our models in East African practice and understanding: We all were determined that East African practice and expertise should be centred. All universities involved were East African, to ensure that ideas developed in very different HE contexts did not displace the knowledge, expertise, and confidence of East African academics. This did not mean that we dismissed expertise and scholarship from outside the region; these were incorporated throughout in the texts and theories which we drew on and through engagement with other experts. The partnership did benefit from the expertise of academics from beyond the region (alongside INASP's contributions to learning design), but this was mobilised through advisory roles and through each university's existing partnerships. The leadership of academics in each university, alongside AFELT's role, ensured this was possible, as did emphasising the central role of and expertise of the lecturers themselves: it was they who, by

exploring new approaches and being bold enough to bring these into the classroom, would lead change, enable practice to shift, and transform the learning cultures of their institutions.

Only by learning and creating space to adapt and to adjust could we achieve our goals: We began with a collective recognition that we were on a journey: we did not know enough to predict how the outcomes would be achieved, but if we agreed to travel a "learning" rather than a "delivery" path, we were more likely to find our way to doing so. We recognised that a shared vision and a collective commitment were critical to this, to create a unifying sense of purpose; we returned to this regularly. Working across and between institutions was motivating and provided a frame of reference for institutions who knew they were not struggling in isolation, had the support of peers, and could learn from their successes and challenges. It was also important that each institution could adapt and adjust the approach to fit their own needs and to make the most of emerging opportunities. The rigidity of reporting, financial systems and payments in arrears made this harder to achieve, because it seeded uncertainty, and made institutions either reluctant or unable to initiate unplanned activities.

No doubt there are more lessons to be learnt in time. Understanding the underlying reasons for change and its real impact requires deeper and continued work. Nevertheless, we have successfully confronted outdated modes of teaching and learning, offered academics and institutions new approaches, seen significant changes in academics' and students' attitudes, knowledge and skills, visible changes in teaching methods, course materials and assessment methods, and greater engagement with communities. Despite strained resources and over-stretched teaching staff, we have demonstrated that change is possible when committed teams imagine and design together. We have seen that change happens when institutions empower academics in conjunction with their students and stakeholders to lead that change, by recognising and championing their professional abilities and tapping into their passion and commitment as educators. We offer this account in the belief there is much that the HE sector generally can learn from educators in East Africa, who are committed to change and to serving the social good.[11]

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11   Our resources, toolkits, and other learning publications are available at www. transformHE.org

Acknowledgements

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