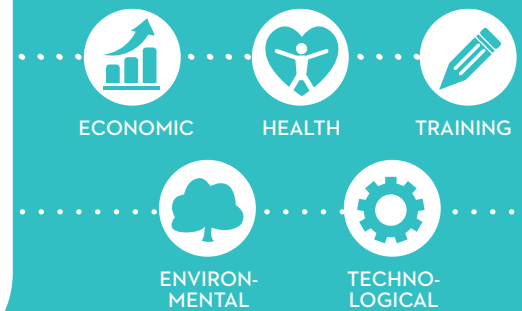




Building Resilience through Education: A Model for Sustainability in Education, Research and Innovation

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SUMMARY

Research by UCD's Centre for Humanitarian Action and Wolaita Sodo University (WSU) found that the absorptive and adaptive capacities of communities in Damot Woyde, Ethiopia, had been greatly advanced due to interventions by NGO Concern Worldwide in the Wolaita zone from 1985 to 2010. However, UCD's study found that the impact of beneficial advances can be short-lived due to the recurring nature of disasters. As a result, there has been a growing demand for both humanitarian action and development interventions to build the resilience of vulnerable communities. On foot of this UCD in partnership with WSU, Concern Worldwide, Future Analytics Ltd and the Network on Humanitarian Action secured €2.1 million in Horizon 2020 funding, for a 4-year programme entitled 'Building Resilience through Education' (BRTE).

Centred around a university-to-university partnership, the BRTE programme utilises education as a vehicle to emancipate communities in Wolaita, by creating a strong academic and physical infrastructure in WSU to expand the community's livelihood base and thereby reduce vulnerability, while advancing resilience. Already the first year of the project has produced significant output, through the successful completion of over 23 individual 3-month internships by WSU staff on the UCD Belfield campus. Outputs include agreed priorities on enabling infrastructure at WSU in I.T., registry, library services, campus services and the business innovation hub. There has been extensive module development, including for postgraduate courses – an under-represented sector in Ethiopian higher education.

Research capacity at WSU is now being strengthened by 14 joint UCD-WSU projects on diverse topics such as:

- female entrepreneurship
- early childhood care and education
- agriculture communication in sustainable development
- household adaptation strategies for climate change
- vulnerabilities of rain-fed crop production
- resilience in I.T. data centres
- heritage in sustainable economic development
- ultrasound in midwifery
- campylobacter in childhood diarrheal disease
- fattening practices and feeding pattern impact on meat quality and consumer preference
- molecular typing of mycobacterium isolated from tuberculosis lesion

These diverse topics demonstrate the widespread reach of the BRTE project's impact on capacity building while addressing the immediate needs of society in the Wolaita zone and contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

In particular the BRTE project addresses SDG 1 Target 5: By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.

The BRTE Programme, through collaboration, seeks to build capacity and expertise for sustainable development in Wolaita and contributes to the UN SDGs.



A sign proclaiming the WSU mission, vision and core values exhorts stakeholders to achieve their shared goal of international recognition for excellence. (Paul Barry)

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

Through the BRTE project, transformative capacities are being built on three pillars:

- Critical infrastructure
- Educational programme capacity at the highest levels
- Research and innovation capacity.

Political, economic and demographic developments have transformed the Ethiopian higher education landscape over the last two decades. The number of universities has grown from 2 to 44. In the context of a population of over 100 million, undergraduate enrolment has risen from 50,000 in 2003/04 to 850,000 in 2017/18, which represents a 25% annual average growth rate. Although the gender gap has narrowed, current male enrolment is still twice and four times the female level at undergraduate and graduate level respectively (Ministry of Education, 2017).

WSU reflects this national pace of change and is addressing the challenge of gender equality. This young university had an initial intake in 2007 of 801 students and incredibly its current enrolment is over 28,000. The ambition of this young university is to be the top ranked university in East Africa, responsive to the development needs of society through engagement in dynamic knowledge creation and application. Specifically, its goals include societal development based on the principle of educational equity irrespective of ethnicity, religion, sex and political background, specifically promoting women's participation in all spheres of development.

The BRTE project especially addresses the potential of a digitally-empowered campus, joint educational programmes of international standard and the capacity of academic staff to conduct research and to deliver high quality graduate degree programmes. The project plays a role in the empowerment of ever-increasing numbers of staff and students.



The enthusiasm for learning by students in engineering is restricted by inadequate teaching laboratory infrastructure, despite highly motivated teaching staff (Mark Richardson)



Getachew Geno Alala with Dr. Pat Gibbons (Dejen Kuma)

RESEARCH IMPACT

All too often universities in developed regions, such as those in European countries, by-pass their peers in developing regions, such as those in Africa, when engaging in research and regional development work. Even in cases where efforts are made by European universities to engage with their African peers, academics tend to establish links with individuals rather than making institutional links. This limits the sustainability of the engagement. Given that African universities have the mandate to shape education and research in their geographic regions, European universities need to foster strong linkages with universities in Africa when tackling global challenges. However, few proven models exist on how to build impactful European-African university partnerships.

The BRTE project seeks to enhance sustainable impact through university-to-university interaction based on addressing existing asymmetries through equality, mutuality, trust and sharing to the highest ethical standards. The BRTE project is a model for sustainability in education, research and innovation based on developing a UCD-WSU ecosystem founded on Irish national qualities of friendliness, openness and empathy (UCD Global Engagement Strategy 2016-2020) and Ethiopian national qualities of pride, history and culture, generosity and mutual respect.

UCD and WSU, supported by BRTE project partners, have established a partnership based on respect and mutuality with a clear goal to transform the livelihoods of the people of Wolaita. Respect, in the UCD-WSU partnership, equates to recognition of and due regard for the mandates, knowledge, abilities and achievements of each institution in its own space. The partnership is built on strategic trust where the motives and intentions are clearly established and actively maintained. There is an openness to share information and resources towards mutual gain. Equality is underpinned by it being a partnership of equals despite obvious asymmetries, where education is seen as a means rather than an end, to emancipate communities from their vulnerability to climatic extremes and improve all aspects of livelihoods.

The partnership is focused on achieving transformative resilience for the people of Wolaita, engaging with a host of stakeholders not least the local community, NGOs and the respective governments. Connell Foley, Director of Strategy, Advocacy and Learning at Concern Worldwide stated: "The vulnerability to recurring drought has plagued the poorest in Ethiopia for decades. In defining a resilience framework, we are finding technical solutions to building an asset base that protects people from these climatic shocks.

We also need to continue to innovate. The BRTE Programme, through collaboration, seeks to build capacity and expertise for sustainable development in Wolaita local institutions so that communities and households can not only absorb and adapt to key risks but also transform their livelihoods and lives. Concern welcomes and values such initiatives, where research is applied for social impact and where learning flows North and South."

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WSU staff at UCD (Dejen Kuma)