

# Building Stronger Universities Programme, Phase IV (2023-2027)

## Programme Outline - ELK, June 2022

### 1. Context, strategic considerations, rationale and justification

Denmark's new development cooperation strategy *The World We Share* (2021) focuses on the promotion of democracy and human rights (of girls and women in particular); on the struggles against poverty and inequality (including conflicts, irregular migration and fragility); and on the need to tackle the causes and consequences of global warming in the context of improved environmental management and greater protection of biodiversity. The strategy will be pursued through enhanced partnerships, including with research institutions.

Higher education and research has grown significantly in the last 20 years, yet the gross enrolment rate of young people in tertiary education is still low in sub-Saharan Africa (9%). Empirical evidence suggests that higher education and research can have significant effects on development and poverty reduction, mainly through four pathways: economic growth, human capital, pro-poor products and services and as evidence to inform policies and practices (Oketch et al 2014<sup>1</sup>). However, the extent to which research-based knowledge guides development policies and interventions ultimately depends on the will and ability of decision makers to absorb and use research-based knowledge.

#### *Overview of Danish support to research and research capacity strengthening*

Denmark has supported development research for more than 40 years through various modalities. Most funds have been provided as competitive grants for research collaboration ("FFU-grants") covering areas such as health, agriculture, natural resources, climate change and governance. In the last four years the funding envelope for development research in the form of FFU grants has been around 200 million DKK per year. Presently, there are 129 on-going FFU projects in 22 countries. Within East Africa the portfolio includes 27 projects in Tanzania, 9 in Uganda, 17 in Kenya, 7 in Ethiopia and 2 in Somalia.

The initiative for *Building Stronger Universities (BSU)* in developing countries, led by Danish universities, was launched in 2011 with the aim of institutional capacity building. In 2014, the second phase of the BSU programme adopted a "south driven" approach, where selected Southern partner universities entered into collaboration agreements with selected Danish universities. In 2017, the MoFA approved 90 million DKK for the third phase (BSU III, 2017-2021) aimed at strengthening research capacity development in six African universities in Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda, in partnerships with Danish university consortia. Due to delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the programme has been extended to the end of 2023. Furthermore, at the end of 2021 collaboration between selected African and Danish universities through the BSU programme was expanded with 16 million DKK in additional grants for Covid-19 related research and training.

#### *Lessons learnt from BSU*

The BSU programme aims to develop research capacities by strengthening the research environment both through focus on Ph.D. schools and curriculum development (MSc and PhD level) and training, and through funding research supporting elements such as library facilities,

---

<sup>1</sup> [The Impact of Tertiary Education on Development: A Rigorous Literature Review. Department for International Development \(ucl.ac.uk\)](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/international-development/research/the-impact-of-tertiary-education-on-development)

laboratories, ICT, policies and guidelines, administrative procedures and the financial management of research projects.

The results of the BSU programmes were highly rated by the independent evaluation of the Danish support to development research in 2020 as well as by a midterm review of BSU undertaken by DFC in 2021. Key achievements include improved capacity and quality of teaching and supervision due to upgrading of staff, curriculum development at both MA and PhD level and course accreditation as well as strengthening of the university administrative structure, e.g. research polices, grant management offices and policies, financial management systems as well as plagiarism software. The achievements have been most significant at the smaller and younger universities such as Gulu University (GU) in Uganda, and the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA). Apart from delays due to Covid-19, most delays relate to delays in PhD studies.

The key lessons learnt include:

- The South-driven approach and the long-term commitment has fostered strong project ownership and commitment from senior management at partner universities.
- The involvement of administrative systems and staff in the development process has improved the internal procedures in ways that are also relevant to researchers.
- The mentorship set up with Danish partners has been perceived as very valuable and the collaboration has functioned as catalyst of joint research collaboration.
- Danish partners are willing to engage in BSU activities. It is, however, challenging for Danish partners to engage further in capacity development activities without a strong research component. Inclusion of pilot research projects and research network activities have worked out successfully and should be continued and even strengthened.
- Triangular (South-South-North) collaboration as well as collaboration across South partner universities has enhanced knowledge sharing and been enlightening and inspiring, where it has worked.
- Development of the educational programmes has, importantly, benefitted from ample time to work out the programmes jointly through exchange visits and discussions.
- Opportunities for synergies with FFU projects have not been fully utilised. In the long run, FFU projects (and other externally funded projects) will benefit from better administrative systems and better qualified South partners. Research-based learning may, on the other hand, benefit from FFU projects.
- Better coordination with other donors may call for a more flexible design, which allows adaptation to available input from other donors in order for South partners to maximize the combined outcome of the resources available. Thus, the coordination is left to the BSU partnership.
- Gender-sensitive targets have increased awareness and helped improve the gender balance.
- The DFC administration of the program has not met any significant challenges or setbacks.

### ***Choice of implementing partners and aid modality***

The three phases of the BSU programme have indicated that there is interest at Danish Universities for partnerships with African higher education and research institutions. Furthermore, the outcomes of the programme have been highly rated and as such the modality with a south-led partnership between African and Danish universities with focus on PhD training and research supporting elements appears to have been successful in improving the quality of education and research at the targeted universities. The support appears to have been most successful in smaller

and younger universities, and the south-south collaboration appears to have been particularly rewarding through sharing of knowledge and experiences from similar contexts and situations.

Due to the significant security challenges in West Africa, it has been agreed to focus further capacity development collaboration between Danish and African universities on East African partnerships. Strengthened capacities for research at smaller and younger universities in fragile settings and regions are important for overall economic growth, natural resource management, improved governance and peace. Thus, in the design of a new phase of the Building Stronger Universities programme, and in line with the overall development strategy *The World We Share*, it has been decided to build on the existing collaboration with Gulu University in Uganda and the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA) and to include a new partner university in Somalia.

Gulu University (GU) was established in 2003 and is located in Northern Uganda. The University has participated in all three phases of the BSU programme. The themes for research capacity building in BSU III were transforming education and rights, resources and gender in post-war development. As part of BSU III, GU has continued a partnership with Maseno University in Kenya (initially a partner in BSU I) regarding the development of an e-learning platform. During the BSU programme, several members of the teaching staff have obtained Ph.D. degrees, while initially they were all at BA level. GU is a partner in two FFU projects, one which is at the end of the project period and one which is about to start. Both projects are within the thematic area of state building. The research capacity development programme and strengthening of higher education are well aligned with Uganda's research policy as codified in several documents, e.g. Vision 2040 and the National Science, Technology and Innovation Plan. The focus on Northern Uganda is well aligned with the Danish country strategy.

The State University of Zanzibar (SUZA) was established in 1999. The thematic focus areas in BSU III are on environmental public health and marine and coastal ecosystems. SUZA is a partner in six on-going FFU-funded research projects, in which one is South-led by the Kilimanjaro Christian Medical College (KCMC) in Tanzania. A few projects include partnerships with research institutions in mainland Tanzania. SUZA is part of the DFID-funded Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL), which also includes Makerere University, Kenyatta University, and three more universities. The research capacity development and strengthening of higher education continues to be aligned with the Zanzibar Education Development Plan II (2017/18-21/22) and the broad Zanzibar Research Agenda 2015-20.

The University of Hargeisa (UoH) leadership has considerable interest in engagement for strengthening research capacity. The Danish engagement in Somalia aims to support the development of a stable, peaceful and resilient country undergoing inclusive economic growth. The Danish engagement in Somalia maintains a strong focus on Somaliland, where there is an opportunity to build on considerable development efforts in the past decade.

The higher education system in Somaliland includes four public universities (and 20+ private), of which UoH – established in 1999 – is presently the largest (7000 students). Most students are at BA level. The universities are challenged by a shortage of academic staff with a doctoral degree, research skills, and publication experience. The Educational Sector Analysis (2016) showed that less than 2% of permanent staff at UoH had a PhD and 5% had an MA. As reflected in the Educational Sector Strategic Plan (2017-2021), there is increasing awareness in Somaliland of the importance of improved local research capacity for the development of knowledge-based local policies, and for increasing the number of Somali academics gaining research training and experience. The above documents identify a number of challenges, which are recognized in the

first UoH Strategic Plan (2019-2024). Based on a SWOT analysis, the strategic plan is structured around three key pillars: teaching, research, and community outreach. The latter two pillars are new and reflect the desire to move towards a full-fledged research-based university. A first step towards this has been the establishment of the Centre for Research and Community Outreach (CRCO). Measures envisioned in the strategic plan include expanding postgraduate courses; recruiting new staff with doctoral competence; and upgrading the capacity of existing staff and increasing collaborations. This fits well with the approach for this programme.

The recently concluded FFU research project Governing Economic Hubs and Flows in Somalia East Africa project (GOVSEA) has, in addition to original research, contributed to capacity building at both individual and partner university level, e.g. to the establishment of the CRCO. Similarly, the recently awarded FFU project entitled Pastoralist Climate Change Resilience in Somaliland (PACCS) in addition to the generation of new knowledge, attempts to strengthen research capacities, institutional collaboration and South-South as well as North-South collaboration in its field of research and translation of insights into policy recommendations to address climate change. Both of these two projects are led by a Danish university, with implementation by a consortium, including UoH, University of Nairobi (UoN) and others.

*Regional collaboration/twinning:* A lesson from BSU is that South-South collaboration is important and could be more sustainable. This new programme will seek to establish a more formal collaboration in the form of a twinning arrangement with a reputable regional university. Twinning arrangements come in many forms. The purpose of the twinning arrangement is to share good practices and foster long-term relationships between the twinning partners. The arrangement should be understood as formalized partnership in which the Southern partner university seeking to build its capacity may enter into an arrangement with a partner university that is in a position to share its knowledge and can take on the important role of providing training, guidance and assistance to build the capacity of the twinned partner. The long-term vision is that the partnerships between universities with limited and more extensive capacity will be able to continue without or with only a limited input from Danish universities.

The identification and approach of twinning partners will be undertaken in collaboration with the Southern partner universities. Through partnerships in the FFU projects and the previous BSU phases, there is already some level of collaboration with regional universities, most notably in Kenya. Both UoN and Maseno University, which are ranked first and third best in Kenya, respectively, could be relevant. Twinning arrangements could also include within country collaboration, for example SUZA and KCMUCo have collaborated with Makerere University, the lead university in Uganda, which may be of interest for GU. During the programme formulation it will be further explored how the twinning arrangement can be formalized.

***Poverty orientation and target group considerations; [LNOB](#), [HRBA](#), climate change and environmental considerations based on preliminary screening***

Research capacity strengthening does not directly affect poverty but is expected to improve the availability of quality research and higher education and indirectly contribute to poverty reduction through economic development and evidence-based policy making. Students and staff at the universities will benefit from the programme. By strengthening one of the public universities, access to higher education will be improved. All partner universities have gender strategies, and during formulation there will be attention to how gender balance can be promoted and monitored. Open and transparent recruitment procedures will be applied. The selected thematic areas are expected to include climate change and environmental management. No negative environmental

effects are anticipated. Incorporating aspects relating to cross-cutting issues will be further considered in the formulation process.

## **2. Programme objectives**

The programme aims to enhance the role of East African partner universities as providers of scientific knowledge as well as research-based education and advice to society. It involves capacity building of the three East-African universities through partnerships with Danish as well as leading national or regional universities. The strategic objectives are to contribute to improved quality of research and increased use of applied research by stakeholders by improving the research environment.

Research capacity strengthening will be focused on and evolve around a few research themes per partner university, but the strengthening of administrative systems and organisations will be university-wide. The anticipated research themes will particularly focus on climate change, environmental management, and health as well as governance. Gender equality will also be prioritised.

The Southern partner universities (GU, SUZA, UoH) should be the main driving force and play the main role in defining the direction of the programme. As a first step, the three universities will therefore define their individual needs for capacity development and select one to two thematic focus areas. This will result in a brief project outline (university concept note) justifying the need and relevance against university strategies, other available support, past BSU experience and current situation. This will also include considerations regarding possible South-based twinning arrangements.

In the next step, the Danish universities and research institutions will be invited to express interest in partnering with the three universities by responding to the different project outlines (university concept notes). The Danish universities may submit responses as single provider or as a consortium of universities/institutions led by one of them.

Following the expression of interest, the South universities in consultation with DFC and the consultant will choose the partners that best matches the needs on the basis of the responses and potential negotiations. If several responses are received for the same project outline (university concept note), the possibilities of forming a partner consortium will be explored. After the partners have been matched, they will jointly produce a project proposal for meeting the capacity development needs of the South partner university. This will include opportunities for South-South exchanges.

## **3. Theory of change and key assumptions**

The overall objective of the support to development research is to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, through anticipated outcomes in the form of a) more and higher-quality research, b) strengthened capacity to undertake research and c) enhanced dissemination and use of new knowledge.

The theory of change for the proposed programme can be summarized as follows: **IF** research training capacity is strengthened and **IF** the research environment including supporting

administrative systems and organization is improved and **IF** there are effective knowledge management systems in place to encourage uptake of results, **THEN** this will lead to higher quality and more relevant research, to a better qualified workforce through improved higher education, to improved products and services and to evidence-based policy-making, which will eventually contribute to the SDGs.

Key assumptions include that there:

- is commitment and high-quality leadership in the partner institutions and that research capacity strengthening is included in university development plans;
- are effective systems to ensure accountability in competitive research funding;
- are well-functioning institutional arrangements for program management;
- is a balance between the teaching and research mission of the university, which is reflected in the workload of academic staff involved in the program implementation;
- is sufficient interest from potential students to take up the opportunities provided for post-graduate training;
- is interest among potential users of research outputs in target sectors.

It is further assumed that research and outreach capacity is most effectively developed when focused within few thematic areas.

#### **4. Draft results framework**

The three universities are at various stages of research capacity development and the weight given to various outcomes may differ. Similarly, the extent to which outputs and outcomes can be achieved depends on the situation at the individual universities. The results framework will be developed by the partnerships as part of the formulation process, and will also include considerations regarding cross-cutting areas, e.g. gender.

Programme outputs will be organized around the same outcome areas applied in the BSU III programme:

- Outcome area 1: University capacity is improved by strengthening organization and systems for researcher training and research processes. This involves the academic aspects at faculty level of the university research capacity, such as establishment of thematic research groups, faculty-wide enhancement of research methodologies and approaches, etc. It also involves further work on strengthening the PhD education within specified thematic areas.
- Outcome area 2: University capacity is improved by strengthening research and outreach practices and networks. The activities include for instance pilot research activities, dissemination of research results and mechanisms for strengthening cooperation and linkages with private sector, civil society and public sector research users.
- Outcome area 3: University capacity is improved by strengthening research supporting elements, mainly organization and administrative frameworks for university research. This includes services and facilities to support research activities, such as administrative and financial processes, policies, library and laboratory facilities, etc. Many of the administrative systems are university-wide and it will be important to focus the partnership on those areas that influence most on the work under outcome 1 and 2.

## 5. Budget

The indicative budget for five years is 70 million DKK

University partnership projects	60 million DKK
DFC administration	4 million DKK
Reviews and mid-term seminar	3 million DKK
<u>Unallocated funds</u>	<u>3 million DKK</u>
<u>Total budget</u>	<u>70 million DKK</u>

The budget distribution between the involved partnerships will be determined during the formulation phase, based on the project proposals. It is expected that the budget will be fairly evenly distributed among the three partnerships and that up to 15 million DKK can be used for twinning arrangements with regional partner universities. The unallocated budget will be planned for new activities under the existing outputs in the last two years of implementation. Overhead costs for South partners will be 12% of their grants, and each institution will be allowed to use an additional 8% for coordination of activities across faculties. In line with the agreement with Danish universities in previous phases of the programme, overheads for Danish consortia will be 20% of the funds they receive.

## 6. Institutional and management arrangements

The overall programme responsibility is with ELK at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Danida Fellowship Center (DFC) will be responsible for the overall programme administration and financial management.

The organizational set-up at each of the partner universities will be determined as part of the formulation and aligned to existing structures in the partner universities. Under the Southern partner's leadership, it will be the joint responsibility of the Southern partner university and Danish partners as well as any Southern twinning partner to ensure proper management of the programme activities, including reporting procedures, financial management and accounting. It is envisaged that there will be a project coordinator responsible for day-to-day management on both/all sides of each of the partnerships. A steering committee may be appointed at each Southern university.

It is expected that the Southern partner universities will be managing the agreement with any twinning partner university, and options for this will be further explored and determined as part of the formulation.

## 7. Risk management

While in most cases the university partners that have been involved in BSU are likely to know each other from previous collaboration, this programme will bring in new partnerships, at least at UoH. There is a small risk that some of the partnerships will be less effective due to difficulties in communication or mutual expectations. This will be mitigated through the joint development of proposed project for each partner university.

Administrative procedures at the universities may cause delay, e.g. procurement can be cumbersome. Such risks will be mitigated by strengthening administrative systems, but this may only materialize in the medium to long-term perspective. Some administrative practices may be difficult to change as they are part of wider public sector administrative framework. Similarly, accreditation of new courses and programmes are subject to policy framework and standards as

well as limited capacity, which may result in delayed processes. In such cases, delays may be mitigated by early and realistic planning as well as frequent follow-up.

Relying on government funding and donor funded research cooperation, the universities have low and sometimes unpredictable resource envelopes. There is a risk that funds and human resources may not be optimally utilized, if important complementary activities are not undertaken by the partner university due to resource constraints or shortfall on donor funds, or if some activities are double funded by two donors. During formulation, attention will be paid to other relevant donor-supported initiatives in order to promote stronger coordination. Furthermore, some flexibility to allow adaptation to changing circumstances may mitigate this risk.

University's staff have many tasks and may already have difficulties balancing time for teaching, research, and administration. There is a risk that tasks may be allocated to staff that is already overloaded without due consideration to the time needed, which will reduce the absorption capacity. It can be a particular challenge for staff who are enrolled as PhD students that it is not fully recognized that this requires release from some other duties. This will be discussed during the formulation process and ways to ensure adequate time allocation will be explored.

## 8. Process Action Plan

Action/product	Deadlines	Responsible	Comment/status
Information gathering with East African target universities and potential regional twinning partners	April - May	DFC & Consultant	Document review and online
Invitation to East African partners to submit proposals	May	DFC & Consultant	Complete
Preliminary invitation to Danish Universities and research institutions	May	DFC & Consultant	Complete
Programme committee discussion of Concept Note	May 24	ELK	Complete
Visit Hargeisa University	May	DFC & Consultant	Complete
Southern universities submission of proposed project outlines	May	DFC & Consultant	Complete
Invitation to Danish eligible partners (universities and research institutions) to respond to project outlines	June	DFC & Consultant	Complete
Submission of response by Danish universities and research institutions	Deadline 30 August	DFC & Consultant	
Selection of matching partners with South universities	Deadline 15 September	DFC & Consultant	
Submission of joint project proposals by matched partners – final version	Deadline 30 October	Consultant & DFC	
Draft programme document, including project outlines	Ultimo November	Consultant & DFC	
Appraisal	December	ELK	To be undertaken by another staff member than desk officer for research
Revision of programme document – Final draft	January-February 2023	Consultant & DFC	



Presentation to the Council for Development Policy (UPR)	March 2023	ELK	
The minister approves the programme	April 2023	ELK	
Preparation of agreements with partners	April 2023	DFC	
Launch of programme (with inception phase)	May 2023	ELK, DFC & all university partners	