

# **GULU UNIVERSITY**

## **Building Stronger Universities Programme, Phase IV (BSU4) concept paper**

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### **1. Brief presentation of the university, including a short research capacity statement (staff, turnover, faculties etc.)**

Gulu University is one of the Public Universities in Uganda established under the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001 through the Establishment Notice Instrument of No 31 of 2003 on the 25th day of June, 2003 enacted by Parliament on the 14th of May, 2003. Established in the time of the Lord's Resistance Army war in northern Uganda, the University is relatively small, and underfunded. These conditions have greatly affected the development of the individual and institutional research capacity. At the inception of BSU III Project in 2017, there were only 24 PhDs out of the 240 academic staff members. The University PhD and Masters programmes were in their infancy. The overall research infrastructure, especially the IT system was weak, but has currently been upscaled with the increase in the internet bandwidth to support teaching and research. ICT system and the Library have been enhanced to support research capacity. The ranking of Gulu University has improved and the academic staff members have been able to grow from Graduate trainees to Lecturers currently totalling 140. Senior lecturers have grown from 23 to 39, and Associate Professors from 2 to 11, and Professors from 7 to 12 based on their research capacity. Therefore, the ambition level of BSU III was set at broad basics, appropriate to the situation of Gulu University and to consolidate BSU1 and BSU2 achievements. As the BSU III Project comes to an end, the number of academic staff has risen to 254 including 81 PhD holders. With the BSU III support, four PhD programmes have been developed and accredited including 11 Masters programmes, raising the number of Masters programmes to 13 in Faculty of Education Humanities, and Faculty of Business and Development Studies. The BSU Project supported the development of 6. At the Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies (IPSS), there is one PhD programme, two Masters programmes and one undergraduate programme. Under BSU III, six Research Policies were developed and approved to enhance research. A Center of Excellence for ICT and Learning to strengthen research capacity was established. Through the BSU Project, PhD trainings and collaborative research, publications in peer reviewed journals and uptakes have increased. The staff attrition rate is very low because most of the staff members are young and keen to grow academically in Gulu University.

### **2. Justification of selected thematic focus area(s)**

- **Thematic focus areas for research cooperation with a Danish university, which is expected to provide a thematic anchoring for the partnership.**

The two thematic areas: Transforming Education and Rights, Resources and Gender are being implemented under BSU III. The continuation of these thematic areas will consolidate the achievements of BSU III. In total, seven pilot collaborative research projects within the two thematic areas have been implemented to enhance research skills and competencies of the early researchers. We have been receiving support from our Danish partners through joint cross-cutting seminars aimed at strengthening research capacity of the academic staff. Joint publications are expected from the seven collaborative researches. The thematic area on Transforming Education has resulted in the establishment of a Center of Excellence for Research and Learning.

- **Justification against national development plans/university strategy/BSU4 programme**

The two thematic areas are anchored and aligned to the Danish Development strategy “The World We Share”. It addresses issues related to Transforming Education and Rights, Resources and Gender which aims at researching new teaching and learning formats, mitigating poverty and inequality, conflict and fragility, and displacement and migration through action research and community engagements which inform National policies. The pilot collaborative researches within the two thematic areas have further focused on innovation and entrepreneurship as a strategy to address environment and climate change related issues which are threats to humanity. The thematic areas address issues related to Human rights and democracy with gender dimensions and focus on the rights of women and girls as vulnerable groups. The inclusion of entrepreneurship is to enhance the self-employability of students and thus reducing dependency on government and private sector employment.

Furthermore, the thematic areas are aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), 6 (Reduced Inequality), 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institution) and 17 (Partnerships for Goals).

The themes are aligned to the Africa Agenda 63 principles (Principle 3: An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law, Principle 4: A peaceful and secure Africa, Principle 6: An Africa whose development is people -driven , relying on the potential offered by the African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children; and Principle 7: An Africa as a strong, united , resilient and influential global player and partner.

The thematic areas are connected to the Uganda Vision 2040 which provides development paths and strategies to operationalize Uganda’s Vision statement: *“A Transformed Ugandan Society from a Peasant to a Modern and Prosperous Country within 30 years”*.

The thematic areas are aligned to the National Development Goal (NDP) III [2020/2021-2024/2025] which guide the nation in delivering the aspirations articulated in Uganda Vision 2040.

The thematic areas are further aligned to Gulu University Vision: “To be the leading Academic Institution for Promotion of Community Transformation and Industrialization for Sustainable Development”. Its Mission: “To provide access to Quality Higher Education, Training, Research and Innovations for the Delivery of Appropriate Services towards Community Transformation and Sustainable Development”. These are anchored on the University Motto: “For Community Transformation”.

The thematic areas are aligned to the BSU4 aims ‘to enhance the role of African partner universities as providers of scientific knowledge and research-based education within the thematic areas. This will be implemented through capacity building of the African universities in partnership with Danish and national or regional universities.

The Rights, Resources and Gender theme is directly in line with the thematic areas of the BSU4: Climate change, Environmental Management, Health, Gender and Governance. The project will initiate activities with South Universities such as University of Hargeisa in Somaliland within the thematic area of Rights, Resources and Gender, and Transforming Education. The project will collaborate with Maseno University in Kenya and State University of Zanzibar in Tanzania within the thematic area of Transforming Education focusing on ICT for research, teaching and learning. This project will be anchored on the BSU1 & 2 former collaboration by twinning with Maseno University to strengthen ICT for research and learning. The project will twin with Mbarara University of Science and Technology in Uganda (MUST) to strengthen grants management for research. This South-South cooperation and regional twinning will provide horizontal support and learning to Gulu University based on the BSU4 principle of “the world we share”. This provides prospects for south-south collaboration and peer-support, and twinning arrangement to strengthen research capacity in the south universities to generate new knowledge.

The proposed thematic areas will impact on and strengthen the teaching and research capacity in Faculties and Institutes at Gulu University. Gulu University is partnering with stakeholders in the region in doing collaborative research, for example in Green Charcoal and digital learning in schools. More Post-Docs trained and PhD and Masters students enrolled and graduated. ICT and new ways of teaching and learning, specifically Problem and Project Based Learning (PBL), blended learning and hybrid learning will be integrated at Masters and PhD levels. More skilled Master students graduate and get employed. GU has long considered a restructuring of faculties that would create a Faculty of Social Science. Work in these thematic areas could feed into these possible plans by strengthening cross-faculty collaboration.

### 3. Research capacity development needs

- **Description of the university needs in terms of research capacity development based on own needs assessment.**

The Faculties and Institute involved in the two thematic areas- Transforming education and Rights, Resources and Gender are: Faculty of Education and Humanities, Faculty of Business and Development Studies, and Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies and Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, and the Department of Computer Science.

The University needs can be categorised into two: 1) graduate and post graduate programme development; and 2) Institutional research strengthening through research infrastructural development. With the support of BSU Project and other projects (Makerere-Sida Project and Master Card Foundation) within the University, PhDs in the Faculty of Education and Humanities has risen from 1 to 13, Faculty of Business and Development studies from 0 to 10, Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies from 2 to 5, Faculty of Medicine from 2 to 9, Faculty of Agriculture and Environment from 6 to 25, Faculty of Science from 4 to 13, Faculty of Law from 1 to 6, and the Library from 0 to 1.

With the increased number of PhDs and early career researchers, there is need to develop their research capacity and skills through Post-Doctoral programmes which will lead to independent researchers/supervisors with clear research outputs and publications in peer reviewed journals.

There is need for continued PhD training to develop the research competencies of the academic staff, the majority of whom are Masters degree- holders (approx. 117) and Teaching Assistants (approx. 56). There is need to train and build the capacity of academic staff to teach and supervise graduate programmes and research. The University has registered an increase in the number of graduate programmes currently standing at 15 programmes for Faculty of Business and Development Studies, 7 for Faculty of Education and Humanities, 3 for Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies, 6 for Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, 1 programme in Faculty of Medicine, and 3 programmes in the Faculty of Science. Most of these graduate programmes are at their infancy stage of implementation and are registering increasing number of students.

The collaborative inter-disciplinary and Multi-disciplinary approach in teaching and research in the ‘World We Share’ requires a strong research competence which can be attained through the graduate training. The Programme will support non-academic staff involved in areas such as Library, ICT and finance that enhance graduate training and research.

The pilot collaborative research for strengthening community and public engagement provides a hands-on and practical experience for the researchers being trained at Masters and PhD; and research supervision and community outreach opportunity for the staff. The pilot collaborative research will contribute towards national policies, policy briefs/mainstreaming of policies / policy uptake at the Lower Local Government levels.

Whereas BSU III supported research related policy development, there still exists gap in policy developments in the two thematic areas. The programme will further consolidate the implementation of the existing and new policies within the University structure, thus increasing the visibility of Gulu University nationally and internationally.

There is a dire need to strengthen eLearning and ICT, and further the uptake of Problem and Project-Based Learning (PBL) in the face of the 'New Normal' brought by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In strengthening the Public-Private Partnership relations, dissemination/communication of research beyond academia consolidates the impact of research uptake to the beneficiaries/the community who are the end users of the research products.

The programme will enable support to peer reviewed journal publications both local and international by individual researchers as well as joint publications with partners both in the South and North.

- **Presentation of key institutional capacity development needs (e.g. strategic and shorter-term planning, resource mobilisation, grant management and financial management, outreach and dissemination and possible infrastructure elements)**

Grants Management Desk has been established under the BSU 3 Project. However, it is still not a fully-fledged grants office that can effectively support researchers in grants application, management and training processes. This is because the office does not have the necessary tools (the funding, staffing level, and the Staff is not sufficiently trained. The grants desk not fully implemented and institutionalised yet. The support to the Desk Office will further strengthen the grants application, management and performance. Resource mobilisation through Grants writing for both Danida calls and other external calls will be strengthened. The calls can be applied for by Gulu University staff or collaboratively with partners in the South or North or a combination of South-North to ensure sustainability of research funding.

Institutional capacity in community outreach and dissemination to stakeholders will be strengthened. This will further enhance the University four-fold mandate: teaching, research, graduate research supervision and community outreach.

There is a gap in the provision of the ICT infrastructure elements which calls for ICT support in the Library, Directorate of Information and Technology, Faculty/Institute, Learning Management System (Moodle) and eLearning.

There is need for the development of soft skills through teaching of cross cutting courses and organizing peer supported refresher courses. There is a gap in transforming the teaching and learning from the traditional teacher centered approach to the student centered pedagogical approach.

There is need to strengthen research collaboration with institutions working in the area of 1) health and 2) refugees. These include international organizations, NGOs, government agencies and private initiatives as partners in research.

#### 4. Previous or on-going research capacity strengthening projects (e.g. BSU or similar)

- **Description of other available resources in support of research capacity development at individual and institutional level**

The on-going research and capacity building projects include:

- Research Initiative: Unlocking the potential of Green Charcoal to mitigate Climate Change in Northern Uganda (UPCHAIN) Project number: 21-02-AAU Grant Amount: DKK 11,999,489 Duration: 4 years effective 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2021
- BSUIII -COVID19 funds application for project “Transforming Education PBL Hybrid Learning - Beyond Covid-19”, project no. “BSU-COVID-GU01”. DKK 1,629,120
- BSU3-COVID19 funds application for project “Consequences of the COVID Epidemic for Youth Reproductive Health in Northern Uganda”, project no. “BSUCOVID-GU02” DKK 2,297,152

- Training Health Researchers into Vocational Excellence (THRiVE- 2 Gulu University) Ref DEL-15-011/107742/2/15/Z
- IMAGENU- Imaging Gender Futures in Uganda 1. Commencement Date: 01.10. 2018 2. Expected date of expiry: 30.09.2022 3. Total Cost – Foreign Currency: DKK 9,997,627
- Makerere-Sweden Bilateral Project funded by the Swedish Government Swedish International Development Corporation Agency (Sida).

Previous research and capacity building projects include:

- BSU I and II
- Governing transition in northern Uganda: Trust and Land. 1.1. 2013 – 31.12.2016. FFU: DKK 9,993,992

### **Main Lessons learnt from BSU**

The key lessons learnt include

- The BSU model is a flexible design that allows gap-filling and adaptation to available input from Danida and other donors. This has led to increased Project output and impact.
- The South-driven approach and the long-term commitment have fostered strong project ownership and commitment from senior management at Gulu University. The Project priorities are customized to the Gulu University needs.
- The involvement of administrative systems and staff in the development process has led to institutionalizing the Project and improved the internal procedures which have provided conducive research environment and enhanced research.
- Partnership and joint research collaboration with the Danish universities has led to mentorship of early career researchers and graduate supervisors.
- With support from the Danish partners we are able to engage in research capacity development activities though we need a strong research element to strengthen the established research networks. The pilot collaborative research projects and networks have been key research activities and have worked out successfully.
- The South-South; and the South-North collaboration across universities has enhanced knowledge creation and sharing. More exchange research activities are encouraged to strengthen the triangular collaboration. This triangular collaboration has produced tangible results such as the increased number of PhDs at Gulu University.
- The BSU supported programme development for Masters and PhDs has led to increased number of students' enrolment and an increased completion rate. The Project has enhanced both graduate students and supervisors' skills in action research and Problem Based Learning.
- Through the graduate students exchange visits; Danish studies have been able to share experiences including primary data collection in Uganda. The short study stays in collaborating Danish universities has enhanced PhD completion rate at Gulu University.
- Opportunities for synergies with FFU projects have not been fully utilized, although the synergy with IMAGENU is growing. However, BSUIII support has been used to develop a prototype green charcoal production machinery as well as support in writing and winning a multi-disciplinary Project: Unlocking the Potential of Green Charcoal in Northern Uganda (UPCHAIN). The BSU4 will provide an opportunity for a synergy with the FFU projects namely: UPCHAIN and IMAGENU in Gulu University. Research experiences gained through the BSU I-III Projects will benefit the upcoming BSU4. BSU experiences have been further used to write and win two small Covid-19 Fund:

“Transforming Education PBL Hybrid Learning - Beyond Covid-19” and “Consequences of the COVID Epidemic for Youth Reproductive Health in Northern Uganda”.

- The BSU Project has been able to support the development of Gender Policy. Activities implemented have been gender sensitive and this has helped to increase gender awareness, sensitivity and proactiveness in Gulu University.
- The south-driven approach to BSU has built the capacity of the Project team and the institution to win and manage big grants and projects using BSU experience and mentorship.

## 5. Research capacity strengthening priorities

- **Overall strategic focus of the partnership with overall objectives aligned to the BSU4 objectives (university’s performance within research-based teaching, research, outreach, and research management, as relevant).**

### **Soft Skills:**

Developing basic skills for research: The Programme will develop academic teaching programmes to strengthen research -based graduate teaching. Furthermore, the development and teaching of cross-cutting courses within discipline and across-discipline will be undertaken to strengthen research, knowledge and skills.

Promoting career development in research: Development of Post-doctoral programmes with a research component, continuing strengthening of PhDs and Masters level programmes as a strategy to enhance research.

Writing small grants: Writing small grants within the thematic areas of research to strengthen individual capacity and research.

Collaborative research: Undertaking joint collaborative research within the thematic areas with partners in South-North, South-South- North, and South-South configurations. This will strengthen research at institutional, national, regional and international levels. It will further consolidate the notion of “the world we share” through research and knowledge sharing to mitigate inequality, conflict and human rights related issues.

Strengthening communication and policy implications of research: This will be undertaken through the Programme website, community and public engagement, policy briefs, stakeholders’ workshops, seminars and conferences.

Exchanges visits/study stays: This will be organised for both South-North students and supervisors to share experiences and knowledge on uptake of research.

Promoting research culture through multi-disciplinary research networks and community of practice including research and supervision data banks for the benefit of the collaborating institutions.

### **Infrastructural development:**

The strengthening of research infrastructure will include the following:

- Grants management
- Research related policies
- Research equipment and software.
- ICT services for research, teaching and learning
- Strengthening the library services for research, teaching and learning (e-resources, repository, anti-plagiarism software).

- **Envisaged output areas based on the needs analysis and in line with the BSU4 objectives. The description of the outputs should include sufficient detail to enable the Danish universities to assess and propose possible partnering inputs.**

Envisaged output Areas:

### **Outcome Area 1: Administrative Capacity**

**Outcome 1.** Administrative frameworks, facilities and services for research strengthened.

**Output 1.1** Faculties function with accessible electronic support systems graduate students and supervisors.

**Output 1.2** Plagiarism software use is strengthened.

**Output 1.3** The Institutional Repository for graduate students and researchers strengthened.

**Output 1.4** The e-campus strategy for Gulu University strengthened.

**Output 1.5** Gulu University research policies developed and strengthened.

**Output 1.6.** The grant management office strengthened.

**Output 1.7** Gulu University staff administers and manages internal and external grants efficiently.

**Outcome Area 2: Research and outreach capacity at system and organizational level**

**Outcome 2.** collaborative research and outreach capacity are improved by strengthening organisation and systems for Post-doctoral, Doctoral and postgraduate teaching and learning, building on and reinforcing on-going research. Courses and Post-doctoral and PhD projects will increasingly be tied to a limited number of collaborative action research projects.

**Output 2.1** Mandatory cross-cutting graduate courses and elective thematic courses within the thematic areas (i. *Transforming education and ii. Rights, resources and gender in post-war development*) developed and taught by Gulu University staff and partners.

**Output 2.2** PBL principles and e-learning practices (Learning Management System (LMS) and blended learning) integrated in the graduate programmes.

**Output 2.3** The two thematic research networks (i. *Transforming education and ii. Rights, resources and gender in post-war development*) are consolidated.

**Output 2.4** Networks are established with the public-private stakeholders in education collaborative research, seminars, workshops and conferences.

**Outcome Area 3: Research and outreach capacity at the level of individuals**

**Outcome 3.** Collaborative research and outreach capacity within the thematic areas (i. *Transforming education and ii. Rights, resources and gender in post-war development*) are improved and by strengthened. This will be achieved through the quadruple-helix (a network between University, Public and private sector and Community) approach and action research on community needs identified through PBL.

Output 3.1 Pilot collaborative and action research projects with Post-doc, PhD and Masters projects established and strengthened.

Output 3.2 Communities, private sector and/or social actors are actively engaged in innovative projects and collaborative research on Rights, Resources and Gender. The research could examine (youth welfare, reproductive health, refugees and migration, Host community issues, Human rights and new discourses on gender).

Output 3.3 Communities, private sector and/or social actors are actively engaged in innovative projects and collaborative research on Transforming Education. This research may address: i. Researching the implementation of e-learning and PBL at Gulu University, ii. Doing action research, developing the technical and pedagogical foundation for new research and innovation learning platform within the environment and climate change and value chains in Northern Uganda. Collaborating with schools and tertiary institutions in different aspects of transforming education (interdisciplinarity, pedagogy, gender issues, and digital divides).

Output 3.4 Respond to external calls within each thematic area and develop joint applications for competitive research grant proposals.

Output 3.5: Training Post-doc and PhD within the thematic areas on Rights, Resources, and Gender and Transforming Education.

Output 3.6: Research results are presented at workshops and conferences and in peer-reviewed publications.

Outline how results and insights gained in the proposed thematic areas will be upscaled beyond those directly involved so as to have impact on the university more widely.

## 6. Partnership and management of possible support

- *Describe how the program would be anchored at the Southern university in terms of governance and management so as to ensure that the activities are fully integrated.*

The programme will adopt the BSU3 model of partnership and management where the South University has been on the lead with successful implementation of the Project. An Executive Committee to oversee the implementation and coordination of the overall Project will be established comprising the north and south partners. The south will form a Steering Committee which will monitor and supervise the implementation of the Programme. The Programme activities will be collaboratively managed and implemented. A Coordination team will be established to ensure the day to day coordination and implementation of the Programme as planned.

To synchronise the implementation within the South-South and North-South partnership, regular onsite meetings, workshops and seminars will take place both in the North and South. This will help to share knowledge and experience; network and develop skills of research and dissemination/communication of project results.

Project activities will be implemented within and across the two thematic areas.

- *Suggest areas (thematic, research, management and others) for enhanced South-South cooperation and regional twinning arrangements (if possible, with suggestions to which other University(ies))*

The project will initiate activities with South Universities such as University of Hargeisa in Somaliland within the thematic area of Rights, Resources and Gender, and Transforming Education. The project will collaborate with Maseno University in Kenya and State University of Zanzibar in Tanzania within the thematic area of Transforming Education focusing on ICT for research, teaching and learning. This project will be anchored on the BSU1 & 2 former collaboration by twinning with Maseno University to strengthen ICT for research and learning. The project will twin with Mbarara University of Science and Technology in Uganda (MUST) to strengthen grants management for research. Furthermore, cross-cutting issues such as Climate change, Environmental Management, health (public), ICT and Communication, and refugees and migration will strengthen the twinning. This South-South cooperation and regional twinning will provide horizontal support and learning to Gulu University based on the BSU4 principle of “the world we share”.

## Conclusion:

The BSU4 will build on the 10 years BSU programme and consolidate the achievements of the BSU programme in building research capacity at individual and institutional research levels. This will strengthen Gulu University contribution to community transformation through research.