Building Stronger Universities

Concept note

University of Hargeisa

1. **University profile**

In this competitive and dynamic world, no country can ensure genuine indigenous and sustainable development without higher education and research institutions providing a critical mass of skilled and educated people. The University has the mandate bestowed upon it by the law to teach and conduct research, disseminate and publish research outputs, engage in innovations, and provide community services. The University is currently the biggest public institution of higher learning in Somaliland, with more than 8000 students and 500 staff. Now, the University has 29 departments offering undergraduate programs. The school of graduate studies has seven master's degree programs but offers no Ph.D. program yet. The University of Hargeisa recognizes that a necessary minimum level of research capacity and dissemination in the country is a prerequisite to a technologically developed nation.

2. **Thematic areas**

Public Policy and Governance (PPG): The collapse of the central government of Somalia in 1991 under General Mohammed Siyad Barre's regime left death and destruction in its aftermath. Somaliland declared its independence the same year. After more than thirty years, Somaliland achieved remarkable progress in the wake of this widespread chaos. The relative improvement in governance and leadership contributed to the emergence of dependable state institutions. The country developed its structures and systems of governance, grounded on a traditional kin-based system that provides the mechanism to organize the structure for social, economic, and political systems. At its core, this kin-based system has incorporated clan identity and traditional elders into a state leadership system. The arrangement has contributed to the population's well-being by providing critical public goods. This 'hybrid' political order can be seen as an effective way out from instability and state fragility into a more stable form of governance. However, currently, it is seen as a destabilizing structure contributing to the degeneration of the political fabric and its core democratic values and undermining the legitimacy of the authority of existing state institutions. Many believe that Somaliland's security and stability were prioritized, neglecting the building of strong institutions that function based on good governance rules such as democracy, accountability, transparency and the rule of law, and sustainable human and socio-economic development. Given the contextual issue undermining sustainable human and socio-economic development. Given the country's strategic location and the development of Berbera Port and Berbera Economic Zone as regional logistics hubs, transportation and logistics, transit agreement, and taxation could be important policy and governance issues for research. The PPG themes will also try to address the complex public policy and governance challenges by designing effective curriculums for launching a master's program and promoting multidisciplinary research through Ph.D. level training and the creation of research teams.

Health Delivery Systems (HDS): To improve the effectiveness of health systems in addressing the building blocks of the healthcare system need to be examined and strengthened. According to the World Health Organization, the building blocks of the healthcare system comprise service delivery, medications, drugs, and technology, health management information systems, leadership and governance, and the healthcare workforce. In Somaliland, each of these areas is limited in capacity and resources. This

indicates the need to form health partnerships to address these challenges. The government fosters health partnerships with higher education institutions like the University of Hargeisa. Health partnerships are formed to advance the goals of each institution and realize more robust health systems.

Somaliland has six administrative regions and 30 districts. The ministry of health development is the leading actor and coordinator of health care in Somaliland. Regions have coordination centers. Hospitals are the primary source of public service. A network of health posts (HPs) and mother and child health clinics (MCHs) make up another tier important for health service delivery. As public health services in Somaliland exhibit exceptionally low-performance levels, private institutions (i.e., privately owned hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies) remain the primary source of care for people.

The Somaliland health system is based on the Essential Package of Health Services (EPHS), which the government adopted in 2009. Though Somaliland has been making progress in decreasing the trend of significant health issues facing the public for the last decades, it still faces many challenges. Infectious diseases (IDs) constitute the priority health problems in Somaliland, as confirmed in most low and middle-income countries (LMCs). This is mainly due to lack of safe water, poor sanitation, feeble preventive public health measures, and limited awareness of the available health care services. In addition, the increasing trend of the prevalence and morbidity related to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) co-occurs with the enduring burden of infectious diseases (IDs), leading to a double burden of disease.

The combination of IDs and NCDs is the most prevalent health problem in Somaliland today. This problem is potentially distressing in Somaliland and similar settings due to ill-health systems. Therefore, the health care system in Somaliland faces enormous challenges, and the government cannot guarantee sufficient health care for its citizens. Among the main challenges is the availability of limited qualified health researchers. Most of the institutions training the health workforce in Somaliland focus on practice-oriented training. Most healthcare providers in the public and private sectors lack much-needed research skills, making healthcare delivery in Somaliland a big concern. Hence, to address the different aspects of the problem and innovatively design and implement context-specific community-based programs to halt the problem, there is an indispensable need to increase the capacity of individuals and institutions involved in producing the health workforce. The national strategic plan emphasizes community-based approaches in programmatic responses to the public's challenges. For this reason, collaborative and outreach-based research models need to be prioritized when designing health system research training and curricula. The HDS themes will address the complex health delivery systems in several ways. Frist we will upgrade the Public Health Curriculums to cater for more subspecialties and promoting multidisciplinary research through Ph.D. level training and the creation of research teams.

3. Research capacity development needs

Since its inception, the University has been active in the teaching-learning process. However, the University was not intensely engaged in research and knowledge transfer. To this effect, the University's contribution to knowledge production and dissemination. In 2016

the University established a directorate for research and community service to help fill this gap. However, the University has a shortage of Ph.D.-level academic staff, and at present, only 6 percent of academic staff has a Ph.D. degree, while another 5 percent are pursuing Ph.D. programs. At this time, the university prioritizes upgrading academic staff to the Ph.D. level and capacity building in short-term training in research.

The office of research and community service has taken the initiative to improve the research culture and output and serve the local community. Research and community service priorities were established. To stimulate more research, the University of Hargeisa is the only University in Somaliland that provide research grants to its academic staff each year. The University spends 2% of its income on Research and Community service.

Office of UoH-Research and Community Service Directorate (DRCS) each year invites research proposals from interested UoH faculty (academic staff) to conduct independent research that is unique in nature, cost-effective and scalable, and should address everyday problems in Somaliland. This program focuses on applied research to serve as a bridge between the government, industry, and academia with the end target of sustainable policy formulation. This research funding has contributed to the University's research output, and it also shows the commitment of the University to research.

Despite all this effort, increasing research output at the university has become arduous. The University conducted a needs assessment in 2019 to develop the University of Hargeisa (UoH) strategic plan. The result showed that management, capacity (due to the shortage of Ph.D. level training), networking, and dissemination were the biggest obstacles to university research development. To address this issue in the assessment result, eight key areas were identified in developing research capacity;

1. Developing research leadership and research project management capacity: this essential intervention can be achieved through training in strategy development, grant management, financial management, and resource mobilization.
2. Research-focused training: increasing the number of Ph.D. holders by giving merit-based scholarships and short-term training in research.
3. Enhancement of research dissemination, knowledge transfer, and research applicability
4. Enabling collaborative research culture through the creation of research groups
5. Creating a research-supportive environment for academic staff and postgraduate students by providing access to research journals, reference material, and platforms to share their research
6. Continuity and sustainability of research, especially research funding: to do this, the University started a competitive small research grant scheme.
7. Develop Institutional support services for research at the lower academic all university levels, including laboratories, IT infrastructure, and relevant software
8. Development of postgraduate programs to support both current research and future Ph.D. program development

The university has two Ph.D. graduates and four final-year Ph.D. students in health sciences who have published ten peer-reviewed papers and have a working research group. We believe that building research capacity on health delivery systems will be a springboard for

developing robust research output and a master's degree program. Later, the accumulation of such effort can be translated to establishing a Ph.D. program at the University. On the other hand, we have one Ph.D. holder in our social science research group and two Ph.D. candidates; we also have several multidisciplinary staff who can support the PPG theme.

Research capacity strengthening priorities: Envisaged output areas based on need assessment

a. **Review of university policies to uplift organizational management efficiency:**

Policies and produces play an essential role in the university governance structure. They are also crucial to solid teaching and learning environment. According to the University of Hargeisa's strategic plan (2019-2024), the University aspires to develop effective policies and procedures to be practical, valuable, and accessible. The University of Hargeisa has established a policy management framework and the process for developing new policies or reviewing existing policies and procedures university policies and procedures within the jurisdiction of its mandate. Policy advances are aimed at improving University's core principles. The University will review several policies and procedures and adopt new ones in this regard. This includes; finance policy, procurement policy, research policy, human resource policy, gender mainstreaming policy, and the University senate legislation.

b. **Upgrade the university management system**

The success of any institution of higher learning hinges on its ability to acquire accurate, reliable, and timely data about its operations. This objective is often achieved by creating an integrated student database system that offers its users: Management, students, parents, and the public a unified view of data from multiple sources. One of the biggest challenges the University faces is the lack of a dependable information management system. The nonexistence of this valuable information management system essential for a university has impeded the smooth flow of information within the university departments. To create reliable data sources for student grades, university finances, and other vital information, the University will try to upgrade its existing university management system to an efficient and effective method that can support the management of university activities.

c. **Strengthening of university capacity building through PhD-level training program.**

The University of Hargeisa started with less than twenty academic staff with BA degrees in 2000. Today, the University employs more than 450 academic staff with at least a master's degree education. However, the number of Ph.D. staff is still a minority. This shortage of highly trained faculty hiders and undermines the development of competent postgraduate education. An important opportunity within the University is that it allows staff to take a paid study leave which can help many young academics pursue Ph.D. programs. The University will coordinate the North-South and the South-South twinning arrangement to secure Ph.D. positions for our academic staff.

d. Graduate degree curriculum reviewed and developed.

Currently, the University offers seven master's degree programs. However, the University is keen to expand this program to twenty within five years. A highly demanded program is the Public Heath master's degree. Apart from the shortage of teaching staff, the program does not have sub-specializations that the University has as a capacity-building program for health systems in the country. The public health curriculum will be reviewed and upgraded to accommodate multiple specializations in this BSU. On the other hand, a public policy and governance master's program will be initiated by conducting a program need analysis.

e. Establishment of formal Multidisciplinary research groups

In recent years research groups in universities have become more common in the academic sphere and have been described as an "engine of productivity" in research and capacity building. It has also boosted the collaboration of individual researchers and enhanced broader informal communication and networks. The University of Hargeisa has already tried to create research groups within the University. The benefit of such groups was readily visible as it increased knowledge sharing, co-publication, improved quality of research, and broader interest in research at the university level. Therefore, to create a more overall synergized individual effort, we will create four research groups alignment with our themes. This will also Strengthen the institutional support for PhDs researchers, including training and mentoring, and supervision. At the same time, small research grants for staff members will be administered within these groups.

f. Research process supporting facilities

i. Upgrade of University of Hargeisa research resource center:

Information and knowledge sharing are essential parts of teaching and learning and the research process. A key challenge at the University of Hargeisa is access to valuable resources for research and information relevant to local conditions, including access to journals, handbooks, and reference books. The university has established a small resources center to organize functional materials for postgraduate students to cater to this. Presently, the resource center provides a pleasant environment for learning, access to resource materials (e.g., Licensed software), advice on the use of information in the center, helps users gain access to information from other sources, and as a meeting place for research groups. However, the number of users has overgrown its capacity, so it needs to be updated and upgraded. New features will be added, including newly licensed software, reference books, and access to journals.

ii. Upgrade students' access to the internet

University of Hargeisa has access to very reliable internet service; however, it is not efficient. It uses an old network system, which hinders the cost-effective use of the internet. Because of this, students do have internet access and have to use their own devices, even though there is no shortage of internet. The university will invest in a new modern network system to increase connectivity to improve this.

iii.   Staff exchange programs

Staff exchange programs have proven to be an effective way of capacity building in universities. Participants can get motivation, gain new skills, and see the world from a different perspective and an expanded network. It is also a reward for outstanding achievements. The University of Hargeisa will strive to include staff exchange with North-South and South-South partners in this project.

4. Other RESEARCH capacity strengthening PROJECTS, PAST AND PRESENT

The proposed program will have the opportunity to build on or link to other research capacity strengthening projects. Key projects include:

a. Governing economic hubs and flows in Somali East Africa (GOVSEA)

GOVSEA is a six-year research program (2014-2019) that analyses state formation dynamics under conditions of limited statehood by examining the governance of economic hubs and flows and their state effects in Somali East Africa. It is positioned in the growing literature on fragile states and post-conflict peace- and state-building. Through GOVSEA University of Hargeisa, a research and community office were established.

This program helped the creation of the office of research and community service which now manganese all research and knowledge transfer programs including research grants, short-term training, community outreach, student and staff exchange and all related activities.

b. TESF Network Plus

The Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures network is funded by the **Global Challenges Research Fund** through the **Economic and Social Research Council Network Plus** scheme. It is coordinated out of the University of Bristol and works with partners in India, Rwanda, Somalia/Somaliland, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. It is due to run for three and a half years, from November 2019 to April 2023. The research addresses the role of education in climate action, decent work, and sustainable cities. Addressing inequalities relating to poverty, gender, and the status of indigenous knowledge are cross-cutting themes in our work, as concern for foregrounding marginalized voices and decolonizing research.

c. Research Grant on Post-Conflict Societies (2020–2023)

Under the ARUA–UKRI GCRF Partnership Programme for Capacity Building, seven partner universities are involved in this project. These include the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies of the University of Hargeisa, Somaliland, the Institute for Peace and Security Studies of Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia; The Protestant University of Central Africa in Cameroon, Africa University in Zimbabwe, Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria, Haramaya University in Ethiopia, and the University of Manchester in the UK.

d. Research Grant on Port Infrastructures and International Politics (2020–2022)

Backed by funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, researchers from different African, Arabian, and European institutions will explore the relationship between the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, focusing on port infrastructures and transport corridors.

The project partners are the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies of the University of Hargeisa, Somaliland, the University of Birmingham, the University of Durham in the UK, Puntland State University in Somalia, Institut de Recherche Indépendant de la Corne d'Afrique (IRICA) in Djibouti, and the University of Djibouti.

e. Support for Higher Education in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building (2015–2017)

Funded by the UK Government and implemented by University College London (UCL) Institute of Education (IoE) in collaboration with the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies of the University of Hargeisa, Somaliland. The overall goal of the project was to enhance peace in Somaliland through the development of a strong higher education sector that nurtures stability, development, and social transformation. The main objective was to develop partnerships among educational establishments in the UK and Somaliland, with a focus on research and academic development in education, conflict, and peacebuilding.

The project developed a module for postgraduate students from the University of Hargeisa and other stakeholders interested in understanding the interconnections between education, peace, and conflict in Somali societies, in Somaliland, Somalia, and the wider Horn of Africa region. The project was completed in September 2017.

f. Supporting the Delivery of High-Quality Research (2015–2018)

The Research Capacity Building project was a 27-months research grant backed by funding from the UK Government in partnership with the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies of the University of Hargeisa, Somaliland, Rift Valley Institute in Nairobi, Kenya, and Puntland State University in Somalia.

The project was aimed to develop individual capacities for research through training in research methodologies, the provision of scholarships, and work placements in research projects; develop competence in the University of Hargeisa, Somaliland and Puntland State University, Somalia for training and research through investments in human resources, research resources, and in equipment and facilities; and support the socio-economic development of communities by enhancing local capacities for evidence-based research to generate knowledge that will inform governance and development policies.

5. PARTNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

The University has previously managed programs intended for capacity building. This program has contributed to the University in several ways: helping staff benefit from both north-south and south-south cooperation individually and helping the institution integrate programs and initiatives developed during programs. This project will be anchored and coordinated by the research and community service office. However, other departments, including School of Graduate Studies, Colleges of Medicine and Health Science, the School of Economics, and Human Resource Management office will support the project.

How BSU will be managed at UoH

The President of the University (P): will be the overall head of the BSU and oversight the role of partnership at the University of Hargeisa. In this regard, the president will sign partnership documents on behalf of the University of Hargeisa. The office of the president will receive reports from the Project Coordinator and conduct periodically
review the progress of activities.

BSU Project Coordinator (PC): implements BSU activities and will act as the Principal Signatory to BSU accounts and advises the president on the progress of BSU activities. accounts staff manages finances; compiles reports, and communicates to DFC and other Danish partners.

An Assistant Project Coordinator (APC): will be appointed to assist the PC and take charge of the duties of the PC in circumstances when the latter is out of the station.

Task Management Groups (TMGs): these are activities implementation groups that implement specific actions and report to the Project Coordinator. Each cluster of training will be assigned working groups (of 2-3 members) under the supervision of the PC.

Financial management: BSU funds will be kept in the University's international account (a separate local account can be created if needed). The Project Coordinator is the Principal Signatory to all BSU accounts. As the university requirement, the president or the vice president for administration and development will co-signatories.

Twining with East African universities
We have several partnerships with East African universities, and we are planning to twin with either University of Nairobi or Kenyatta University.