Strengthening Higher Education Institutions: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Experience in Assuring Quality Higher Education in Sierra Leone Project

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April 2, 2019

Assuring Quality Higher Education in Sierra Leone (AQHEd-SL) Project Overview

- UK Department for International Development (DFID)
  Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform (SPHEIR)

- April 2018 – September 2021 (3.5 years)

- Problem
  Being unable to align course content with the needs of the job market and the aspirations of the growing number of students

- Objectives
  1. Enhance the quality of higher education service delivery
  2. Improve management and implementation of outcome-based education
  3. Establishment of a National Qualifications Framework policy

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Project Partners

Sierra Leone (SL)

Anchor Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
The University of Sierra Leone (USL) – Lead
Njala University (NU)
The University of Makeni (UniMak)

Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)
Sierra Leone Institute of Engineers (SLIE)
The 50/50 Group

Waterfalling HEIs
Eastern Polytechnic (EP)
Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology (EBKUST)
Freetown Teachers College (FTC)
Milton Margai College of Education and Technology (MMCET)

UK
Kings College London (KCL) –
Grant management

King's Sierra Leone Partnership (KSLP)

International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP)

U.S.
The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)

Cluster-Based Structure and Waterfalling Approach

Phase 1

- Receive external inputs
- Deliver phase 1 program reviews

Health	STEM	Agriculture	Econ. & Business
Anchor: USL (COMAHS)	Anchor: USL (FBC)	Anchor: Njala	Anchor: UniMak
External: KSLP	External: SLIE	External: UIUC	External: UIUC

Phase 2 - Waterfalling

- Receive training from phase anchor HEIs
- Deliver phase 2 program reviews
- Receive external mentorship

Cluster Members:
- Njala
- UniMak
- EBKUST
- MMCET
- EP

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- FTC

Cluster Members:
- USL (IPAM)
- USL (FBC)
- Njala
- EBK
- MMCET
- EP
- FTC
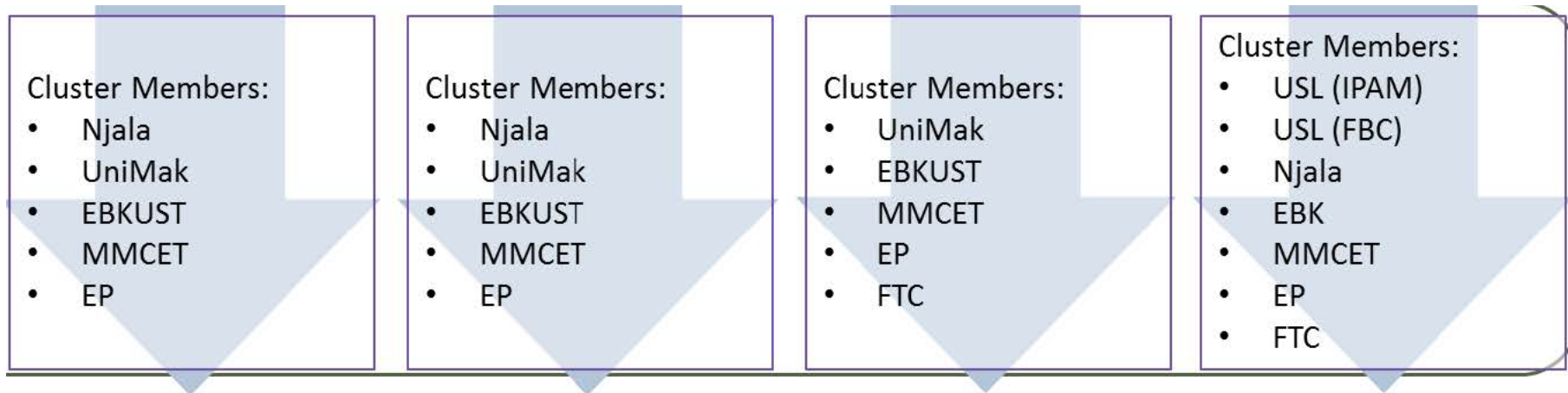
Overall Approach for Outcome-Based Education

1. Identify Skill Gaps with Stakeholders

Stakeholders

Ministries, FAO, BRAC, SLARI, banks, SMEs in agriculture, etc.

Identified Lack of Skills in:

Basic computer skills
Problem solving
Writing in English
Understand emerging topics (CSA, gender)

2. Analyze Existing Curriculum

Curriculum Review (CR)1

Review of skills gaps
Overview of CR process
Introduction of pedagogical approaches

CR2

Define Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) in Agricultural General (Njala) and Management (UniMak)

3. Apply and Revise Curriculum

CR3

Integrate SLOs from CR2 to specific course syllabi

CR4

Review updated curriculum and revise based on feedback

FAO: Food and Agriculture Orgzanization
SLARI: Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute
SME: Small and Medium Enterprise
CSA: Climate Smart Agriculture

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Conceptual Framework Used in CR 1 and 2

1. Review stakeholder feedback
2. Define Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) at two levels:
    Program Level and Course Level
3. Review Bloom's taxonomy
4. Introduce pedagogical approaches:
    Student Centered Learning, Active Learning, Experiential Learning, Early Learner Feedback, Effective Questioning, etc.
5. Analysis of curriculum against SLOs/Curriculum mapping exercise

Throughout the steps, participatory process/group work/real-time feedback on curriculum review inputs were used

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Student Learning Outcomes and Bloom's Taxonomy

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)

What is the most important student goal for your curriculum?

Identify Student Learning Outcomes   SLOs

Campus-Wide

University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign

First step

1. Intellectual Reasoning and Knowledge

2. Creative Inquiry and Discovery

3. Effective Leadership and Community Engagement

4. Social Awareness and Cultural Understanding

5. Global Consciousness

Bloom's Taxonomy

Framework for categorizing educational goals

Create	
Evaluate	Higher Order Thinking Skills
Analyze	
Apply	
Understand	Lower Order Thinking Skills
Remember	
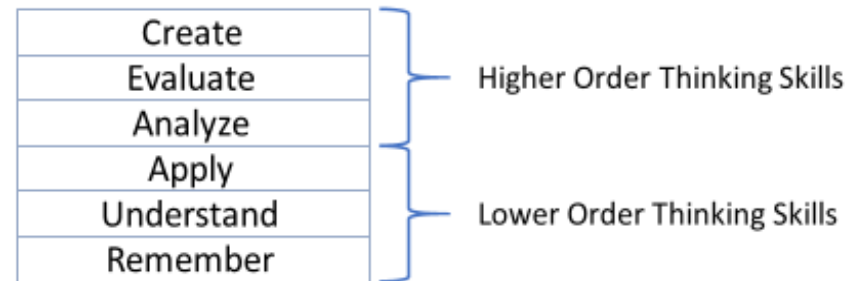
SLOs should be developed using Bloom's Taxonomy

SLOs should be written using action verbs,
as per Bloom's Taxonomy

nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html

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Output 1
Njala and UniMak both defined their SLOs

Njala SLOs
1. Written & Oral Communication
2. Basic Computer/ICT Adaptability
3. Research Methods: Ability to Analyze both Qualitative and Quantitative Data
4. Ability to Work Both Collaboratively & Independently in an Inclusive Work Environment
5. Social Awareness & Cultural Understanding
6. Critical Thinking & Problem Solving
7. Ability to Apply Agronomic Principles to Produce Solutions to Production, Processing and Marketing Problems

UniMak SLOs
1. Oral and written communication
2. Critical thinking and problem solving
3. Computer literacy
4. Research
5. Team work and self dependency (leadership)
6. Social and Cultural awareness

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Output 2
Mapped existing curriculum around SLOs, and designed assessment benchmarks for progressive learning throughout years 1-4.

Lessons to Date

- ## What has worked?

Interactive open format to discuss problems and ways forward. Presence in the field (Njala-based field coordinator).

- ## What has not worked?

Silos/information dissemination, not all faculty have been present in CRs. Rigid financial rules putting administrative burden and less local buy-in.

Future Direction – CR3, CR4, and beyond

- Support implementation. Field project coordinator is a key.
- Besides CR3 and 4, coaching faculty directly by observing his/her class and providing feedback, and supporting waterfalling by coaching the anchor faculty, with follow-up tracking/monitoring.

THANK YOU

Assuring

Quality Higher Education

in Sierra Leone (AQHEd-SL)