OER Africa Professional Development

Background

The long-term vision of OER Africa is to establish institutional policies that support effective OER practices by reflecting a grounded and practical understanding of the realities in which African university academics operate. These policies should propose and implement practical support and developmental mechanisms to enable them to harness OER effectively to the educational benefit of university students. In this way, we believe that *OER Africa* will exercise strong leadership across Sub Saharan Africa in identifying a pathway where the appropriate use of OER can make a real contribution to the development of the region.

Professional Development Needs: Survey and Desktop Research

In its work over the past few years, OER Africa has noted that effective harnessing of OER practices (rather than propagation of OER to replicate rote learning and top-down content transmission) depends heavily on the educational skills of participating academics. Our work suggests that, generally, these skills are at much lower levels than we had assumed, regardless of subject matter expertise.

Desktop research has focussed on the professional development needs of academics, librarians and support staff at universities, and the findings thus far reveal a limited focus on OER. The desktop research also seeks to identify institutional and national professional development policies to assess whether (and how) PD needs are addressed. It focuses on the efforts in five countries: Ethiopia, Tanzania, Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya. Simultaneously, the research is identifying strategies used by governments, universities, development partners, and NGOs in Africa to meet PD needs. Findings from the research will be used to prepare a paper for publication.

Development of Continuing Professional Development pilots in universities

Professional Development activities are being piloted in a number of institutions. Examples of these include:
Supporting lecturers in designing and developing activities by working through an interactive multimedia package with guiding questions and resources for implementation in the learning management system.
'Working with OER' online course implementation
Collection and collation of LMS help files
Publishing research as OER for non-expert audiences: discussion are ongoing with two institutions to collect past research reports from graduate students and put them on a common portal. The best research reports would be selected, simplified and translated into

local languages and published as OER in the form of simple brochures for relevant stakeholders. The main professional development activities in this pilot are developing licensing skills and translating research results for the different target audiences. Supporting the development of open courseware for developing effective courseware. Redesigning an existing OER Africa course called Facilitating Online Learning to let participants experience an online course from a student perspective.

Advocacy

OER Africa has also begun participating more actively in various advocacy activities. This has included making presentation at the UNESCO Mobile Learning Week in Paris and at the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education Ministerial Forum in Moscow. As an extension of this, OER Africa has been invited to join a group tasked with tracking implementation of the Ljubljana OER Action Plan, having been identified as 'as a key partner for mobilizing OER Activities in Africa, a priority region for UNESCO'. OER Africa staff members have run workshops on OER for several universities and conferences.

OER Africa Website

The current focus and purpose of the OER Africa website is to - *reposition OER Africa as the voice of knowledge on what's happening in OER in Africa in Higher Education, the main drive being "OER in African Higher Education".* To achieve this, the website's look and feel was redesigned and launched early in 2018. The *OER Africa* website currently showcases the following sections:
1) Understanding OER;
2) OER Courseware, Research, Case Studies and Policies;
3) What's happening in OER in HE;
4) About *OER Africa*.

One of the main foci since the beginning of this grant has been to streamline all content on the website to reflect the trajectory of our work and outputs through the grants we have received from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, but also from the Gates Foundation, but also foreground the work we are doing in the current grant. This is all reflected in the About Us section of the website. Much time was also spent ensuring that we have a record of all the resources and openly licensed courses that were developed during the grants on the website. The search facility was also updated to align with the new sections of the website as well facilitate easier searching and browsing of resources. On the technical and back-end side, the Drupal platform and modules were updated to the latest versions.

Our section on Understanding OER is now the primary focus of the website. The section underwent a dramatic re-vamp towards the end of the previous grant and has been well-received in workshops that we have run on OER-sensitisation. We will continue to review the section on a regular basis to ensure its currency. We continue to add theoretical

resources on OER to the website, with many of them initially featuring on the home page. We have a two-pronged approach here as we also showcase these resources on the OER Africa Facebook page which has over 1 200 followers. Each post reaches on average 150 followers.

Although, still under development we have done some of the groundwork in identifying African academic writings, namely theses from OATD – Open Access Theses and Dissertations - and ResearchGate which will be showcased in a section on the website. *OER Africa* has also been identified as a possible home for all OER courseware developed in Africa. Requests have been made by NADEOSA (the National Association for Distance Education and Open Learning in South Africa), and the PEBL project (referred to above).