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## OUR WORK AT OER Africa

Over the past six years, *OER Africa* has sought to respond to a growing urgency to meet the demands of students (and faculty) for improved pedagogical content and practice on the one hand and, the demands of African societies for competent higher education graduates on the other. *OER Africa* recognizes that extensive change in institutional practice is required to transform higher education provision in ways that overcome institutional barriers – policy, regulatory, systemic, and cultural – which inhibit the sustainable adoption of pedagogical practices that take full advantage of the transformative educational potential of OER and ICT. While these barriers remain, mainstream adoption of OER practices is likely to remain on the margins of institutional activity.

Accordingly, in our current phase of work *OER Africa* is taking the new approach of integrating a Participatory Action Research (PAR) agenda into each of our institutional engagements. We believe that more focused interactions will facilitate a collaborative agenda and support the four carefully selected institutional partners to:

1. build a deepened understanding of how OER practices can support transformation of teaching and learning
2. ensure that such accumulated understanding is widely shared and incorporated into policy and advocacy

Through this current grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, *OER Africa* is supporting a selected group of academics to routinely look for OER to integrate into their emerging curricula, share back new and re-versioned OER as a matter of course, and be supported in this process by institutional policies and procedures. In this way, the four institutional partners will be well positioned to contribute to educational transformation within their own institutions.

Whilst the emphasis of this grant is on in depth interactions with the selected institutions, focused attention has been given to on-going documented reflection on the change processes involved. *OER Africa* believes that hands-on practice at institutional level is already beginning to generate action-research and advocacy required to understand institutional transformation and the role of OER therein.

These lessons will be of great value to all higher education practitioners but in particular, those working in Africa and making use of open educational resources.

### **Participatory Action Research Agenda (PAR)**

This is an innovative grant mainly because *OER Africa* and its partners are integrating a PAR agenda into each institutional engagements. For the purposes of this grant, we have defined PAR as ‘collaborative research, education and action used to gather information to use for change on social issues’<sup>1</sup>. It involves people who are concerned about or affected by an issue and who take a leading role in producing and using knowledge about it. A PAR approach has the following features:

- It is driven by participants;
- It offers a democratic model of who can produce, own and use knowledge;
- It is collaborative at every stage, involving discussion, pooling skills and working together;
- It is intended to result in some action, change or improvement on the issue being researched.

By its very nature, PAR requires strong engagement with, and leadership from, key participants to be effective. A definite research methodology for the PAR agenda has emerged through specific engagements with our partner institutions.

### **Our Partners**

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Our institutional partners were selected to represent a diversity of situations and approaches as indicated below.

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<sup>1</sup> Pain, R. et al. Participatory Action Participatory Action Research Toolkit: An Introduction to Using PAR as an Approach to Learning, Research and Action. Durham University.

**Africa Nazarene University – ANU (Kenya) – <http://www.anu.ac.ke>**

Africa Nazarene University (ANU) is a private Christian university and an Institution of the International Board of Education of the Church of the Nazarene. ANU was established in 1994 and granted its University charter in 2002. ANU's main campus is situated 24 km from Nairobi, in Ongata Rongai. It has Regional Centers also in Nairobi, Meru, Kisii, Machakos and Eldoret. ANU offers flexible modes of study including campus-based, school-based, evening programs and distance learning.



ANU and *OER Africa* signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) that commits the two organisations to work together towards collaboratively achieving the following outputs:

- A policy framework that supports Open Distance and electronic learning (ODEL) provision and OER deployment
- An organizational architecture that supports ODeL provision and OER deployment
- At least three examples per year of ANU learning materials that effectively integrate OER and are published as OER
- Examples of and reflective reports on workshops initially offered by *OER Africa* for core ANU staff, subsequently adapted and run by core ANU staff for other ANU staff as well as for representatives from other institutions in the region.

**University of Pretoria, Onderstepoort – UP (South Africa) – <http://www.up.ac.za>**

The University of Pretoria (UP) has its origins in the establishment of the Pretoria Centre of the Transvaal University College in 1908. A 1930 Act of Parliament resulted in its becoming the University of Pretoria. Today, UP has over 50,000 students and is one of the leading higher education institutions on the continent and indeed, in the world. It offers courses in both English and Afrikaans and has transformed from a mainly white, Afrikaner institution to a multicultural, multiracial university that offers quality education to South Africans from all walks of life.



Over the past three years, *OER Africa* has worked closely with UP's Faculty of Veterinary Science <http://www.up.ac.za/faculty-of-veterinary-science> (known as Onderstepoort) to support the launch of its African Veterinary Information (AfriVIP) Portal (see <http://www.AfriVIP.org/>). This portal is integrated into the Faculty's Plan for 2012-2016, and is part of a broad vision both to share its intellectual property under an open license. AfriVIP is being used to systematically integrate the use of OER into both formal educational programs and continuing professional development (CPD) activities at Onderstepoort.

Over the course of this grant, *OER Africa* has committed to supporting the faculty's curriculum review processes, with a particular interest in investigating how OER is being used to enhance teaching and learning at the institution. Together, we hope to achieve the following objectives:

- All Onderstepoort CPD developed using OER, with at least 5 new courses operational by the end of the grant
- AfriVIP Portal systematically integrated into delivery of at least 4 different undergraduate and postgraduate programs
- Revised institutional policy on intellectual property developed
- Commitment for integration of OER into educational activities of at least 1 other Faculty at UP
- At least 2 other African Faculties of Vet Sci actively contributing resources to AfriVIP Portal
- Detailed collaborative project successfully designed, incorporating at least 4-5 Faculties of Vet Sci

## Open University of Tanzania – OUT (Tanzania) – <http://www.out.ac.tz>

The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) is a distance and open learning institution, operating through a network of twenty two Regional Centres and four co-ordinating centres spread throughout the United Republic of Tanzania and beyond the borders. It was established by the government of Tanzania fifteen years to fulfil the mission of expanding access to higher education across the country and beyond its boundaries.



Building on a relationship that commenced in 2008, *OER Africa* and OUT established a collective framework for addressing particular institutional needs through the current grant. These include the institutionalisation of OER at OUT, including support for the review and update of a variety of OER related institutional policies; Capacity development for academic staff teaching and learning with OER, including the development of a new open professional development course on *Digital Fluency*, comprising five modules; and support for the further enhancement of the OUT Digital Library Portal and Open Repository, including developing processes for transforming existing OUT courses to OER.

In consultation with the OUT management team and in collaboration with the OUT Institute of Educational and Management Technologies (IEMT) and the OUT Library, *OER Africa* is supporting processes to meet the needs expressed above. These activities are framed by a Participatory Action Research approach that is designed to share and disseminate the project outcomes, which include the following:

- Policies: Review and updating of OUT institutional policies, including OER/IP and ICT/eLearning
- Digital Fluency Course for Academics (5 modules)
- Identified OUT courses mounted on appropriate OER repositories

## University of the Free State – UFS (South Africa) – <http://www.ufs.ac.za>

The University of the Free State (UFS) is one of the oldest institutions of higher education in South Africa. It opened its doors in 1904 on the Bloemfontein Campus with a mere six students in the Humanities. Since then, UFS has grown to more than 31 000 students, spread across seven faculties over three campuses.



*OER Africa* began working with the University of the Free State (UFS) in the second half of 2015. This is because the University identified the deployment of OER as of strategic importance to its overall approach to teaching and learning, and more specifically blended learning. Central to this approach is a deeper understanding of how students learn with technology and how the potential of OER can be scaled to alleviate the financial pressure on students due to the prohibitively high costs of textbooks. The collaboration with *OER Africa* has led to the development of UFS academics contributing to OER development especially in the areas of zoology, language development and numeracy.

As part of this work, the collaboration focusses on the following specific activities to strengthen UFS capacity to harness OER effectively:

1. Establishment of an open licensing framework, as part of a wider review of the institution's Intellectual Property Policy, which enables academics to incorporate openly licensed materials in their courses as appropriate and allows academics to follow a defined process to apply open licences to their course materials and research products where there are valid reasons for doing this.
2. Systematic integration of high quality, available OER as appropriate into courses and their subsequent release for use by others, through a process of developing the capacity of both academics and staff of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) to make effective use of OER.
3. Exploration of the role that OER might play in helping to advance the objectives of the Unit for Language Development (ULD) within CTL.