

DEVELOPING AN ASIAN WAY TO INTERNATIONALIZATION: NEEDS AND PRIORITIES IN LAOS, MYANMAR AND SRI LANKA

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This Report was developed within the framework of the TOOLKIT project (“Designing and managing international relations, educational projects and mobility schemes in Asian Universities”), financed by the European Union, Erasmus+ Key Action 2 Capacity Building in Higher Education program.

TOOLKIT’s main aim is the enhancement and modernization of the internationalization strategies pursued by Asian universities, especially in terms of the capabilities in building up an “Asian way” to internationalization. The framing of a more advanced and internationalized HEIS, in each of the Asian Countries involved, may contribute to amplify the cooperation on a regional and global level, creating wealth and wellbeing. From a social point of view, the development of a strongly internationalized University system may be conducive to the advancement of multiculturalism and offer a unique opportunity to both local students and Faculty members to confront and learn from other international HE Institutions.

TOOLKIT is a multi-country project, which comprises Higher Education Institutions from Laos, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. The Toolkit Consortium includes 3 European Universities – The University of Bologna (UNIBO), Uppsala University (UU), Vilnius University (VU); 2 Laotian Universities – National University of Laos (NUoL), Souphanouvong University (SU); 3 Myanmar Universities – University of Yangon (YU), Yangon University of Economics (YUEco), Yezin Agricultural University (YAU) and 2 Universities from Sri Lanka – University of Peradeniya (UoP)-University of Kelaniya (UoK).

The drafting of this Preliminary Report stands out as the most relevant by-product of the tasks and activities performed under the framework of the first project’s Work Package: WP1 BASELINE STUDIES ON INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIES IN ASIA (more information on the TOOLKIT project activities here: <https://site.unibo.it/toolkit/en/project/activities>).

This study was performed in three stages:

Collection and analysis of relevant documents produced both by Ministries and by International Organisations; the analysis of the information collected from the Asian partner universities;

a series of questionnaires whose aim was to identify the key issues, obstacles and aspirations for the enhancement of the Asian HEIs international dimension according to the answer of specific target groups: professors, students, other Asian HEIs external to the TOOLKIT Consortium.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, universities in our three partner countries (Laos, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka¹) are undergoing a complex reform process of their educational systems. An important aspect of this process is the enhancing of the international dimension of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in order to meet the emerging opportunities and challenges in a globalized environment.

The main goal of the TOOLKIT project is to contribute to the process of internationalization undertaken by the HEIs in Laos, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. This will happen through a mutual exchange of expertise, practices and models of internationalization, as they reflect different cultural, historical and economic environments in Asia and Europe.

The TOOLKIT consortium comprises 3 European universities, 7 Asian universities and the Ministry of Education of Myanmar as project's associated partner:

- The University of Bologna (Italy) - Coordinator
- Vilnius University (Lithuania)
- Uppsala University (Sweden)
- University of Yangon (Myanmar)
- Yezin Agricultural University (Myanmar)
- Yangon University of Economics (Myanmar)
- National University of Laos (Laos)
- Souphanouvong University (Laos)
- University of Peradeniya (Sri Lanka)
- University of Kelaniya (Sri Lanka)

The three Asian partner countries have different profiles and educational models. The table below compares some of the key development and education indicators for our three partner countries:

	Independence Year	HDI ² Rank/189	Population (millions)	GNI/ ³ capita (US\$ ppp)	Mean ⁴ years of schooling	HE Gross enrolment ratio ⁵ (%)
Laos	1953	139	6.86	6,070	5.2	15.72
Myanmar	1948	148	53.37	5,567	4.9	15.96
Sri Lanka	1948	76	21.44	11,326	10.9	18.97

They also have different experiences of higher education development. Whereas Sri Lanka and Myanmar inherited HEIs from the colonial era based on British models, there were only a few non-university HEIs in Laos until the founding of the National University of Laos in 1996. Despite significant internal conflicts, Sri Lankan universities were able to largely maintain their international contacts through the decades following

¹ Official names: Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos), Union of the Republic of Myanmar (Myanmar), Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka)

² <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI> Human Development Index (HDI)

³ Gross National Income per capita in US\$ at purchasing power parity (standard measure of a country's wealth)

⁴ **Mean years of schooling:** Average number of completed years of education of a country's population aged 25 years and older, excluding years spent repeating individual grades.

⁵ **Gross enrolment:** Number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education.

independence. Laos and Myanmar however both went through a long period of international isolation, from which they only began to emerge when they joined ASEAN in 1997. The lack of international contact has had a profound impact on the academic strength of the universities, and their capacity for managing international links and partnerships. However, they all share a similar vision and approaches towards internationalization in Higher Education. This builds on increasing links with partners in Asia. For Laos and Myanmar this happens principally with ASEAN neighbours, especially Thailand and Singapore and for Sri Lanka with India. Japan consistently supported Higher Education in Myanmar during the long years of isolation, and links with China and the Republic of Korea are growing. For Sri Lanka the main regional links have been with Thai, Chinese, Indian, Pakistan and Bangladesh universities, while international links have been established with Japanese, Australian, US and UK Institutions. In Myanmar the greatest number of links is with Japan.

Approaches to internationalization have developed largely from necessity rather than as a result of a deliberate strategy, and only now are universities beginning to develop strategies and to open International Relations Offices. Most of the Asian TOOLKIT's participant universities have established an International Relations Office (IRO) at least on paper, with the aim of consolidating their internationalization strategies, of increasing their potential in mobilizing students and faculty members, enhancing their attractiveness for international collaborations and coordinating the inputs from growing numbers of international partners. For this they are drawing on experience in the region, particularly from the leading universities in Singapore, Hong Kong SAR and Japan. They are also increasingly looking to learn from European experience in international relations management. The Toolkit project is therefore a very timely intervention, allowing the sharing of European expertise in the Asian context.

1.1. Why Capacity Building Projects?

Institutional partnerships have been one of the pillars of comprehensive internationalization. The other three pillars - internationalization of the curriculum, teaching and learning; internationalization of research and knowledge creation; and the integration of internationalization of the university to the broader society - rely largely on international partnerships for their global reach.⁶

Capacity-building (CB) projects are a practical tool of international partnerships that allow partner institutions to acquire knowledge and expertise on the higher education system of partner institutions and to establish relationships and build up trust by *actively working* for a shared, comprehensive objective. Moreover, higher education institutions involved in CB projects should strive towards the collaboration among partners and not be focused on assistance; instead, they should recognise the difference in capacity and resources, but at the same time also realise the inter-relatedness of the developed, emerging and developing worlds. Learning is a two-way process between partners from the Global North and those from the Global South.

The ambition of re-positioning our Asian partner universities to meet international standards requires a lot of effort and a clear and effective strategy. In this sense, the exchange of best practices between European and Asian HEIs in this CB project could lead to a more suitable model of internationalization based on cooperation more than in competition. Asian universities are already beginning to find their own vision, mission and strategies for internationalization after systematically reviewing relevant contextual factors, challenges and opportunities specific to the country and the region. This project will enable them to compare Asian approaches as practised in high income Asian countries (Japan, Hong Kong SAR and Singapore) and European models, and develop policies and practices that meet their own needs.

⁶ *Higher Education Partnerships for the Future*, Nico Jooste, Hans de Wit and Savo Heleta Eds. Unit for Higher Education Internationalisation in the Developing World, ISBN: 978-1-920508-62-3. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

2. Baseline Study on International Strategies in South-East Asia and its Practices

2.1. Methodology

In order to enhance internationalization of the different Asian HEIs, the analysis of the current state on this matter is essential. The following paragraphs make a brief review of the present internationalization strategies of the different countries and institutions.

This study was performed in three stages. The first stage consisted in the collection and analysis of relevant documents produced both by Ministries and by International Organisations.

The second stage consisted in the analysis of the information collected from the Asian partner universities through a survey (see ANNEX 1) that was independently answered by each of them. The aim was to set the scene of their present internationalization model and their main needs to improve it. This first survey intended to gather information on 4 sets of indicators:

- Current Internationalization strategies
- Existing EU funded projects
- Mobility flows of students and academics
- Investigating the needs and priorities of the target groups (students, academics, staff)

Further information was collected during the kick-off meeting of the TOOLKIT project held at the University of Bologna between 8th to 10th April 2019, where each partner institution presented and discussed their internationalization programmes and challenges.

After the kick-off meeting, the third stage began with a series of questionnaires that were prepared and sent to different target groups:

1 Survey for professors at the Asian partner universities (ANNEX 2)

1 Survey for students at the Asian partner universities (ANNEX 3)

1 Survey for Asian Universities external to the TOOLKIT project (ANNEX 4).

3. Laos



3.1. Higher Education System

The higher education system in Laos includes five universities, four academies (related to defence, police, army, politics and public institute), 122 Colleges (which cannot issue degrees) and four institutes relating to the finance sector (banking, finance, Bank of Laos and Ministry of Finance) which can issue degrees⁷.

Four of the five public Lao universities, namely National University of Laos, Souphanouvong University, Savannakhet University and Champassak University, are under the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) while the University of Health Science is under the Ministry of Health.

Following the establishing of Lao People's Democratic Republic [Lao PDR] in 1975, the Government prioritised primary education, aiming to boost the literacy rate. The New Economic Mechanism (NEM) in 1986 aimed to accelerate the transition from a centrally planned to a market-oriented economy⁸. Higher education was less of priority and it remained strictly limited until the early 1990s. Due to the lack of attention to tertiary education, many students were given the opportunity to study in Soviet Bloc countries.

In 1995 the Prime Minister's Decree established the National University of Laos (NUOL) merging the HEIs that existed before 1995. This process has been considered a landmark of Lao higher education. In fact before the foundation of NUOL, the existing HEIs were under different ministries, making it difficult to have a uniform management of the higher education system. The obstacle has been overcome by merging the HEIs in NUOL under the management of Ministry of Education and Sports.

Within this framework, two regional universities were later established to broaden access to higher education: Champassak University (CU) in southern Lao PDR established in 2002 and Souphanouvong University (SU) in northern Lao PDR in 2003. In 2007 the Prime Ministerial Decree on the Adoption and Implementation of the **National Education System Reform Strategy (NESRS)** (2006– 2015) was issued. The decree aimed at strengthening HEIs in order to move the higher education system towards regional and international standards, and thus contributing to the socio-economic development of the country. NUOL was granted autonomous administrative authority while Souphanouvong University and Champassak University were given autonomous administrative authority two years later, in 2009.

Educational policies and development strategies are currently under the control of the **Ministry of Education and Sports** (MOES). Its Department of Higher Education (DHE) provides overall policy guidance to public universities, undertakes planning and coordination with other Government ministries and agencies for the development of the higher education system, and cooperates with international agencies and bodies that are supporting the modernization of the Lao HE system. MOES shares responsibilities with the **Provincial Education Services** (PESs) and the district education bureaus. The PESs are responsible for secondary, technical and vocational schools not under MOES jurisdiction. MOES administers the entrance university examination in collaboration with public Universities and PESs which are responsible for identifying a quota of disadvantaged students to guarantee inclusion and equity on the basis of gender and ethnicity (quota students).

On the basis of the Education Law of 2007 the functions of MOES include:

- Studying and developing the policy framework;
- Formulation of strategic plans and action plans;

⁷ QUALITY ASSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS RELATED TO NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN ASEAN AND THEIR IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION – SHARE Project Report, 2018

⁸ Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thammika Songkhaeo & Loke Hoe Yeong

- Development of projects and submission to the Government for approval;
- Drafting of laws and regulations related to education;
- Curriculum design, teaching aids and teaching-learning materials for all grades;
- Teacher training and management;
- Leading, monitoring, encouraging, supervising, inspecting and evaluating the educational work.⁹

In 2009 the MOES was re-organized into 13 Departments, each including a number of divisions, sections, units or bureaus. The main departments include: primary and pre-school education, higher education, universities, non-formal education, private education, and the education inspection. The **Research Institute for the Educational Sciences (RIES)**, reorganized in 2007 and now under the MOES, is in charge of curriculum design and research. The **Educational Standards and Quality Assurance Center (ESQAC)** was established in 2011.¹⁰

From the beginning of the 2000s a number of private colleges, often with support from international partners, were established in Laos. In 2011 they were banned from awarding degrees. However, in early 2019 some private colleges were given approval to deliver bachelor courses and higher level courses. Two institutes, Rattana Business Administration College (RBAC) and Sengsavanh Administration College in Vientiane, have now been given the authorization to award degrees¹¹.

3.2. Internationalization policies and strategies

The MOES has not yet developed a strategic plan for the internationalization of the Higher Education system. Nevertheless, internationalization is a strategic action included in the **8th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016-2020)**, officially approved at the 8th National Assembly's Inaugural Session in April 2016.¹²

With regards to Higher Education sector, the Ministry of Education (MOES) has identified the following priorities:

1. Promote human resources development to compete with regional and international education standards;
2. Support scientific research, technology development and innovation for the country;
3. Improve HEIs governance and management capacity.

In order to achieve these goals, six main strategies have been set out to be implemented by 2020:

Strategy 1. Develop higher education to meet the demands of labour market and the national socio-economic development plan

The objectives of this strategy focus on inclusiveness (to increase the enrolment rates and guarantee equitable access to disadvantaged population) and on improvement and development of higher education infrastructures.

The key activities to be implemented in order to reach these goals according to the NSEDP 2016-2020 are:

- Review and implement policies to foster higher education access for excellent students, and disadvantaged ones by providing them with scholarships and establishing a student loans system;

⁹ World Data On Education http://www.ibe.unesco.org/sites/default/files/Lao_PDR.pdf

¹⁰ The higher Education in Lao PDR and Roles of International Cooperation for Its University Development – National University of Laos

¹¹ https://laos.opendevlopmentmekong.net/tag/private-education-institutes-in-laos-to-resume-bachelor-degree-courses/?queried_post_type=news-article

¹² 8th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development (2016-2020), http://www.la.one.un.org/images/publications/8th_NSEDP_2016-2020.pdf

- Set up a permanent career counselling office in all HEIs;
- Increase student enrolment rates in priority sectors such as education, teaching, engineering, science, technology and agriculture in order to address national and local needs;
- Support public-private partnerships for the development of higher education and scientific research;
- Conduct graduate tracer surveys and employer satisfaction surveys to improve effectiveness and efficiency of HEIs;
- Conduct labour market surveys to provide higher education plans according to the country needs;
- Establish student service centres in all HEIs.

Strategy 2. Improve the quality of teaching and learning

The main priorities in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning are linked to the design of curricula according to the National Curriculum Standards and National Qualifications Framework. Another goal to be achieved is to provide facilities by building centres of excellence for priority sectors, to improve teachers' knowledge and pedagogical skills (including IT) through online and offline training, to develop monitoring mechanisms and the evaluation of student learning performance.

Strategy 3. Support scientific research, technology development and technical services to meet socio - economic development needs

This strategy plans to provide training in research methods and collaborations with industry to support scientific research, technology development and innovation.

A key point is the need to increase funding from governmental and non-governmental sources to support scientific research, dissemination of research findings both at domestic and international level and the establishment of research centres within HEIs.

Strategy 4. Improve higher education quality assurance

The goal is to develop a comprehensive quality assurance system. Higher education institutions are expected to set up internal quality assurance units in order to carry out their internal assessment. The capacity of Education Quality Assurance Centre needs to be empowered in order to accomplish thorough external quality assessments, to upgrade university curricula and to generally ensure quality in teaching and learning in both public and private institutions.

Strategy 5. Improve higher education governance and management

According to the NSEDP 2016-2020 there is a need to implement efficient governance and management systems for HEIs. One of the main priorities, in this regard, is the development and approval of a set of regulations that may grant more autonomy to HEIs in financial management, staff recruitment and staff remuneration, curriculum development, international cooperation and research. This will lead to more efficiency in expenditure management and HEIs' capacity to attract and exploit funding from external donors and cooperation bodies. In order to empower HEIs' capacity in strategic planning and decision-making through data analysis, it is necessary to set up a data information system and ICT infrastructures.

Strategy 6. Increase internal and external cooperation

According to NSEDP increasing internal and external cooperation is fundamental to improve teaching and learning outcomes. In order to achieve this objective it is essential to set up and increase exchange schemes for professors, students and staff. This will support the development of the higher education system together with the establishment of a credit transfer system, the promotion of domestic and international cooperation, mutual recognition of courses and the design of joint degree programmes. Another key activity to be carried out is the enhancement of international cooperation for joint research with ASEAN HEIs and other countries' institutions.

Table 6. Main facts related to internationalization strategies of LAO partner universities

	<i>Internationalization Strategy</i>	<i>International Relations Structure and Governance</i>	<i>Related actions being implemented</i>
National University of Laos (NUOL)	<p>The strategic plan is decided by the University Council, the Academic Board, and the Administration Board. The main objective is to raise academic capacity through international networking and cooperation. High importance is given to the increase of internal and external cooperation with both regional and international organizations and to the development of strategic plans in response to Ministry priorities of enhancing the quality of their graduates (professional, language and intercultural skills), mobility schemes and credit transfer.</p>	<p>The Office of International Relations is the key actor involved in the internationalization process. Its main aim is to ensure the effective coordination and cooperation with the external partners and networks at different levels. Its mandate is also to consolidate NUOL's role in the internationalization policies within the Government's development plans. It is led by the Vice President for International Relations and is in charge of the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International Cooperation: IRO evaluates and supports the enhancement of cooperation with international HEIs. Promotes the NUOL abroad and looks for partnerships; - Student Exchange: IRO takes care of existing mobility programmes and collaborates with Academic Affairs to develop and implement a credit transfer system; - Academic and Research Exchange and Cooperation: IRO defines regulations and provides assistance for the exchange programmes. It looks for funding in order to improve the current international projects; - Human Resources Development: IRO implements language and technical trainings for its staff in order to offer a more efficient service. 	<p>Cooperation for curricula development and mutual recognition of courses, joint research with ASEAN countries. NUOL aims to offer more international programmes, taught in English in order to increase the number of incoming and outgoing mobility for staff, students and professors. A major priority remains the establishment of a credit transfer system. 277 international MOU/MUA with 30 countries and 9 organizations/NGO.</p>
Souphanou vong University (SU)	<p>Most of the routine matters concerning international affairs are under the decision of the President while the university Leadership Board's approval is requested only for strategic decisions and in case of delicate issues.</p> <p>The main activities of the SU internationalization strategy already in place mainly consist of mobility for professors, the request for international volunteers and experts, curriculum design and SWOT analysis (for an English centre establishment) in order to increase the number of international students studying at SU.</p>	<p>At Souphanou vong University, the President is the person who is in charge of the internationalization.</p> <p>The office of International Relations is the main steering unit for the internationalization of the university. It reports to the President and the Leadership Board of the university, dispatches documents and communications related to external affairs to offices and faculties, and maintains and manages contacts and links with external organisations, institutions and universities.</p> <p>Each faculty has an International Relations Division. These divisions deal with international affairs at a faculty level.</p> <p>The services provided by the Office of International Relation at SU are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to provide assistance for mobility schemes and international projects to faculties and students; - to give support from the bureaucratic point of view by dealing with official documents based on the Government regulations. 	<p>SU plans to enhance the foreign language competences of its student and academic community by establishing language centres, and an international course(s), including foreign language courses in its curricula; by expanding cooperation with international universities and organisations.</p> <p>SU has identified 2 achievable development goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introducing Chinese language courses in their curricula, - establishing an English Language Center. <p>59 international MoUs and MoDs.</p>

3.3. Mobility and International Projects

Mobility for students and staff and participation in international projects is a key factor in the enhancement of the international dimension of Lao HEIs. Nevertheless, according to the collected data, there are still various issues affecting the implementation of the mobility schemes and participation in international projects, being among the most relevant the lack of financial autonomy for Lao HEIs and scarce governmental funding. Due to the financial constraints the majority of current international activities are carried out thanks to external cooperation programmes and funding among which the most cited ones are:

- **ASEAN University Network (AUN):** LAO PDR became a member of ASEAN in 1997. <http://www.aunsec.org>
- **Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA):** In line with the Government of Lao PDR 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) (2016-2020), JICA is working on various policies to achieve balanced and sustainable development. JICA has in place different projects in order to support Laos in the achievement of its goal of graduating from least developed country (LDC) status by 2020. https://libportal.jica.go.jp/library/Data/PlanInOperation-e/SoutheastAsia/024_Laos-e.pdf
- **World Bank:** The World Bank in cooperation with the Lao PDR Government supports the development of the country with different projects. There are currently no projects in the education sector. http://projects.worldbank.org/search?lang=en&searchTerm=&countrycode_exact=LA
- **Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR)** <https://www.aciar.gov.au/About-ACIAR>. In 2017, Australia and Laos commemorate 65 years of strong diplomatic relationship (from 1952). Its aid to Laos aims to build prosperity and reduce poverty while helping Laos to economically integrate with the region. Under the new Aid Investment Plan (2015/16–2019/20), the bilateral aid programme focuses on basic education, human resource development, and a stronger trade regime and more competitive private sector growth.
- **Institute de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD):** IRD works in Laos since 1995 and its programme aims at structuring the scientific research by developing the knowledge regarding the research findings according to the country's development objectives. <http://www.laos.ird.fr/>
- **DAAD:** The DAAD funds university partnership programmes support the structural development of higher education institutions in Laos, particularly at the National University of Laos (NUoL). <https://www.daad-vietnam.vn/en/about-us/daad-in-laos/>
- **Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA):** is a development cooperation agency of Korea Republic whose aim is to contribute to the advancement of international cooperation through various projects that build collaborative relationships and mutual exchanges between Korea and developing countries and support the economic and social development in developing countries. KOICA provides scholarships for staff trainings, funds for textbook development in different subjects and for student facilities, such as dormitories.
- **English Language Institute/China (ELIC):** In 1981, ELIC began a formal partnership with the Chinese Government to start sending teams of teachers to join the faculty at universities throughout China. Since then, ELIC has sent thousands of teachers to more than a dozen countries in East Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. ELIC recruits, trains, and sends hundreds of people each year to teach in long-term and short-term programmes throughout Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. <https://www.elic.org/who-we-are/about-elic>. ELIC has started a project to support human resource development in Laos, focusing on English skills development in universities and colleges. The project will run for five years until 2021. <http://asianews.eu/content/project-enhance-english-teaching-lao-universities-37845>

As regards joint international projects, Lao HEIs participate to various projects mainly in the region. In the recent years, Lao HEIs have started to take part in EU funded projects too, the most significant ones are exposed below:

REACT

- Reference number: 573964-EPP-1-2016-1-ES-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP;
- Duration: 2016-2019;
- Summary of Goals: support Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in strengthening their capacities and regional cooperation by promoting effective Research & Innovation in Climate Change;
- Coordinator: Universidad de Alicante.

BRECIL

- Reference number: 585852-EPP-1-2017-1-MY-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP;
- Duration: 2017-2020;
- Summary of Goals: build research capacities in Laos universities, enhance research governance in Malaysia and Lao PDR, and innovate new research developments through ICT technologies;
- Coordinator: Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya.

FORHEAL

- Reference number: 585884-EPP-1-2017-1-FI-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP;
- Duration: 2017-2020;
- Summary of Goals: strengthen the forest-related higher education system in Laos to improve domestic capacity to sustainably manage forests for the benefit of the people and the environment, while at the same time enabling Laos to effectively respond to the demands and opportunities of international processes such as the Agenda 2030 (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change;
- Coordinator: University of Helsinki.

Table 7. Participation of Lao partner Universities in European or other international projects and mobility programmes.

	<i>EU Projects</i>	<i>Other externally funded projects</i>	<i>Mobility Schemes</i>
National University of Laos	- CATALYST - HR4ASIA - REACT - BRECIL - FORHEAL	ADB: Improve capacity building Eco- Health: Health care access World Bank: capacity building in hydropower and mining	Erasmus +, EU-SHARE Programme, JICA, ASEAN
Souphanouvong University	- REACT - BRECIL - FORHEAL	NONE	Confucius Institute, JICA, ASEAN, MOE Korea

3.4. Challenges and needs

The Government of Laos is working to graduate from least-developed country status by 2020 and to prepare the country for regional and international integration. In order to achieve this goal, the enhancement of higher education international dimension is of key importance. Higher education in Laos is at its early stages of development, and in order to foster the internationalization process it is still in need of improvement in the fields of management, financing, relevance and quality, as well as equity and access. The main challenges highlighted from the collected data refer to:

- 1) **Management:** the higher education system lacks overall planning, management, and monitoring. Department of Higher Education management capacity is not adequate to meet its responsibilities.

Higher education does not currently have a standardized system for the coordinated collection, dissemination, and use of up-to-date data and information to support policy development, planning, administration, and management of higher education.¹³

- 2) **Weak quality assurance, accreditation, and credit system:** Quality assurance and accreditation systems are under development but are not functioning yet. MOES' Quality Assurance Center (QAC) is responsible for developing quality assurance policies and procedures for all education sub-sectors, including public and private higher education. Currently no standardized system is in place to allocate credit for subject units completed from year to year. Credit is allocated on the basis of contact time rather than student workload. Student transfer between universities is very difficult due to the lack of a standardized credit system.
- 3) **Lack of funding:** Insufficient funding is another important issue of Lao higher education. There are insufficient funds to provide adequate salaries and financial incentives to staff, particularly lecturers and professors. The system still relies heavily on international cooperation. This is largely because the infrastructure of Laos cannot support the demand for education. A large part of Lao higher education is financed through partnerships with other countries.
- 4) **Low qualifications of academic staff:** The quality of higher education is still poor due to under-qualified academic staff. Due to low formal salaries paid to academic staff, public universities have difficulty in retaining skilled and experienced academic personnel, leaving the universities with an insufficient number of young, under-qualified, and relatively unexperienced staff. Data on teachers' and students' academic performance are largely unknown since a comprehensive QA system is still being implemented and it becomes difficult to compare them with regional and international standards.¹⁴ The lack of English language proficiency of staff and students really affects the development of the international links and collaborations.

3.4.1. Challenges and needs – the voice of students

The two Lao partner universities submitted the survey (ANNEX 3) to a sample of students and collected 100 replies.

Half of the students knows two foreign languages: English and one among Thai and Chinese, while a little less of one fourth know three or more foreign languages (Japanese, Korean). The majority of students answers that they are aware of the possibility to have an exchange study period abroad at their university. All students identify the International Relations Office as office in charge of student mobility; some of them add that they are also given information and advice by teaching staff of their departments. The perceived role of the International Relations office is to provide information and scholarships and to assist students in the application process and in other administrative tasks.

More than half of the students does not know whether the credits acquired during the mobility period would be recognized; half of the remaining students affirms that credit are not recognized and the other half says that credit will be recognized. The recognition of credits and/or of mobility periods abroad is one of the most important concern for students, when they decide for a long or a short mobility period.

¹³ The Higher Education in Lao PDR and Roles of International Cooperation for Its University Development - National University of Laos - Bounheng Siharath

¹⁴ ibidem

The list of the countries where students would like to study is very wide and ranges over from Asian industrialized countries (Japan, Singapore, Korea) to neighbouring countries (Thailand, China, Malaysia), to Australia and New Zealand, to USA and European countries (UK and Hungary above the others). The most important reason behind the choice is the quality of Higher Education systems of the preferred countries, followed by the opportunity to increase language competences and to get scholarships. Few students list the interest for the culture, the opportunity to study new technologies and to transfer this knowledge to their country or the interest in working in the preferred countries after graduation.

Two thirds of students prefer a long term exchange because of the interest in being exposed to new teaching and learning methods and to raise their language competences. The choice of the students (about one third) who prefer a short term mobility is based on a wide variety of considerations: the opportunity to experience many different visits abroad, the concern to repeat semester once back at home university and to “waste time”, the concern to affect their current grade scores at home university (*“I don’t want to take gap year in my home university. If my university allows us to transfer grade during exchange I will strongly to go for long-term exchange”*).

The expected benefits of a mobility period abroad ranges from personal development motivations (new friends, development of social skills, *“life experience”*) to professional development (experience different teaching and learning environments; opportunity to know other countries and cultures; improvement of language and communication skills; career and job opportunities; technology and knowledge transfer back to Laos).

The most important challenge is language, mentioned by a majority of students; followed by personal aspects (home sickness, being away from families and friends) and by the cultural differences. Financial issues are mentioned by some students (one out of ten). Few students mentioned the fear to be object of racism.

Little less than half of students already experienced a mobility period, the majority of them for a short period (less than 1 month). They had information from the university office or from professors and other students; many used internet and social media. The mobility was funded by international programmes or by hosting institutions.

The students list some actions to improve internationalization at their home institution: increasing the number of mobility programmes and of scholarship schemes; teaching foreign languages; sharing information on mobility opportunities; modernizing teaching methods.

3.4.2. Challenges and need – the voice of professors

The two partner universities from Laos submitted the survey (ANNEX 2) to a sample of academic staff and collected 71 replies. According to the answers collected, the importance of mobility programmes abroad is very high for academic and administrative staff (a mean of respectively 3.72 and 3.41) and a little lower for students (mean of 3.28).

In order to facilitate mobility, professors ranked two actions as most important: *“Sign agreements or memorandums of understanding (MoU) with international universities”* and *“Improve language skills of students and staff”*. Two further actions are positioned immediately below in the ranking with a very similar incidence: *“Provide scholarships to students and professors”* and *“Provide information on internationally funded programmes”*. The actions *“Empower the international relations office”* and *“Assuring credit recognition (for students)”* are considered relatively less important.

The importance of mobility for students is based mainly on the assumption that mobility is a value in itself, being the most frequently reported reasons *“exchange academic knowledge and cultures”*, *“improve English*

language”, “gain foreign experience”. In a few cases personal development of students is taken into account “improve confidence and broaden horizon”, “improve international communication skills and inter-cultural competences”. In other few cases, employability is mentioned as a consequence of mobility. Scholarships are considered an important enabling factor.

Mobility benefits for staff are in the field of professional enhancement (improvement of teaching and research practices; learning of good practices and application at home university; improvement of English language skills). Networking is considered important in order to build capacity and to exploit research opportunities.

The survey investigated also the most suitable duration of mobility: the majority lies in a medium duration (from 1 to 6 months) for all the categories (incoming and outgoing students; incoming and outgoing professors), long mobility period (more than 6 months) is considered suitable by more than one third of respondents.

Participation in projects is considered important to get training opportunities for academic and administrative staff (capacity building, exchange of good practice in management and in research) and to prepare institutions for student mobility and in reforming teaching curricula. The improvement of language skills and of infrastructure is considered an enabling factor.

As far as Memorandums of Understanding are concerned, more than half of the respondents are not able to give the number of signed agreements. The most frequent purpose of these Agreements is student mobility and research, followed by staff mobility and institutional cooperation.

We collected only one feedback from other Lao universities, which confirms the analysis done.

4. Myanmar



4.1. Higher Education System

Myanmar has more than 170 higher education institutions (HEIs) including colleges, degree colleges and universities, which are overseen by eight Ministries according to their profiles as shown in Table 1. Nearly all HEIs are Government-operated, but recently, there has been an increase in privately funded schools, some set up by international actors. Although higher education institutions come under the administration of different ministries, the academic and administrative policy matters relating to higher education are managed by two councils: the Universities' Central Council, and the Council of University Academic Bodies. The former council is mainly responsible for the framing of broad policy and coordination of the work of higher education institutions, while the Council of University Academic Bodies responsibility lies in the adoption of academic regulations and coordination of academic work.¹⁵ Universities and professional institutes from upper and lower Myanmar are run by two separate entities, the Departments of Higher Education, whose office headquarters are based in Yangon and Mandalay respectively. These departments are executive branches of the Ministry of Education (MoE) which is responsible for administration and coordination of higher education in Myanmar.

Table 1. Number of HEIs operated by the different Ministries of the Republic Union of Myanmar

Ministry of reference	Sub-category	Number
Ministry of Education (MoE)	Arts and Sciences Universities	40
	Universities of Economics	2
	Universities of Distance Education	2
	Universities of Foreign Languages	3
	Universities and Colleges for Teacher Education	27
	Technological Universities	33
	Universities of Computer Studies	27
	Sub-Total	134
Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (MoALI)		7
Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry		1
Ministry of Defence		6
Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture		5
Ministry of Border Affairs		3
Ministry of Transports		2
Ministry of Health and Sports		15
	Total	173

*Data provided by the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, the Republic Union of Myanmar, November 2018.

¹⁵ Higher Education policy in Myanmar <http://www.myanmar-education.edu.mm/dhel/myanmar-higher-education-policy/higher-education-policy/> (accessed 21/05/2019)

A crucial moment for education sector reform in Myanmar was the approval by the Parliament of a National Education Law (NEL) in September 2014 and the NEL Amendment in 2015 that aimed to strengthen the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the national education system. The NEL and NEL Amendment provided an excellent national framework for the implementation of a wide range of complementary reforms across the national education system. In fact, from 2014 to 2016, the Ministry of Education (MoE) undertook a Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) to identify priority reforms, strategies and programmes in order to develop the **National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2016-2021**. This international-standard evidence-based strategic plan should lead to major improvements in teaching and learning in all schools and educational institutions, and provide the Government, education stakeholders and citizens with a ‘roadmap’ for sector-wide education actions for the period 2016–21. However, the MoE recognises that many of the listed reforms will take longer than five years to be successfully implemented.¹⁶

As regards Higher Education, the NESP includes three main strategies:

- Strategy 1: Strengthen Higher Education governance and management capacity
- Strategy 2: Improve the quality and relevance of Higher Education
- Strategy 3: Expand equitable access to Higher Education

More recently, the Government established as well the National Education Policy Commission (NEPC), which is a statutory body, created to provide policies in education for the promotion of national development. It was formed on 28 September 2016 with 21 members who are academics and professionals from various sectors of education with deep knowledge and extensive experience in their respective fields. This commission is responsible for the three following committees, each of them with specific functions¹⁷:

The National Curriculum Committee (NCC):

- Developing curricula of international standards to meet the needs of national development and nurture good citizens
- Making continual reviews of curricula to keep them in line with international trends and national education policies

National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee (NAQAC):

- Developing and implementing a comprehensive quality assurance system in education
- Assessing and providing accreditation to educational institutions and programmes

Rectors’ Committee (RC):

- Coordinating the affairs of Higher Education Institutions on the basis of policies laid down by the NEPC
- Helping to enhance the quality of teaching, research and management in Higher Education Institutions
- Giving guidance to Higher Education Institutions in the transition to autonomy
- Providing advice to Higher Education Institutions for increasing revenues to support their development.

¹⁶ Myanmar’s National Strategic Plan (NESP 2016-2021)

https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/myanmar_nesp-english.pdf

¹⁷ NEPC info site: <https://myanmar.ca/edu/>

Presentation on the role of Rectors’ committee, Dr. Zaw Wai Soe, 2018.

<http://www.myanmar-education.edu.mm/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1.pdf>

4.2. Internationalization policies and strategies

In this complex governance environment it is sometimes difficult to determine where decisions are made. As far as internationalization is concerned, the following trends are clear:

- High-level support for increasing internationalization is assured.
- Administrative procedures have not been optimised to support internationalization yet.
- An increasing role for the Rectors' Committee in setting the agenda.
- The pace of change and intensity of regular tasks leaves little senior management bandwidth for new strategic initiatives.
- The move towards increasing autonomy for universities will benefit internationalization, but progress is slow.
- The continuation of the system of rotation for senior academics hinders the development of strong international partnerships.

“If you want to develop, you must look outward”¹⁸

In terms of “internationalization cycle” of Higher Education, Myanmar finds itself between the commitment, planning and operationalize stages. Commitment is there, and some strategies, but not the resources for implementation. However some academic activities and services are going ahead despite this.

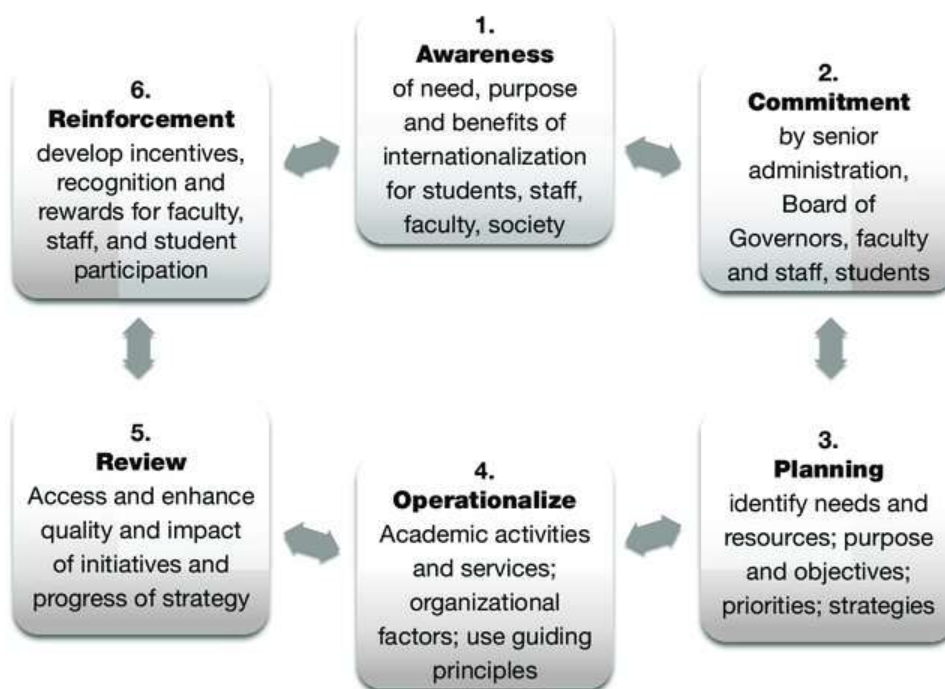


Figure 1. Internationalization cycle. Source: Jane Knight and Hans De Wit (2007), Strategies for Internationalization of Higher Education. Historical and Conceptual Perspectives.

In fact, one of the education sector reform priorities for the Government, as stated in the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP), is to develop a world-class Higher Education system. To achieve this goal, the National Education Policy of Myanmar outlines actions at administrative level.

¹⁸ Dr Hla Myint, Myanmar’s most celebrated economist, Rector of the University of Rangoon 1958 – 1962, quoted by Prof Dr Aung Tun Thet, Member, Peace Commission, at the ‘Managing Challenges during Myanmar’s Transition Conference University of Yangon 5-6 July 2019.

In particular, the National Education Committee has specific roles regarding internationalization of Higher Education¹⁹:

- to give guidance in cooperation with international development agencies and educational organizations for the implementation of programmes in the education sector
- to make policies for upgrading curriculum and syllabus to meet international standards.

It highlights the tasks for the internationalization of Higher Education as follows:

- To provide scholarships, stipends and awards both locally and internationally
- To collaborate with international and local organizations including the UN, INGOs and NGOs
- To upgrade education standards to international levels.

Looking on the specific internationalization measures of the partner institutions, the evidence collected through the questionnaires and during the TOOLKIT project meetings²⁰ suggests that all the partner universities are currently persuaded that raising the international outlook of Myanmar HEIs is an issue of utmost importance. However, the awareness is not always accompanied by either an internationalization strategy or resources. Nevertheless, they are trying to align with national policies and currently most of them are implementing the following measures:

- To set up an International Relations Office
- To enhance the international collaboration by revising existing and signing new Memorandums of Understanding (MoU)
- To welcome the advice of international experts
- To build capacity for both teachers and staff
- To attract scholarships, stipends and awards both locally and internationally

Table 2 summarizes the findings related to internationalization strategies of Myanmar’s partner universities.

Table 2. Main facts related to internationalization strategies of Myanmar’s’ partner universities.

	<i>Internationalization Strategy</i>	<i>International Relations Structure and Governance</i>	<i>Related actions being implemented</i>
University of Yangon (UY)	UY already started to develop International Engagement Strategy covering the following key development areas: research, curriculum and student-centred learning; leadership and staff capacity building; student and staff mobility and transfer and recognition of academic credits; drawing on committed international partners and most relevant resources to contribute to the UY modernization and build excellence	International Cooperation Office (ICO) was set up in 2017 to develop international relations under the guidance of Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs University Senate chaired by the Rector is the key-decision making body. The ICO is supported by core-team members on a part-time basis and reports to Rector and Pro-Rector.	-Networking with other international universities to offer scholarships and exchange programmes -Programmes to upgrade the English language proficiency skills of both students and teachers, to keep abreast of regional and worldwide universities -Proposal to establish an international standard Bachelor (Science) degree that incorporates project-based learning and meets industry needs -Construction plan for the Lancang-Mekong Youth Exchange Centre has been proposed -54 MoU signed with international institutions ²¹ -Major international partnerships with Central European University (CEU) and Australian National University (ANU)

¹⁹ Presentation on the Myanmar Higher Education Policy, Dr. Myo Thein Gyi, 2013.

<http://yangon.sites.unicnetwork.org/files/2013/05/MyanmarHEPolicyConference-Development-PolicyDr-MTG.pdf>

²⁰ Kick-off meeting in Bologna; meeting with Myanmar partners in Yangon in January 2019.

²¹ All MOUs signed between 2013 and 2016 at which the Ministry placed a moratorium on new MOUs. This has now been partially lifted and universities can follow a standard template for new agreements, but these can take up to two years to be agreed.

Yangon University of Economics (YUE)	YUE is implementing its internationalization effort under the guidance of the Ministry of Education, even though it has to outline a specific internationalization strategy	International Relations Office (IRO) plays key role in internationalization of YUE while University Senate is mainly responsible for approving the functions of IRO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Student exchange -Faculty exchange -Research collaboration -Quality assurance programme (Accreditation of AUN-QA) -Capacity building programmes for both teachers and staff -Upgrading the infrastructure -Facilitating the functions of IRO - 29 MoU signed with international institutions
Yezin Agricultural University (YAU)	YAU is overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, which does not have a specific international policy for Higher Education. However, the university is developing its own policy for international activities trying to be aligned with the Ministry of Education as well as with the Ministry of International Cooperation	There is an International relations department under the guidance of Rector and Pro-Rectors, but still it has not clear strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long term and short term training programmes for teaching staff, in home training programmes for capacity building of teaching staff - International activities for students (Internships, summer camps, international students' summits, long term exchange or degree programmes, etc.) 33 partner institutions

4.3. Mobility and International Projects

Mobility for students and staff is a key activity to enhance the internationalization of Myanmar's HEIs. However, as deduced from the questionnaires' replies, until now the development of stable outgoing and incoming mobility schemes has been hampered by the lack of adequate national funds and the excess of bureaucratic barriers. Under such circumstances, the wide majority of Memorandums of Understanding signed by Myanmar HEIs rests on a mere premise that requires foreign partners to bear all the costs of both inbound and outbound mobility.²² Moreover, according to the collected information, the mobility of students and staff occurs mainly inside the ongoing international projects and some already established alliances and networks, being the most mentioned ones:

- **ASEAN University Network (AUN):** The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the Founding Fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam then joined on 7 January 1984, Viet Nam on 28 July 1995, Lao PDR and Myanmar on 23 July 1997, and Cambodia on 30 April 1999. AUN with China, Japan and Korea has set up the ASEAN+3 IRO network (<http://www.aunsec.org/asean3heads.php>), which brings together heads of international relations offices for training and experience sharing.
- **Asian University Alliance (AUA):** The Asian Universities Alliance is a regional organization established in 2017 with the aim of jointly addressing regional and global challenges, specifically related to higher education and economic, scientific and technological development, by strengthening collaboration among member institutions. AUA acknowledges and promotes shared identity and values in working towards this mission. <http://www.asianuniversities.org/>

²² CHINLONE project report: Myanmar's Higher Education Reform: Which way forward?
https://site.unibo.it/chinlone/it/results/wp1/chinlone_report_web.pdf



- **Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA):** governmental agency that coordinates Official Development Assistance (ODA) for the Government of Japan. It is chartered with assisting economic and social growth in developing countries, and the promotion of international cooperation. <https://www.jica.go.jp/english/>. JICA has been the main supporter of Myanmar higher education for many years.
- **Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR):** Australia's specialist international agricultural research for development agency (<https://www.aciar.gov.au/>). Especially important for Yezin Agricultural University. There are three ongoing projects: SLaM/2017/041 Mainstreaming research in Myanmar's Agricultural and Veterinary Universities (2019-2023); AGB/2014/035 Improving livelihoods in Myanmar and Vietnam through sustainable and inclusive vegetable value chains; (2017-2021); SMCN/2014/044 Management of nutrients for improved profitability and sustainability of crop production in central Myanmar; (2016-2019).
- **EU-SHARE:** is a programme by EU and ASEAN to strengthen regional co-operation and enhance the quality, regional competitiveness and internationalization of ASEAN Higher Education Institutions and students. <https://www.share-asean.eu/sites/default/files/EU-Share-Flyer.pdf>. EU-SHARE has funded some of the first exchange programmes in the ASEAN region, and has developed guidelines on credit transfer and other support mechanisms for student mobility.
- **Fulbright:** The Fulbright Program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (<https://www.cies.org/about-us>). Myanmar universities have benefited from hosting Fulbright scholars in Myanmar, and sending Myanmar faculty to the US for study and research visits.

As regards joint international projects, HEIs have started to participate as partners in different international projects. However, many of these projects are delivered with little or no involvement of the Myanmar partners in design, management, monitoring or evaluation. This results in a lack of coordination between projects working in related fields, over-commitment of the few senior staff with English-language and project management skills, and in some cases unsatisfactory outcomes with little to show for the investment. Recently they have started to participate as well in Erasmus+ capacity-building projects which are not immune to the sort of problems outlined above. These projects include:

CHINLONE

- Reference number: 586180-EPP-1-2017-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP
- Duration: 2017-2020
- Summary of Goals: To contribute to the modernization and internationalization of Myanmar's Higher Education System (HES), in order to facilitate the country's transition toward a knowledge economy
- Coordinator: Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna (Italy)

NUTRISEA

- Reference number: 561945-EPP-1-2015-1-BE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
- Duration: 2015-2018
- Summary of Goals: To build human resources capacity to ensure a sustainable food value chain model.
- Coordinator: Ghent University (Belgium)

CABARET

- Reference number: 573816-EPP-1-2016-1-UK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
- Duration: 2016-2019
- Summary of Goals: To improve capacity Building in Asia for Resilience Education and to improve Multi Hazard Early Warning (MHEW) and increase disaster resilience among coastal communities
- Coordinator: University of Huddersfield (United Kingdom)

DEEM

- Reference number: 574282-EPP-1-2016-1-FI-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

- Duration: 2016-2019
- Summary of Goals: To improve sustainable energy knowledge and promote innovative pedagogical approaches and skills as well as to improve international, national and regional networks and knowledge exchange.
- Coordinator: University of Turku (Finland)

SEASIN

- Reference number: 573701-EPP-1-2016-1-UK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
- Duration: 2016-2019
- Summary of Goals: To effectively support and promote social innovation as a means to achieve sustainable and inclusive socio-economic growth, social cohesion and equity in South East Asia, through intercultural, curricular and extracurricular activities
- Coordinator: The Glasgow Caledonian University (United Kingdom)

NEXUS

- Reference number: 585604-EPP-1-2017-1-BE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
- Duration: 2017-2020
- Summary of Goals: to enhance the research capacities of HEIs in the southeast Asian region, by strengthening relationships between Education, Research and Innovation in GIS, SDI and remote sensing, for applications that are related to environment, agricultures and situations of emergency
- Coordinator: Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium)

Table 3 summarises the participation of Myanmar Universities to the different international projects and mobility schemes.

Table 3. Participation of Myanmar's partner Universities in European or other international projects and mobility programs.

	<i>EU Projects</i>	<i>Other major externally funded projects</i>	<i>Mobility Schemes</i>
University of Yangon (UY)	-CHINLONE -NUTRISEA -CABARET -DEEM	-TIDE: Transformation by Innovation in Distance Education (UK Government) -THEMP: Transforming Higher Education in Leadership and Management Programme, (British Council and Irrawaddy Policy Exchange -IPE)	Outgoing through Asian University Alliance (AUA) and ASEAN University Network (AUN); EU-SHARE Programme
Yangon University of Economics (YUE)	-CHINLONE -SHARE -SEASIN	-QASTE: Quality Assurance Structure and Enhancement (Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development) -ERIA: Economic Research Institute For ASEAN And East Asia	EU-SHARE Programme, Stipendium
Yezin Agricultural University (YAU)	-CHINLONE -NUTRISEA -NEXUS	-ACARE: Advance Center for Agricultural Research and Education (IARI, India) - Strengthening human development institution in Agriculture (JICA-Japan) -Sustainable Cropland and Forest Management in priority agro-ecosystems of Myanmar (The Food and Agriculture Organization-FAO) -Project for Strengthening Human Development Institutions in Agriculture (JICA Japan) - Analysis of the global pathway and risk of highly pathogenic plant viruses and insect vectors from tropical and subtropical countries (Korea Animal And Plant Quarantine Agency) - Management of nutrients for improved profitability and sustainability of crop production in central Myanmar (ACIAR Australia) -Improving livelihoods in Myanmar and Vietnam through vegetable value chains (ACIAR Australia)	Lotus+, Nutrisea, Erasmus+, ACIAR, JICA, Fulbright, Erasmus+, Australian Volunteers for International Development Program, Chinese Government –Yunnan Agricultural University

4.4. Challenges and needs

The HEIs in Myanmar are trying to keep pace with the education reform and the national priorities in order to achieve a world-class Higher Education system. However, significant challenges remain. According to interviewees, the shortcomings of the present system that should be tackled to foster internationalization in Myanmar HEIs can be summarized as follows:

1) Excessive bureaucratization

According to the current decision-making processes, each university needs to address a formal request to the Ministry of reference for every change needed in every aspect of academic life including the participation to international collaborative activities such as joint research, signing agreement between two institutions, staff mobility programs. This mechanism prevents HEIs from acting promptly in the event of necessity and also forces university leadership and teaching staff to spend quite some time in administrative reporting.

2) Precariousness of the International Relations offices

The main issue reported is the lack of qualified staff allocated to the IRO. In fact, the general shortage of personnel in the academia is even more relevant regarding the administrative tasks since most of them are performed by the same teaching staff. In fact, management roles like registrar or financial officer are performed at an institutional and department level by teaching staff who are severely overstretched by a very high workload in terms of teaching hours and management duties (without any additional income for serving different roles).

3) Insufficient Budget and Financial Allocation

Despite the increase in the last years of the financial resources allocated to Higher Education in Myanmar, these are still insufficient. Moreover, given the absence of financial autonomy, HEIs are not able to rely on different sources of revenue, such as raising students' fees or profiting from commercial activities. This lack of financial autonomy could prevent Myanmar universities from gaining access to international funding schemes and international programs such as those launched by the European Commission. It also means they are not able to make full-time appointments to important professional roles including fundraising, communications and international relations.

4.4.1. Challenges and needs – the voice of students

The three Myanmar partner universities submitted the survey (ANNEX 3) to a sample of students and collected 208 replies.

All the students answer that they are aware of the possibility to have an exchange study period abroad at their university. The students provide quite a wide range of different answers about the offices in charge of student mobility: student affairs, international relations, heads of departments, professors, student unions; about one fourth of the students cannot identify the office in charge. The perceived role of these offices is to provide information and scholarships.

About two third of the students do not know whether the credits acquired during the mobility period would be recognized; a small minority affirms that credit are not recognized and less than one fourth say that credit will be recognized. However, the recognition of credits seems not to be a concern for students, as none of them mention it among main mobility challenges.

The list of the countries where students would like to study is very wide and ranges over from Asian industrialized countries (Japan, Singapore, Korea) to neighbouring countries (Thailand, China, Philippines, Hong Kong), to Australia and New Zealand, to USA and European countries (UK, Germany and France above the others). Reasons behind the choice are the quality of Higher Education and Research systems, the interest

for the culture, the opportunity to develop language competences. Some students point out the opportunity to study new technologies and to transfer this knowledge to their country. Other are interested in internship opportunities and in their exploitation for their future careers.

Almost all the students prefer a long term exchange because of the interest in being exposed to new teaching and learning methods and in exploiting new techniques; many of them say that short term mobility is “just a visit”. The very few (one out of ten) who prefer a short term mobility, say that it is their first experience and they are afraid of missing home or not to be ready for it.

The list of expected benefits of a mobility period abroad is quite long: experience different teaching and learning methods; opportunity to know other countries and cultures; improvement of language and communication skills; career and job opportunities; development of soft skills (leadership, critical thinking, time management), personal development (new friends, independence, social skills, self-confidence).

The most important challenge is language, mentioned by a large majority of students; other challenges refer to cultural aspects (different food, habits, weather) or to personal aspects (homesickness, loneliness, being away from families and friends). Financial issues are mentioned by some students (less than one fifth).

Very few students already experienced a mobility period (one out of ten), the majority of them for a period from 1 to 6 months. They had information and support from their departments and the mobility was funded by international programs or by hosting institutions.

The actions to improve internationalization at their institution are the following: increasing the number of agreements with international universities, of mobility programs and of scholarship schemes; increasing the number of visiting professors and of international workshops and seminars; developing an international strategy; teaching foreign languages; sharing information on mobility opportunities. In same case internationalization is considered a way to change and modernize the university in teaching methods and in research activities.

4.4.2. Challenges and needs – the voice of professors

The three Myanmar partner universities submitted the survey (ANNEX 2) to a sample of academic staff and collected 70 replies.

According to the collected answers, the importance of mobility program abroad is very high for academic staff and students (a mean of respectively 3,51 and 3,33) and a little lower for administrative staff (mean of 2,82). In order to facilitate mobility, the most important actions ranked by importance are the following:

1. Signing agreements or memorandums of understanding (MoU) with international universities;
2. Providing information on internationally funded programs;
3. Providing scholarships to students and professors;
4. Empowering the international relations office;
5. Assuring credit recognition (for students);
6. Improving language skills of students and staff.

The importance of mobility for students is based on many different considerations ranging from academic reasons (learn advanced technologies; learn foreign languages; experience different learning and research methods and environments) to soft skills (cross cultural communication, team-work, creativity, flexibility, problem-solving, mediation and negotiation; understand cultural differences) to personal development (understanding diversity; improving self-confidence; live new experiences; independence) to employability (find new opportunities in the job market; extend their social network).

Staff can benefit from mobility experience in various domains. From the professional point of view, mobility periods help in being aware of the best practices adopted in international universities; in improving the teaching capacity; in increasing the links with international community of education and research; in improving the skills required for their research; in acquiring advanced knowledge and/or technological know-how; in enhancing language competences; in exploring different courses design, curricula and syllabus. On the other hand, personal development is fostered by international mobility: intercultural skills, language skills, knowledge of cultural and social aspects. Some professors also mentioned opportunities for career advancement and extension of their social and professional network.

The survey investigated also the most suitable duration of mobility: the majority lies in a medium duration (from 1 to 6 months) for all the categories (incoming and outgoing students; incoming and outgoing professors), while the other two durations (short: less than 1 month and long: more than 6 months) rank more or less the same score, with the exception of long mobility periods for outgoing students.

Participation in projects is considered a good way to enhance internationalization of the university by almost all the professors. Suggested ways to improve the participation of universities or departments in such projects are the following: improving communication strategies; providing scholarships and grants for mobility periods of both students and academic and administrative staff; developing capacity of academic and administrative staff. For research projects, providing learning experiences and meeting opportunities with researchers of partner universities to exchange knowledge and views; strengthening the laboratory and infrastructure equipment; promoting mutual exchange of knowledge and information among universities; organizing workshops and seminars.

Some remarks concern the internationalization strategy that still needs to be tailored according to local needs and should take in consideration different background, development status and nature and structure of the institutions.

Other remarks concern the necessity of involving the institutions located in remote area of the country, where faculties and staff have very low or no exposure to internationalization by disseminating information about projects. Another area of concern is related to reward policies, underlining the need to recognize teams and not single individuals.

As far as Memorandums of Understanding are concerned, the majority of respondents are not able to give the number of signed agreements. The most frequent purpose of these agreements is research, followed by joint projects and student mobility.

4.4.3. Challenges and Needs: other universities in Myanmar

12 other universities responded to the questionnaire covering a variety of specialised institutions, including medical, veterinary, economics, forestry & environmental conservation and a number of arts and science universities in the regions. A table setting out their responses is available in Annex 5.

All have some form of IRO, usually consisting of senior academic staff who work with the IRO on a part-time basis. Taunggyi University has one full-time member of staff, and the University of Medicine 1 has three officers. Some have physical offices with dedicated computers and internet access, while others rely on using shared areas and equipment. The IROs undertake a similar range of activities to the IROs in the three focus universities including:

- Managing MOUs
- Implementing projects
- Student mobility programmes
- Supporting visiting professors

- Receiving international visitors
- Information about scholarships
- Advising on publication in international journals

About half the institutions surveyed have some sort of international strategy already. Others say they are in the process of preparing a strategy, while two say they do not have a strategy.

The most current international contacts are with Japan (10 universities), China, Thailand, USA, Australia (7), Germany, Korea, UK (6), with other European and ASEAN countries with one or two links. Some mention ASEAN and the EU as groups, which reflects the activities of some regional projects. Activities planned for the future include further development of existing programmes such as more student exchange, participating in international projects and joint research projects. One university proposes setting up video-conferencing networks.

By far the most often mentioned challenge is the lack of staff to undertake international activities, followed by the lack of funding and bureaucratic procedures. This again reflects the experience of the three partner universities. In the “other comments” section many mention again the need for more autonomy, but there is also this powerful statement:

“Mutual recognition, Mutual Respect and Mutual relationship based on Mutual Trust are essential for creating Mutual International Relation networks among the partners that lead to Fairness and Equity of sharing benefits of partner countries”

This highlights the key issue of the importance of *how* we do internationalization, which is just as important if not more important than *what* we do. This points to the need for inter-cultural skills, as much for the European partners as for the Asian partners.

5. Sri Lanka



5.1. Higher Education System

Sri Lanka has 15 public universities that operate under the University Grant Commission (UGC) and other 6 Higher Education Institutes functioning under different ministries. The Higher Education System includes also 7 post graduate institutes, other 10 Higher Education Institutes and 17 private colleges, acknowledged as degree awarding Institutes. The origins of the modern university system in Sri Lanka date back to the establishment of The University of Ceylon in 1942. Sri Lankan public HEIs are overseen by the **Ministry of Higher Education (MHE)**, which acts on regulations and provisions to guarantee the functioning and the development of Higher Education System. This Ministry has a crucial role in the social and economic development of the Country since its policies and actions have a strong impact towards the Human Resources upgrading as demanded by the key economic sectors. Technical education leading to higher national diploma certificates is under the Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technical Education (SLIATE) which also comes under the MHE's purview.

The management of the major universities is under the **University Grants Commission (UGC)**, appointed by His Excellency the President. The University Grants Commission is the apex body of the University System in Sri Lanka and was established in 1978. The main functions of the UGC are: the planning and the coordination of HE system; the allocation of funds to higher education institutions (HEIs); the monitoring of academic quality standards. The UGC also regulates the administration of HEIs and the students' admission and its chairman acts as the chief executive officer of the Commission. MHE and UGC maintain a continuous dialogue with academia, trade unions and other key stakeholders with the aim of upgrading the HE systems according to the needs of Sri Lanka society.

The **Quality Assurance Council** is a statutory body which operates under the UGC to ensure the quality of university education.

The **National Policy Framework** of Sri Lanka recognizes the importance of supporting the existing public universities to keep them in line with the ever changing standards and developments in higher education. Its principles are set out in the **National Policy Framework on Higher Education**.²³ The Government of Sri Lanka, and in particular the MHE, regards internationalization in higher education as a priority, being it crucial for a better positioning of Sri Lanka HEIs in the global education panorama. This approach is underlined in the MHE Vision and Mission.

"Vision: Sri Lanka to be an international hub of excellence for higher education by 2020.

Mission: To delight students, the industry, staff and other stakeholders of the Higher Education System of Sri Lanka by formulating and implementing results oriented policies & strategies and to deliver results in an effective and efficient manner through a participatory process to produce the best intellectuals, professionals, researchers, entrepreneurs to deliver innovative solutions to make Sri Lanka "The Wonder Of Asia."²⁴

²³ National Policy Framework on Higher Education and Technical and Vocational Education in Sri Lanka 2009.

<http://nec.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/national-policy-on-higher-education-2009.pdf>

²⁴ www.moe.gov.lk/english/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3D754&Itemid=3D1088&id=17259,15700022,15700043,15700186,15700191,15700256,15700259&usg=ALkJrhi6jKhBbHe3jYTqR9Ss7Chehmk-Ew

5.2. Internationalization policies and strategies

Despite the changing political environment in the country, internationalization of higher education institutions has continued to remain a top priority. Stability in politics and sound policies for the higher education system contribute to the harmony among different communities and prevent conflicts; as a result the ongoing process of enhancing the HE system can be secured and effectively carried out.

The policies and strategies for the development of HE system are defined in the **National Policy Framework on Higher Education and Technical and Vocational Education in Sri Lanka 2009**.

Some of these national policies and strategies refer specifically to the improvement of the international dimension of Sri Lankan HEIs. Starting from the assumption that:

“With the rapid global advanced in educational technologies and changing socio-political demands, choice in the mode of acquisition of such higher education should be globally acceptable and locally feasible. Although the development or creation of a framework for expansion should conform to similar global approaches, trends and needs the local socio-political background in which such changes are expected to be introduced, needs to be considered seriously.”²⁵

Specific policies have been settled:

- *Policy 9: Regulate the establishment of higher education institutes with cross-border affiliations by ensuring that the mother institution and the specific programme of work is accredited in the home country, as well as locally.*

The rationale behind this policy lies in the presence of several international institutions which deliver tertiary educational programmes in Sri Lanka. Many of them are franchised institutions operating on behalf of foreign institutions. Unfortunately, no legal entity or regulating body has been appointed to the monitoring of such institutions. For this reason, the following objectives have been settled:

- Establish a unit to study the activities of the institutions affiliated to foreign universities which are already functioning in the country;
 - Prepare a list of guidelines for the recognition of overseas institutions;
 - Ensure that the mother institution and the specific educational programme is accredited in the home country and, if not, accredit both institution and programme locally.
- *Policy 15: Introduce student exchange programmes, both nationally and internationally in collaboration with Government, non-government organizations and industry.*
 - Formulate a common Credit and Qualifications Framework for Sri Lankan HEIs;
 - Define the maximum number of credits per semester within which credit transfer can be allowed;
 - Create flexible learning programmes to promote student mobility;
 - Implement a common credit system for all HEIs, based on student workload, contact hours and achievement of learning outcomes;
 - Synchronise academic calendars of universities.
 - *Policy 20: Promote linkages between Sri Lankan and International Higher Education Institutions.*

This policy stems from the assumption and awareness that collaborations with international HEIs are strategic for the upgrading of the Higher Education in Sri Lanka. Through the exposure to different educational models and the sharing of best practices, Sri Lanka university leadership and faculty may

²⁵ National Policy Framework on Higher Education and Technical and Vocational Education in Sri Lanka 2009.
<http://nec.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/national-policy-on-higher-education-2009.pdf>

empower their capacity in university management and enrich their teaching skills. The exchange of staff and students aims at same fruitful sharing of culture, knowledge and expertise. International cooperation might also have an impact on degree programmes and curricula, on their structure, content and teaching methodologies.

- Establish partnerships and affiliations with international HEIs;
- Establish student and staff exchange programmes;
- Establish visiting fellowship for foreign academics and sabbatical leaves;
- Enable specific missions to promote linkages and make allowance for budgetary provisions in each HEI;
- Enable academic and non-academic staff and students to visit overseas universities for short periods.

In 2011, the Ministry of Higher Education introduced a World Class University Fund (WCU Fund) with two main goals: empowering the capacity of the academic and administrative staff by providing them with more opportunities for international exposure and establishing partnerships with overseas universities. Since then many universities in Sri Lanka have set up international offices, improved their world rankings and developed a number of mutually beneficial partnerships.

Table 4 summarizes the findings related to internationalization strategies of Sri Lanka’s partner universities.

Table 4. Main facts related to internationalization strategies of Sri Lankan partner universities.

	<i>Internationalization Strategy</i>	<i>International Relations Structure and Governance</i>	<i>Related actions being implemented</i>
University of Peradeniya	<p>University of Peradeniya has identified two main goals to be achieved for the 2017-2021 cooperate Plan:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhance the quality and relevance of HE programmes in compliance with international standards; 2. Develop resources to enhance the quality of research in order to address national and international challenges. <p>University of Peradeniya’s international approach focuses on initiating and expanding the international collaborations with partner institutions and increasing the quality of teaching and learning by mutual exchange of best practices, knowledge and expertise.</p> <p>Peradeniya carries out different international activities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Organization of International workshops and conferences; -Publication of a two years Research Magazine named “Hantana Vision”; -Infrastructure projects funded by international organizations. 	<p>In 2012, the University of Peradeniya established its International Affairs Office (IAO), formerly known as International Research Centre (INCR), which was validated by Vice chancellor advisory committee and approved by University Council. The IAO is in its journey of enhancing global relations, promoting multidisciplinary collaborative research programmes, and facilitating students and staff mobility.</p> <p>The IAO has been functioning as a streamlining unit for all international exchanges and research, and has initiated and renewed links and agreements with several international institutions.</p> <p>It’s IAO’s responsibility to draft the strategic plan and actions which is first validated by the Vice Chancellor’s Advisory Committee, composed by all the deans of faculties. Then the University Council, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, gives the final approval. University Council is the supreme board of management of the University and includes all the Deans of Faculties, representatives of senate members and external members.</p>	<p>University of Peradeniya is proposing the establishment of University Research Council to better manage international collaborative research. By this, it is expected to promote multidisciplinary collaborative research. The University Research Council will facilitate relevant international exchanges by providing students and staff members with necessary resources and platforms.</p> <p>Further actions to foster internationalization include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -dissemination of the outcomes in terms of internationalization to the university community, relevant authorities and general public; -increased intake of foreign students; -increased intake of international visiting staff; -establishing credit transfer policy and joint degree programmes. <p>74 MoUs in operation at present among which 37 MoUs between UoP and Asian Universities.</p>

<p>University of Kelaniya</p>	<p>The national policy of promoting the ranking and internationalization of the Sri Lankan universities, aligns well with the internationalization strategy of University of Kelaniya. From the international point of view, the mission of the University of Kelaniya is to:</p> <p>“To become one of the most desirable international destinations, with numerous global partnerships for excellence in the creation and dissemination of knowledge and to broad base creativity, innovation and contribute to national development through international academic exchange including students and staff, international research collaborations, international resources and facilities sharing, and international networking.”</p>	<p>The Centre for International Affairs manages mobility schemes and international projects. It is the first contact point for any international scholar, grant agency, prospective student or university. At the same time it assists academics and students in their research/study activities by providing funding sources, links with international universities. In this way the Centre for International affairs contributes to meet the university's goal of becoming an internationally recognised leader in the development and implementation of a knowledge-based society.</p> <p>The international strategy is defined by the Centre for International Affairs, validated and approved by the Senate and the University Council chaired by the Vice Chancellor.</p> <p>University of Kelaniya organizes different international activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -cultural exhibitions and events mainly organized by the Department of modern Languages; -over 40 international conferences per year; -awareness sessions for academic and administrative staff and students on opportunities available overseas. 	<p>The activities foreseen by the international plan, aiming at enhancing the international dimension are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increase visibility and rankings locally, regionally and internationally; -International partnerships for staff and students exchange; -Incoming and outgoing mobility; -Collaborative research and joint publications; -Fellowships to welcome international scholars at University of Kelaniya for short term exchange (1-3 months). <p>95 MOUs signed with international Institutions.</p>
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5.3. Mobility and International Projects

As highlighted in the previous chapter, mobility for students and staff is one of the key points of the **National Policy Framework on Higher Education and Technical and Vocational Education** of Sri Lanka.

Higher Education Institutions are developing strategies and policies in this direction and some projects, MOUs and mobility schemes are already in place through different Asian and EU networks and alliances:

- **World Bank:** The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the World Bank have agreed on supporting the higher education sector through a Bank-funded Accelerating Higher Education Expansion and Development (AHEAD) operation to support the higher education sector enabling Sri Lanka to make the transition from a Lower-Middle Income Country to an Upper Middle-Income Country <https://ahead.lk/about/>.
- **Asian Development Bank (ADB) Projects:** The Asian Development Bank supports initiatives in education; at the moment there is not any project relating to higher education. <https://www.adb.org/countries/sri-lanka/main>
- **NORAD** is the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation managing the NORHED, the Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development. The programme was launched by NORAD in 2012. In this framework, Sri Lankan HEIs are involved in the WaSo Project - Asia Water management and Climate Change adaptation in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Cambodia. The aim is to enhance societal resilience to climate change and water insecurity through strengthened education and research on water and society. <https://norad.no/en/front/funding/norhed/projects/water-and-society--institutional-capacity->

[building-in-water-management-and-climate-change-adaptation-in-selected-countries-in-asia-was-asia/](#).

- **Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA):** JICA (<https://www.jica.go.jp/english/>) launched SATREPS, a programme designed to promote international joint research in which both Japanese research institutions and those of recipient countries work together based upon the social needs in recipient countries. https://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/science/satreps.html
- **India-Sri Lanka Foundation:** The India-Sri Lanka Foundation was established in 1998 by a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Governments of India and Sri Lanka, with the objective of fostering Indo-Sri Lanka relations through the enhancement of economic, scientific, educational, technical and cultural cooperation between the peoples of the two countries. https://www.slhcindia.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=371&Itemid=106
- **Japan Foundation:** The Japan Foundation is a Japanese institution dedicated to carrying out comprehensive international cultural exchange programmes throughout the world. The Japan Foundation was established in October 1972 as a special legal entity supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <https://www.jpf.go.jp/e/index.html>. At the University of Peradeniya, Japan Foundation sponsors conferences on collaborative research. Japan Foundation supports University of Kelaniya under Japanese Language Education Programme with a Japanese language expert dispatched for a maximum of 5 years for teaching. The programme started in mid 90s and continues. The Foundation also offers Training Programmes for Teachers of Japanese Language.
- **Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA):** is a development cooperation agency of Korea Republic whose aim is to contribute to the advancement of international cooperation through various projects that build collaborative relationships and mutual exchanges between Korea and developing countries and support the economic and social development in developing countries. KOICA collaborates with Sri Lanka Government through Country Partnership Strategy for the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 2016-2020. https://www.koica.go.kr/lka_en/3916/subview.do

Sri Lankan HEIs have started to participate as partners in different international projects, including EU funded projects. It is surely an important achievement that some of them are planning to apply as Coordinator Institution for Erasmus+ Capacity Building Grants. In this respect, they need to increase their staff capacity in managing educational projects, collaborating with international partners and implementing mobility schemes. The EU-funded projects in which Sri Lankan partner HEIs are currently involved include:

IMPAKT

- Reference number: Erasmus Mundus Action 2 Lot 5 IMPAKT Project;
- Duration: 2014-2019;
- Summary of Goals: development of relations between Europe and Asia through mobility between; the two regions.

CABARET

- Reference number: 573816-EPP-1-2016-1-UK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP;
- Duration: 2016-2019;
- Summary of Goals: To improve capacity building in Asia for Resilience Education and to improve Multi Hazard Early Warning (MHEW) and increase disaster resilience among coastal communities;
- Coordinator: University of Huddersfield (United Kingdom).

INNOTAL

- Reference number: 586227-EPP-1-2017-1-BG-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP;
- Duration: 2017-2020;
- Summary of Goals: aims at building the capacity of universities in the Philippines, Nepal, Sri Lanka and India to embed graduates' employability in their core activities and to facilitate the development of student talent through co-curricular and extra-curricular innovation activities involving key stakeholders, with a view to contributing to youth employment, inclusive growth and sustainable development;
- Coordinator: University of National and World Economy, Bulgaria.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN DATA SCIENCE AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

- Reference number: 599600-EPP-1-2018-1-TH-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP;
- Duration: 2018-2021;
- Summary of Goals: Across Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka there is an urgent demand and lack of supply for Data Scientists in the ICT industry. The project focuses on MSc's level training, providing advanced courses and guidance in developing research skills necessary to develop innovative new data-driven technologies;
- Coordinator: Asian Institute of Technology.

WATER HARMONY

- Reference number: 561755-EPP-1-2015-1-NO-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP;
- Duration: 2016-2018;
- Summary of Goals: develop improved learning and teaching tools, methodologies and pedagogical approaches using best practices. As a result, there will be developed skills in multiple use of resources and long-term planning for multiple benefits in such a way that project partners will have harmonized teaching and pedagogical approaches in water related gradual education;
- Coordinator: Norwegian University of Life Science.

Table 5. Participation of Sri Lankan partner Universities in European or other international projects and mobility programmes.

	<i>EU Projects</i>	<i>Other externally funded projects</i>	<i>Mobility Schemes</i>
University of Peradeniya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WATER HARMONY - CABARET - INNOTAL - CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN DATA SCIENCE AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IDRC- (SAWA fellowship) Capacity building in Integrated Water Resources Management (Funding from Canada India, Bangladesh & Nepal) - CapNet (UNDP) Capacity building in sustainable water management 	Erasmus +, Fulbright, JASSO, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, NORAD, JICA
University of Kelaniya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IMPAKT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confucius Institute. Promotion of Chinese language and culture, exchange of scholars and students - Japan Foundation. Promotion of Japanese language and culture - Korea International Cooperation Agency. Promotion of Korean language and culture, exchange of scholars and students 	Erasmus+ Merging Voices (KA1), Erasmus+ International Credit mobility, Confucius Institute, Korea international Cooperation Agency, Korea Foundation.

5.4. Challenges and needs

Although HEIs in Sri Lanka have already in place some relevant international strategies and activities, some challenges still need to be faced in order to reach the ambitious goal of enhancing the quality of their programmes and aligning them with the international standards. According to the results of the surveys conducted in the framework of the Toolkit Project, the main areas in which Sri Lankan HEIs face challenges in the development of their international dimension are listed below:

1) **Financial regulations and limited funding.**

Concerning the management of international projects, the main obstacles are linked to the University financial regulations, which are often impractical and incompatible with project management regulations of granting bodies. The administrative and financial systems are archaic and the process of negotiating and approving MoUs is inefficient due to the bureaucratic, time-consuming procedures for decision-making and the continuous changes in the Government regulations. There are limited scholarships to promote international opportunities and hardly any grant is available from local funding sources. Faculty members have a negative attitude towards the grant applications due to the difficulties they have to face in financial management if they are successful.

2) **Lack of dedicated facilities.**

The main issues are related to the need for efficient and modern systems in line with international standards. Sri Lankan HEIs highlight the lack of integrated systems, information and up-to-date databases, which is caused by the high cost of imported technology, especially for laboratory equipment. This affects the management of mobility flows, but it reduces HEIs' potential to better disseminate the outcomes of international activities to the university community, relevant authorities and the general public. Another relevant challenge is represented by the difficulty in engaging professors and students in mobility schemes due to the poor quality of on-campus accommodation for international students, on-campus shopping and some students' services. In addition, language issues and difficulties offering cross-faculty courses hinder the attainment of steady mobility flows.

3) **Lack of dedicated staff for International Relations Offices**

According to the collected data, Sri Lankan HEIs are in the process of establishing or already have established International Relations Offices. Despite this, most of them do not have any dedicated permanent staff with the necessary competences and awareness of all the factors and procedures involved in the management of mobility flows and international projects. In most cases the IRO staff consists of professors or administrative staff who are appointed on a part-time basis and have several different tasks to fulfil inside the institution. This brings deficiencies in the management of the Offices and related activities making more challenging the aim of HEIs to increase the intake of foreign students and the number of international visiting staff.

4) **Lack of a policy for credit transfer and recognition of activities carried out abroad**

This represents one of the main obstacles for the development of mobility schemes in Sri Lankan HEIs since no well-established National policy for credit transfer and joint degree programmes is currently in place. This results in a more difficult process for the agreement and recognition of the activities carried out by students and staff during mobility periods. However, some universities have an International Credit Transfer Scheme.

5.4.1. Challenges and needs – the voice of students

The two Sri Lanka partner universities submitted the survey (ANNEX 3) to a sample of students and collected 118 replies.

The majority of students are aware of the possibility to have an exchange study period abroad at their University. The students provide quite a wide range of different answers about the offices in charge for student mobility: about one third indicates a university unit (student affairs or welfare, international relations, registrar, sport unit, professors, student unions); about half of the students cannot identify the office in charge and one out of ten identifies an external institution. Only one fourth of the students answers about the role of these offices: half of them focus on providing information and opportunities, the other half is aware of services provided (scholarships, documents, credit transfer).

About two thirds of the students do not know whether the credits acquired during the mobility period would be recognized; a small minority affirms that credit are not recognized and one fourth says that credit will be recognized. However, the recognition of credits seems not to be a concern for students, as very few of them mention it among main mobility challenges.

The list of the countries where students would like to study is very wide and ranges over from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and USA to Asian industrialized countries (Japan, Singapore, Korea) to Asian countries (China and Malaysia) to European countries (UK, Germany above the others). Reasons behind the choice are the quality of Higher Education and Research systems, the quality of infrastructure and facilities, the level of technology. Some students are interested in internship opportunities and in their exploitation for their future careers; others point out the opportunity to get scholarships.

The large majority of students prefer a long term exchange because of the interest in being exposed to new teaching and learning methods, in exploiting new technologies and in knowing the culture of the host country; some of them point out the need to have time to adapt to a new environment; others say they would like to attend a master or a PhD programme (vertical mobility). Some of the very few (two out of ten) who prefer a short term mobility say that they want to finish on time the degree programme they are attending.

The expected benefits of a mobility period abroad are wide: opportunity to have an international exposure, to know other countries and cultures; to improve language competences and communication skills; to experience a personal development (new friends, independence, social skills). Some students point out the opportunity to be prepared for the job market and to have better career opportunities.

The most important challenge is funding, mentioned by a large majority of students; other challenges refer to the ability to adapt (culture, language, food, teaching and learning methods) or to personal aspects (being away from families and friends). Some students mention challenges linked to procedures (visa, obtaining documents).

Very few students already experienced a mobility period (about one out of ten), the majority of them for a period from 1 to 6 months. They had information and support from their departments and the mobility was funded by international programmes, by national or university funding schemes and by their own funds (roughly less than a half).

Internationalization is considered a good way to improve the quality of the university. Actions mentioned by students are the following: increasing the number of mobility programmes and of funding schemes; sharing information on mobility opportunities; raising awareness of the importance of internationalization among students through seminars and other awareness programmes.

5.4.2. Challenges and needs – the voice of professors

The two Sri Lanka partner universities submitted the survey (ANNEX 2) to a sample of academic staff and collected 44 replies.

According to the answers collected, the importance of mobility programme abroad is very high for academic staff and students (a mean of respectively 3,75 and 3,51) and a little lower for administrative staff (mean of 2,78). In order to facilitate mobility, the most important actions ranked by importance are the following:

1. Provide scholarships to students and professors;
2. Provide information on internationally funded programmes;
3. Assuring credit recognition (for students);
4. Empower the international relations office (same value as 3);
5. Improve language skills of students and staff;
6. Sign agreements or memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with international universities.

The importance of mobility for students is based on the importance of exposure: to socio-economic and technical developments, to different teaching methods, to different working ethics. As a consequence of this many professors mention the opportunity for students to learn advanced technologies and foreign languages and to acquire soft skills (communication, understand cultural differences). Employability is also considered a positive benefit of mobility.

Staff can benefit from mobility experience in two main areas: on one hand mobility helps in sharing knowledge, improving research capacities and teaching abilities, fostering technology transfer; on the other it gives the opportunity to build professional and research networks and to improve collaborations.

The survey investigated also the most suitable duration of mobility: the majority lies in a medium duration (from 1 to 6 months) for all the categories (incoming and outgoing students; incoming and outgoing professors), while long duration (more than 6 months) ranks in the second position for outgoing students and incoming and outgoing staff.

Participation in projects is considered a good way to enhance internationalization of the university by almost all the professors. Suggested ways to improve the participation of universities or departments in such projects lie in improving research collaboration and facilities, in raising awareness of the opportunities, in establishing exchange programmes, in promoting mutual exchange of knowledge and information among universities in organizing workshops and seminars.

As far as Memorandums of Understanding are concerned, about two third of respondents can give the number of signed agreements. The most frequent purpose of these Agreements is research, followed by joint projects and student exchange.

We collected only two feedbacks from other two Sri Lanka universities, which confirm the analysis done.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Training needs

Training needs have been identified through the analysis of the questionnaires completed by the three focus groups: professors, students, and by other universities in Myanmar, Laos and Sri Lanka, and from the contributions of Project participants. They have been loosely assigned to each of the three work-packages which involve training: WP2 – modernizing internationalization strategies, WP3 – Project management, and WP4 – managing mobility flows. Project leads for these three packages should use this analysis as the basis for the design of training. While training needs to be focused on immediate needs of each work package, the design should also consider training interventions that cut across the three WPs, and that will impact positively on WP5 – promoting engagement in internationalization, WP6 – the development of the Toolkit MOOC, and WP7 – disseminating results. Training is expensive in terms of costs and staff time, and it is important to maximise its impact across the project and beyond.

WP2 – Modernising international strategies

- Comparing existing and planned international strategy: what are the essential components of a good strategy?
- How to communicate the international strategy in appropriate ways to faculty, other staff and students (with links to WP5);
- Streamlining procedures for visiting professors and other teachers: what can be done within existing bureaucratic constraints including visas, suitable accommodation, language of instruction and departmental procedures. This is a real constraint on the implementation of an internationalization strategy and needs to be addressed in writing the strategy;
- MOUs and other international agreements: what is important, what is not, in each country. Streamlining procedures for approval of agreements to allow projects to start and proceed smoothly;
- Record-keeping and knowledge management, including the use of the University's website, file-sharing sites etc.
- How to keep websites up-to-date;
- Design advice for online and printed materials.

WP3 – Project management

- It is suggested that this training is more focused on the whole project cycle including implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation instead of on the project writing.
- Communication with international partners: effective use of e-mail, shared sites, video-conferencing.
- Streamlining procedures for approval of project documents and agreements to allow projects to start and proceed smoothly.
- Project staffing plan: what demands are made of Asian partner staff, how these are accounted for.
- Financial regulations for projects: obstacles and opportunities.
- Visas and immigration procedures for people taking part in projects. Developing transparent procedures.

WP4 – Mobility flows management

- Developing the role of the IRO in supporting student mobility: information, procedures, advice and communications.
- Credit transfer: drawing on experience in each country and from regional experience through AUN, EU-SHARE and the ECTS.
- Communication with students: how to use mobile devices and social media and overcome the lack of IT networks. This is important also for WP2 and WP5.
- Approaches to preparing students for mobility: language, inter-cultural skills and support systems.
- Envisaging and implementing services for incoming students : buddy programmes, welcome days short term mobility schemes such as summer course delivered in English

This is not an exhaustive list of training needs. Work package leaders should consult with the rest of the Toolkit team, send out draft learning objectives, and an outline programme before finalising. Consideration should also be given to what training might be provided online, and what might then form part of the MOOC to be established under WP6.

6.2. Other issues

The outcomes of these surveys show that some issues and challenges for the internationalization are country-specific and they are the result of the evolution of the educational system, the management, funding and goals of HEIs. However, it is clear several issues and challenges are common to all the Asian partner countries, and these are reflected in the training needs analysis. There are a number of common constraints which make it difficult a direct application of European methods of cooperating and interacting. While some of these are being addressed progress is patchy. Most of these are outside the scope of the Toolkit project but will nevertheless impact on its results. These include:

- Lack of university autonomy: many simple decisions relating to internationalization need referral to the Ministry or some other supervisory body;
- Lack of ICT infrastructure: while mobile digital communication has become the norm for students, institutions are hampered by low connectivity, lack of hardware, and lack of ICT skills for teaching, research and administration;
- Weak data management with limited file-sharing and rudimentary websites. Information management in international activities is a challenge in the most well-endowed universities, but it is a major constraint in most of the universities in the focus countries: it is very difficult to ascertain who is doing what with which partners, with the result that projects often have similar objectives and sometimes duplicate activities leading to confusion and nugatory efforts;
- Low levels of English among faculties (Laos and Myanmar in particular). As a result of decades of isolation English has not been taught or used to the same level as in neighbouring countries. This is a real constraint on internationalization with both Asian and European partners.
- Low levels of staffing: almost all assigned IRO staff have other jobs to do. With the proliferation of international activities enormous demands are made of staff, but this can be at the expense of teaching, research, and essential internal administration.

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ANNEX 1. First survey questions sent to TOOLKIT Asian partners

TOOLKIT – WP 1 BASELINE STUDY ON INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIES IN ASIA AND ITS PRACTICES

This survey has the aim to set the scene for developing the activities of WP 1.

The main activity foreseen in WP1 is to gather information on 4 sets of indicators:

- Current strategies
- Existing EU funded projects
- Establishing mobility flows for students and academics
- Investigating the needs and priorities of the target groups (students, academics, staff)

The outcomes of the survey will be discussed during the kick-off meeting in the focus group of April 9th.

Please answer the questions and provide us with links or other documents (in English) that may be useful as sources to draw a picture of the international strategies and internationalization process in your Country and within your Institution.

Some topics and questions of this survey may be similar to those we have already indicated in the presentation template you will use to introduce your institution. In this survey, we would like to ask you a more detailed feedback. A paragraph of 5/6 lines will suffice for each question.

SURVEY

1. What are the National policies for internationalization of Higher Education? What are the tools (i.e. funding or other kind of incentives) put in place by National Authorities to support HE internationalization policies?

Response and Comments

Title of policy document & date	Producer of document(s) (full name of Government department/agency etc)	Link to document (or attach pdf)



2. Did your Institution develop an internationalization strategy?

-If yes, how does your internationalization strategy align with your overall institutional strategy?

-How does your strategic plan for internationalization align with the national policies?

-What are the bodies in charge to define it, what are the bodies in charge to validate/approve it?

-How the actions anticipated in the strategic plan are implemented, monitored and evaluated?

3. Please list the EU funded projects your Institution is or has been involved in, with dates. Please indicate whether your institution acts as coordinator or as partner; provide a very short description of the topic – 2 lines max. What are the main challenges in managing them?

Project name and dates	Summary of objectives	Lead university and list of partners	Outcomes for your university

4. Is your Institution involved in other international projects? Please list them providing a very short description and indicating the funding authority and the programme.

Project name and dates	Summary of objectives	Country and university partners (e.g. Japan, Nagoya)	Outcomes for your university

5. Please list the outgoing mobility schemes your institution has in place, briefly describing them and indicating whether they are for students or academics or staff, the duration, the funding mechanism. What are the main challenges in running these mobility schemes?
6. Please list the incoming mobility scheme your institution has in place, briefly describing them and indicating whether they are for students or academics or staff, the duration, the funding mechanism. What are the main challenges in running these mobility schemes?
7. Please describe the other internationalization activities your institution has already in place.
8. Please indicate the internationalization activities your Institution is developing for the future
9. Please indicate max three main needs you have to address to foster your internationalization policies.



ANNEX 2. Survey questions sent to PROFESSORS of TOOLKIT Asian partners.

SURVEY:

- 1) Importance of going abroad (mobility programmes). Please rank the importance from 1 to 4 with 1 very low and 4 very high.

For students 1 2 3 4

For Academic staff (Researchers and teachers) 1 2 3 4

For Administrative Staff 1 2 3 4

- 2) What could your University do to facilitate international mobility? Please rank in order from 1 to 6, being 1 the most important)

- Provide information on internationally funded programmes
- Sign agreements or Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with international universities
- Provide scholarships to students and professors
- Improve language skills of students and staff
- Empower the international relations office
- Assuring credit recognition (for students)
- Other (Specify):



3) What should be the purpose of the mobility?

For students:

For staff:

4) Could you please list your experiences abroad as student and as teacher?

5) What is the suitable duration of mobility for the following categories:

-Students

Incoming Less than 1 month Between 1 to 6 months More than 6 months

Outgoing Less than 1 month Between 1 to 6 months More than 6 months

-Professors/Researchers

Incoming Less than 1 month Between 1 to 6 months More than 6 months

Outgoing Less than 1 month Between 1 to 6 months More than 6 months



6) Is participation in projects a good way to enhance internationalization of the university?

Yes No

If yes, please suggest ways to improve the participation of your department/university in such projects.

7) Do you or your department have partnership agreements?

If yes, how many?

What is the purpose of these partnerships?

-Student exchange

-Staff Mobility

-Research

-Institutional cooperation

-Joint projects/conference

-Other (Specify)

ANNEX 3. Survey questions sent to STUDENTS of TOOLKIT Asian partners.

SURVEY:

1) Gender: **Male** **Female**

2) Age:

3) Years of study at your home University:

4) How many languages can you speak?

Which ones?

5) Are you aware of the international possibilities (exchange studies abroad) at your university?

Yes **No**

6) Which Office/Person deals with the student's mobility at your university and which kind of support they can provide?

7) Are the credits obtained abroad recognized by your university?

Yes **No** **I don't know**

8) Which 5 countries would you like to study in?



Please briefly explain your choices

9) Would you prefer a short term (up to 1 month) or long term exchange (1 or 2 semesters):

Short Long

Why?

10) Please list the main benefits and main challenges (maximum 5 each) for making a period abroad (real or expected):

Benefits:



Challenges:

11) Have you been on an exchange period abroad? Yes No

If yes,

- How did you find the information on the studies abroad?

- How long did you stay abroad?

Less than 1 month Between 1 to 6 months More than 6 months

- Who funded your period abroad?

12) How can the internationalization be improved at your university?

ANNEX 4. Survey questions sent to EXTERNAL Asian Universities.

SURVEY:

1) Does your Institution have an office in charge of International Relations?

Yes No

-If Yes, how many people work there? Are they administrative staff or professors with a par-time appointment? What facilities does this office have?

-What are the main activities carried out by the office/staff in charge of International Relations. (Exchange schemes for students and professors, MOUs, international projects...)



-If you do not have an office how and who takes care of international relations?

2) Does your Institution have an internationalization strategy or an internationalization plan? Can you briefly describe the main objectives and actions? Can you provide a copy?



3) Is your Institution involved in international projects? Please list them providing a very short description and indicating the funding authority and the programme.

Project name and dates	Summary of objectives	Country and university partners (e.g. Japan, Nagoya)	Outcomes for your university

4) Can you name the most important Countries for international collaborations in your Institution (Up to five Countries)?

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

5) Please indicate the internationalization activities your Institution is developing for the future



6) What challenges do you have in managing international relations?

7) Is there anything you would like to add about international relations?



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PROJECT PARTNERS

the TOOLKIT consortium works under the supervision of UNIBO as Project coordinator, and it gathers three Universities from Myanmar, two from Laos and two from Sri Lanka together with three Higher Education Institutions from the EU.

Partners: University of Bologna, University of Yangon, Yangon University of Economics, Yezin Agricultural University, National University of Laos, Souphanouvong University, University of Kelaniya, University of Peradeniya, Uppsala University, Vilnius University.



IMAGE CREDITS

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