



Report on the University Leadership Engagement Workshop

Aug 25 - 26, 2023



In partnership with



Meeting Minute

📍 Arba Minch, Haile Resort

🕒 August 25 & 26, 2023

📋 Agendas:

- University Leadership Engagement Workshop
- Tripartite MoU signing among the Ministry of Education, Shayashone PLC, and the five Resource Center Universities
- Resource Center Universities Quarterly Meeting
- Academic Vice Presidents Business Dinner
- Outcome Achievement and Lessons

1. Networking and Team Introduction

During the welcoming dinner, which was organized on the evening of August 24, 2023, the project team undertook networking and team introduction activities. In addition, the team distributed promotional material (brochures, Notebooks, business card holders) and briefed the guests about the event. The state minister received participants and forwarded a short welcoming message.

2. University Leadership Engagement Workshop

The senior leadership of the Ministry of Education (MoE), Presidents, Vice Presidents of all universities of the 50 public universities, as well as ICT Directors and e-learning Coordinators of the five Resource Center universities, and the e-SHE project team members participated in the workshop kicked off on Friday, August 25, 2023.

Opening remarks, keynote speeches

His Excellency Dr. Samuel Kifle, State Minister at the Ministry of Education (MoE), and ICT and Digital Education CEO at the MoE, Dr. Zelalem Assefa presented an opening remark and keynote speech respectively.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Samuel emphasized the role of e-learning in improving education access, quality, and relevance in Higher Education institutions (HEIs). He said: Despite the successes, the country still has a long way to go in achieving its targets in terms of improving access to education. Besides, the education system has significant gaps in terms of ensuring quality and relevance. Its resilience to external shock was also tested during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Dr. Samuel Kifle
State Minister - MoE

As to Dr. Samuel, digital education is one of the most readily available alternatives to address these challenges, though digital education is almost non-existent in Ethiopian HEIs. As part of the country's digital transformation initiative, MoE has initiated the e-SHE initiative in partnership with Mastercard Foundation, Arizona State University, and Shayashone PLC. The five-year initiative aspires to support and build the capacity of the 50 public universities to introduce digital education in their academic systems.

Reiterating the fact that no public higher education institutions are accredited to provide online education, the state minister urged the universities' management to swiftly implement e-learning in their respective universities via fully online or blended alternatives.

Dr Zelalem Assefa, CEO for ICT and Digital Education on his part presented a keynote speech and presentation on the need to scale up investment in e-learning in HEIs. Given the absence of online education offerings in Ethiopian universities and the resulting lag behind global trends, the solutions encompass all aspects of readiness, including infrastructure development, technological preparedness, curriculum adaptation, faculty training, and the establishment of essential policies and guidelines, he underscored.

"The ultimate goal is to enable Ethiopian HEIs to overcome the current limitations, ushering in a new era of accessible and quality education that aligns with the demands of our digital age," Zelalem added.



Dr. Zelalem Assefa
CEO, ICT and Digital Education - MoE

Presentations and discussions

Arizona State University (ASU) virtually presented its global partnership experience in fostering digital education and its role within the context of e-SHE and beyond.

Yared Sertse and Getahun Mekonene (PhD), from the e-SHE team also presented about the e-SHE project, priorities, partnership, major focuses, project plan, progress, challenges, and the way forward, as well as facilitated the discussion session.



Yared Sertse
e-SHE Project Director

Yared stated that the e-SHE team initiative aspires to realize system change across public universities and enhance education resilience, accessibility, and quality. In due course, it also envisions enhancing the employability and entrepreneurial skills of graduates.

Human resource development, digital infrastructure, learning management and student information systems (LMS/SIS), policy and institutionalization, as well as content development and teaching practice change are said to be key intervention themes of the initiative.

The presentation by Yared highlighted a training plan for 35,000 instructors on masterclass and instructional design), while 800,000 students are expected to receive Student Online Success Suit training. In addition, 5 multi-media studios will be built at five Resource Center Universities.

Further, led by Arizona State University, the initiative has been working on the customization of LMS (open edx) that supports seamless integration for use by the 50 public universities and the adoption of SIS that supports fully online education. MoE and the universities have been closely working on requirement identification and the ultimate take-over of the system as a whole.

In addition, MoE and e-SHE have been developing a harmonized e-learning policy and guideline that awaits approval by the former. The initiative is also in the process of developing model courses and standardized digital content development guidelines as a reference for universities to adopt.

Discussion points by participants

The participants forwarded the following comments and questions during the discussion:

- The expansion of e-learning may address the accessibility, relevance, and quality of education partially or fully. But taking into account the status of ICT and the demography of Ethiopia, access and equity of the e-SHE may be limited and may leave a large part of citizens living in the rural part of the country behind. In addition, support should be provided to universities that lag behind, especially 4th generation.
- Strengthening our capacity on online platforms is salient, considering the high marketing potential locally and in neighboring countries as well.
- The workshop provided a conducive environment for learning and networking, fostering a sense of collaboration and community among the participants.
- Further questions were raised about institutional email (whether to use Google or Microsoft Office 360), the selection process of resource center universities and the situation of Tigray universities in light of the initiative.
- The workshop provided a comprehensive and insightful exploration of e-learning, covering a wide range of topics and practical applications. The expertise and knowledge shared by the speakers were helpful.



University Leadership Engagement Workshop - Discussion with participants

Reflections and the Way Forward

The MoE and the e-SHE team reflected on the comments and questions and asserted that they will be considered in future courses of action. Dr. Samuel emphasized that the Resource Center Universities' selection was made by taking regional distribution and equity into account. He also underlined the importance of supporting education with digital technologies and the responsibilities of the HEIs to extensively work on digital literacy and digital skills development activities for their students and instructors.

The state minister urged the university leadership to own the project as its success will be used as a springboard to initiate other projects in the future that would further cement e-learning in Ethiopia's HEIs.

Regarding the institutional email issue, Dr. Zelalem underscored that the universities can utilize both Office 360 and Google as both are free, but Office 360 provides unlimited access while Google offers limited one. He also added that his office opted for Office 360 as it offers unlimited access.

3. Tripartite MoU signed

As a side event, the Ministry of Education, Shayashone PLC, and the five Resource Center Universities have signed a Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding to establish five multimedia studies in each university as a milestone platform to produce digital education content.



Tripartite MoU signing

4. Cluster Lead Universities Quarterly Meeting (e-Learning Coordinators & ICT Directors)

The workshop also witnessed the Quarterly Meeting of the Resource Center Universities. The ICT Directors and e-Learning Coordinators of four of the five Resource Center Universities (Jimma, Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, and Hawassa) discussed the Quarter 2 progress review, (plan, result, and lessons learned) and Quarters 3 and 4 planning (plan, potential challenges, and key interventions needed) for each thematic area with the project team. Particularly, Dire Dawa University registered encouraging performance in executing the plan as the leadership developed a strong sense of ownership.

The MoE and the e-SHE team reflected on the comments and questions and asserted that they will be considered in future courses of action. Dr. Samuel emphasized that the Resource Center Universities' selection was made by taking regional distribution and equity into account. He also underlined the importance of supporting education with digital technologies and the responsibilities of the HEIs to extensively work on digital literacy and digital skills development activities for their students and instructors.

The following are some of the challenges they raised:

- Tasks are not executed as per the project plan
- Low university management engagement
- Lack of incentives for staff who participated in project activities
- Low completion rate in Master Class Training in some of the Universities
- Inadequate infrastructure for students

The e-SHE team also recognized their concerns and challenges and reaffirmed their commitment to work with the Universities to resolve them.

Next Priorities and the Way Forward

Based on the discussions, the universities were requested to submit a revised plan and progress update. The project team and the e-learning coordinators also proposed the following activities as the next priorities:

LMS/SIS

- Students Success Suit: Institutional email creation is critical for students to be able to access the platform through which they can enroll in student success suit courses (student digital skill enhancement)

Policy and Institutionalization

- Finalize the institutional-level e-learning policy

Project Management

- Introduction of incentives for e-learning participants
- Introduction of regular sessions to monitor the progress
- Work closely in the execution and monitoring processes of the plans.
- Low completion rate in Master Class Training in some of the Universities
- Promote university management engagement
- Establish e-learning center/unit
- Model Courses launching: Universities should work on the assignment of Master Class Trained instructors for the two model courses to be launched in the coming semester
- Priority program selection per each university

Capacity Building

- Master Class Training: Tracking ToTs per university and intentionally working towards university targets
- Teacher selection per-program-per-batch
- Teaching practice change: enforcing the one-teacher-per-one-program-per-batch
- Develop capacity in online instructional design

Infrastructure

- Conduct preparations in terms of skilled manpower to run the multimedia studios once their establishment is completed.

The project team, ICT Directors, and e-Learning Coordinators also conducted a virtual meeting with the ASU team where they discussed the progress of the LMS/SIS platform. The review meeting of the studio designs was conducted.



Cluster Lead Universities Quarterly Meeting (e-Learning Coordinators & ICT Directors)

5. AVP Business Dinner

Presentation

At the start of the business dinner, Yared Sertse from e-SHE presented the five-year and year 2 e-SHE targets, human resource development indices for cluster-lead universities, human resource development progression scorecard, and major challenges and call for action to the Academic Vice Presidents (AVPs).

Following the presentation, a discussion was held on the core areas of university engagement which included structure and communication in place, instructors' training, student training, policy and guideline implementation, and digital content development.

The following are highlights of the comments forwarded by AVPs:

- The AVPs gave feedback and raised concerns regarding the fact that the project didn't engage them at the start as it only focused on ICT Directors.

- Shared concerns regarding communication gaps in the process of recruiting Master Class trainees which resulted in inefficient tracking and support mechanisms. If the AVPs were involved in the communications process, they would have been able to follow up the process closely
- They also emphasized the need to be on the same page in terms of project institutionalization, structuring, mainstreaming, and information flow.
- They appreciated the fact that the project has been formulating a national e-learning policy as their previous efforts to launch e-learning projects with various stakeholders and partners in their respective universities failed due to the absence of such a policy. Partners were not willing to fund the projects as the country did not have an e-learning policy.
- Such platforms (the workshop), including the WhatsApp group, should have been initiated earlier as they enable them to be informed about the project much better.
- As a way out to deal with trainee dropouts, the AVPs urged MoE to send a kind of circular to the universities regarding the progress of trainees and dropouts so that they make immediate interventions rather than taking administrative measures later on.
- One of the instruments for the successful implementation of the initiative at the university level is ownership. For instance, Dira Dawa University registered encouraging results as the leadership developed a strong sense of ownership. Such a sense of ownership will enable universities to open satellite campuses in different parts of the country and in neighboring countries.
- They further affirmed their commitment to speed up the process of creating institutional emails for their students and staff.
- Representatives from universities in Tigray also requested some kind of mechanism to engage them in the project as they didn't take part in the process right from the start. Others also requested access to contextualized LMS so that they would be able to update and upload



AVP Business Dinner

Reflections and the Way Forward

The e-SHE team stressed that their comments, feedback, and concerns are duly noted and will be incorporated in the upcoming activities. The team stressed that it will take communication issues seriously and pledged to introduce systematic, regular update mechanisms, and two-way communications to facilitate effective information sharing. Yared also affirmed that the team will engage the AVPs more in strategic communications while engaging the e-learning coordinators in operational communications. He also stressed that the e-learning policy and guidelines are ready to guide the institutionalization process.

Regarding Tigray Universities, he said the team will organize a mission to handle the issue. The major thing the universities missed was the Graduate class training but the project reserved their quotas. Thus, when Arizona State University launches the next cohort, trainees from universities in Tigray will be included. Regarding Master Class Training, their trainees will be part of the activities from now on.

A consensus was also reached for the project team to share training plans, as well as completion, and dropout status to the universities through the MOE channels this week so that they introduce their respective intervention mechanisms and monitor the progress. Finally, the project team urged the AVPs to own the project, while the AVPs expressed interest in making the e-SHE intervention part of their mainstream activities as a way forward.

Outcome achievements:

- Raise awareness regarding the e-SHE project, priorities, partnership, major focuses, project plan, and progress. The workshop provided a comprehensive and insightful exploration of e-learning, covering a wide range of topics and practical applications
- Strong message transmitted by the State Ministry of Education, His Excellency Dr Samuel Kifle who urged the universities' management to swiftly implement e-learning in their respective universities via fully online or blended alternatives.
- The resource center universities shared their experiences and challenges in implementing the initiative.
- As stated by the participants, the workshop provided a conducive environment for learning and networking, fostering a sense of collaboration and community among the participants.
- The platform was also utilized to hear the concerns of the University Leadership and to incorporate them into the future course of action.
- The University leadership affirmed their commitment to speed up the process of creating institutional emails for their students and staff.
- A consensus was also reached for the project team to share training plans, as well as completion, and dropout status to the universities so that the leadership can introduce
- Opportunities created to engage universities from Tigray in the initiative.

Lessons

- The need for more and continuous communications activities to engage the university leadership in the project initiative. (In fact, some of the AVPs noted such platforms (the workshop), including the WhatsApp group, should have been initiated earlier as they enable them to be informed about the project much better).
- The need to work closely with the ICT Directors and e-Learning coordinators in the execution and monitoring processes of the plans.
- The importance of engaging the AVPs in the Master Class Trainees nomination and the overall process as they stated that had the AVPs been involved in the process from the start, they would have been able to follow up the process closely)
- Sending circulars to the universities regarding the progress of trainees and dropouts is a way to deal with trainee dropouts, as it would allow them to make immediate interventions rather than taking administrative measures later on.
- One of the instruments for the successful implementation of the initiative at the university level is ownership at the leadership level as demonstrated by the success of Dire Dawa University. content.
- Ownership and institutionalization at the MoE level
- Besides the Resource Center Universities, the importance of Champion Universities who have demonstrated a strong commitment to the initiative.