



# Catalyzing Innovation

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## **EQUAL PARTNERSHIP IN THE CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT “EDULAND2”: CONCEPTUAL DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNT**

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## **Abstract**

The capacity building project “Implementation of Academic Land Administration Education in Ethiopia for Supporting Sustainable Development is a bilateral project between Austrian (BOKU Vienna, TU Vienna) and Ethiopian universities (DMU, BDU), funded by the Austrian Development Agency. EduLAND2 is a trigger for the design and running a research-driven bachelor curriculum at DMU, for joint problem-oriented research, for the building academic staff capability, for joint research activities and for the preparation of demand driven community services – all on the topic of land administration. Gender mainstreaming and the principle of equal partnerships between all project partners are central elements of EduLAND2. The presentation considers the conceptual design and the realization for guaranteeing an equal partnership in the project. Based on the experiences gained by project members in EduLAND2, challenges and success factors for a successful and equal partnership are outlined. Recommendations for a long-term and successful equal partnership are given.

**Key Words:** Capacity Building, Education, Equal Partnership, Land Administration

## **1. Introduction**

In Ethiopia, land is the primary means of production offering diversified livelihood opportunities. Land is the basic asset used by farmers to accumulate wealth and to transfer it to future generations. Besides, land has also cultural dimensions. People often have an emotional feeling with the land that they claim, resulting that small land disputes lead to hostility and deadly conflicts even between two neighboring farmers. Accordingly, proper assurance of land rights support proper management of land, livelihood improvement of people, and hence, leads to economic growth. Thus, land rights are imperative in order to bring sustainable development of the country.

An effective land administration system supports sustainability and is an essential source for decision-making. Land administration includes land tenure, land use, land value, and land development. A proper land administration system is a pre-requisite for good governance. It supports sound and transparent land policy, resilient land use, adequate spatial planning, and sustainable land development.

In 2015, in Ethiopia a small number of land professionals was available, but UNDP estimated a demand of 50.000 within the next ten years (USAID, 2014). To fill the gap of trained workforce, the national government is establishing land administration programs at different universities. This is an imperative necessity to guarantee the roll-out of second level certification (mapping of parcels) in the Ethiopian land administration as well as for the sustained management of land.

The project “Implementation of Academic Land Administration Education in Ethiopia for Supporting Sustainable Development (EduLAND2)” contributes to mitigate the lack of land administration experts and to trigger the research on land administration topics. The capacity building project EduLAND2 is a bilateral project between Ethiopian and Austrian universities financed by the Austrian Development Agency.

A central issue in the design of the EduLAND2 project has been the principle of equal partnership between all project partners. The presentation will discuss the conceptual design for guaranteeing an equal partnership in the project and it will document all the components, which had been realized so far. Based on the experiences gained by project members in the EduLAND2 project, challenges and success factors for an equal partnership are formulated. Finally, recommendations for a long-term and successful equal partnership are outlined.

## **2. The Project EduLAND2**

### **2.1. Aims and Objectives**

The establishment of a proper land administration system provides many socio-economic benefits for the society, such as assurance of land tenure security, enhancement of social stability, development of the society, provision of security for credits, labor mobility, increased productivity, improved urban planning and infrastructural development, fair taxation, and support of resources management.

The general objective of the academic project EduLAND2 is to improve the livelihood of Ethiopian society by increasing the knowledge, competences, and skills of experts working in the field of land administration and to provide enhanced geodata-sets for land-related decision-making, whereas the specific objectives of EduLAND2 are:

- To establish a Land Administration Competence Centre at Debre Markos University (DMU);
- To increase the number and increase the competence of land administration professionals in Ethiopia;
- To deliver demand-driven community services in the area of land administration;
- To launch long-term cooperation between all partner institutions and to strengthen the professional network at national, regional and international level;
- To promote gender mainstreaming on land rights and to increase the number of female academics in land administration.

### **2.2. Project Description**

For the achievement of the objectives documented above, an integrative approach was applied. In August 2016, DMU established a Land Administration Institute (ILA/DMU) based on and with support of the existing Institute of Land Administration at Bahir Dar University (BDU). ILA/DMU provides education and training, which conducts research activities, and which delivers guidance and service to the land administration authorities. All activities at ILA/DMU are based on the Humboldtian model of higher education, which is a holistic combination of research and studies.

The project was also set-up to provide a solid working basis for education and research. Thus, EduLAND2 financed a computer lab with 25 computers, basic surveying equipment (4 GNSS instruments and 4 total stations), and relevant study material, including textbooks and lecture materials.

The bachelor program “Land Administration and Surveying” was launched in October 2016 and is running now in the third year. The curriculum of this study program is based on the bachelor course “Land Administration” of the Institute of Land Administration at Bahir Dar University. Some adaptations were carried out, which were elaborated in discussion processes with relevant stakeholders at different levels. To be fit for purpose for land administration, the contents include subjects of technical, natural, legal, and socio-economic sciences. Specific attention is given to be fit for future by covering measures of land consolidation and the assessment of land-related information by remote sensing techniques. Gender aspects are addressed prominently in relevant lectures. Some specific courses covering the principles of gender mainstreaming are part of the study program. The curriculum development follows the recommendations of the Bologna process. The course delivery follows a student-centered approach.

Academic staff of ILA/DMU is trained to deliver courses for students and for external experts. The education of staff is outlined in different approaches:

- Two staff members were selected and are doing their PhD at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna (BOKU). The scholarship is paid by EduLAND2;
- Five staff members of DMU have upgraded their bachelor degree in a master program at BDU and at Addis Abeba University (AAU);
- Five staff members of DMU are attending master study programs at BDU and AAU;
- Project members of BOKU, Technische Universität Wien (TUW) and BDU are delivering selected study courses for the bachelor program “Land Administration and Surveying” at DMU. These experts prepared the teaching and training material for these courses. Staff members of DMU attended the courses and continuously were increasingly involved in providing courses.

A community service delivery program and training for local land administration experts is developed and is being delivered starting the second project year. Life Long Learning (LLL) programs are provided (evening and summer training programs). In addition, short-term trainings are provided to the farming community on Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) revised land administration and land use legislation. Consultancy services within the areas of land administration are offered.

The project includes also joint-research activities. Two feasibility studies with the topics ‘Semi-Automatic Boundary Delimitation and Land Cover Classification’ and ‘Austrian land consolidation as a tool to improve agricultural structures in Ethiopia’ were elaborated as an activity in the third project year. The fieldwork for the second study was carried out during the stay of Austrian experts in Debre Markos (April 2018).

Gender mainstreaming is one focal point in EduLAND2. Priority is given to females in staff recruitment, in staff training, and in student enrolment. Additionally, gender-related topics are integrated in the developed BSc curriculum “Land Administration and Surveying”. The success story until yet: in the first year about 70 percent of the enrolled students were female, in the second and in the third year the percentage of female students was about 35 percent.

The project “Implementation of Academic Land Administration Education in Ethiopia for Supporting Sustainable Development (EduLAND2)” was launched in March 2016 and has a duration of four years. In total, four universities are involved:

- University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna (BOKU), which is the coordinator of the project and contributes
- Debre Markos University (DMU), which is the main beneficiary in the project;
- Technische Universität Wien (TUW); and
- Bahir Dar University (BDU), which is mainly contributing its experience in establishing a Land Administration Institute and running a curriculum in “Land Administration”. In the first stage of the project, BDU also provided teaching staff for DMU.

EduLAND2 is funded by the Austrian Development Cooperation in the framework of the “Austrian Partnership Program in Higher Education and Research for Development (APPEAR)”. The overall objective of APPEAR is to strengthen the institutional capacities in higher education, research and management in the addressed countries through Academic Partnerships with Austrian higher education institutions and master’s and PhD scholarships as a contribution to effective and sustainable reduction of poverty. APPEAR encourages professionals and higher education institutions in the addressed countries and in Austria to share their knowledge and experiences with each other, to design innovative projects targeting the objectives and expected results and to improve the general standards in higher education, research and management (APPEAR, 2019).

APPEAR is a competitive study program, outlined in two stages. At first, a project draft has to be submitted. In a review process, a specific number of projects is selected. For these projects, a preparatory funding is provided (about €15.000). The budget has been used to strengthen the networking between partners as well as to prepare and submit – in the second step – the final project proposal. Once again, the selection is based on the outcome of a detailed review process.

### **2.3. Contribution to National and Regional Development Strategies**

EduLAND2 is in line with the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, which was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 and which provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2019). EduLAND2 is covering most of them, as

- a proper land administration plays a pivotal role in combating poverty (SDG 1);
- is desirable for planning and managing resources in an integrated approach (SDG 11 and SDG 15);
- reduces gender disparity in access and control to land (SDG 5);
- helps to design appropriate land policies, which strengthen the role of indigenous people and communities (SDG 10);
- enables to capacity building of experts in the field of land administration (SDG 4);
- contributes to efficient land administration authorities, to clearly defined rights on land and with it to peace and justice (SDG 16); and
- it contributes to a sustainable development of a country (SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 3, SDG 16).

EduLAND2 is in line with the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) of Ethiopia. The Federal Republic of Ethiopia has recently adopted a five year strategic plan for sustainable land administration in the country, including

- The finalization of the certification process (first level of land registration process) and the roll-out of cadastral surveying (second level of land registration activities),
- The review and preparation of an operational legal framework and the digitalization of land records,
- The development of a strategic master plan for the nation and of local development maps in an appropriate scale,
- The strengthening of existing land administration organs and implementation of new ones, where they do not exist, and the capacity building on human and material resources.

### **3. Equal Partnership in EduLAND2**

In capacity building projects, like EduLAND2, an equal partnership is based on the principle of co-operation, mutual learning and mutual understanding in the field of profession. An equal partnership is characterized by knowledge exchange, joint research activities, and staff mobility between all project partners. Mutual learning and understanding of each other's culture is an essential ingredient for

implementing the partnership. In addition, the concept for establishing an equal partnership has to include components to maintain the partnership beyond the duration of the project.

### **3.1. Conceptual Design and Implementation**

Already in the designing stage of the EduLAND2 project, the idea of equal partnerships between all project partners (University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna / BOKU, Debre Markos University / DMU, Bahir Dar University / BDU, and Technische Universität Wien / TUW) was considered and embedded. The project proposal was developed in two workshops. One was held in Debre Markos, Ethiopia, and one workshop was organized in Vienna, Austria. In the three-day workshops, the proposed project coordinators framed the project idea, the objectives of the project, discussed and agreed on content, work packages, time schedule and budget. High-level managers of all partner universities as well as stakeholders in the field of land administration in both countries were informed and partly involved during this stage.

Besides the core activities in EduLAND2, the implementation of the Institute of Land Administration and a bachelor degree program on “Land Administration and Surveying” at the Debre Markos university, the following work packages were outlined in the project to strengthen the cooperation and the partnership in the project.

- Elaboration of two feasibility studies, which are meeting current challenges in the Ethiopian land administration. The first one ‘Semi-Automatic Boundary Delimitation and Land Cover Classification using remote sensing techniques’ is related to the second level of land registration in Ethiopia. In this study, various image data, e.g. orthophotos and Sentinel 2 satellite images, as well as methods of image segmentation and classification were applied to investigate the potential to delineate parcel boundaries automatically or semi-automatically. The second one, ‘Austrian land consolidation procedure as a tool to improve agricultural structures in Ethiopia’ investigates, if and in which way the success story of Austrian land consolidation methods could be implemented in Ethiopia.
- Ethiopian and Austrian professionals prepared together lectures and applied team teaching to deliver short-term training for students and land administration experts. Mutual knowledge exchange and cooperation is required to optimize the contents according to the curriculum and to prepping lectures.
- Staff exchange is strengthening the cooperation between project members. EduLAND2 includes bidirectional study visits of staff members to get knowledge about each others’ teaching and learning environment and about the strengths and weaknesses of the systems in both of the countries, Austria and Ethiopia.



- EduLAND2 funds two PhD students, who are working on a project related research topic. Both students are staff members of DMU. The PhD program is carried out as a so-called sandwich program, where the students are spending one year during their PhD for fieldwork in Ethiopia. This is for keeping the close contact of the students with their Ethiopian home institution. In addition, during the fieldwork a two-week visit of the supervisor is scheduled, which also enhances the partnership between the universities. For getting the scholarship, the students also have to confirm to teach and research at least three years after the finalization of the PhD study at their home institution.

All decisions in the project management are discussed and agreed with involved partners. Decisions were communicated to all other project partners. APPEAR requires a bundle of reports: Annual reports and half-year reports summarize the progress of the project, inform about difficulties and deviations from the project proposal and include specific information about gender perspectives, project management and the quality of cooperation between partners. The annual report also covers all the financial issues. All reports are elaborated in cooperation and mutual understanding.

From the very beginning of the project, all members agreed in establishing a long-term cooperation. As the funding of research and staff exchange is essential for achieving this goal, one activity in EduLAND2 is the preparation of follow-up research activities. The elaboration of at least one project proposal therefore was integrated to the project activities.

Partnership-building measures also have to establish good relationships or friendships between project partners, as these are the ingredients for an ongoing cooperation. These require confidence-building activities including common cultural programs. Enhanced knowledge about history and way of life of partner countries are contributing to a better mutual understanding. In EduLAND2, one day of the weekly study tours was dedicated for visiting cultural places.

### **3.2. Success Stories**

As described above, EduLAND2 includes a bundle of activities to implement and run an equal partnership in the project. After three of project years, it can be said that in general all the planned and scheduled measures are enhancing the partnership.

All project members are in close contact on institutional and national level. The partnership between the two Ethiopian universities (DMU and BDU) as well as between the two Austrian universities (BOKU and TUW) was enhanced through EduLAND2. The Institute of Land Administration at BDU was implemented

some years ago with the support of SIDA, the Swedish International Development Agency. Until yet, they recruited an adequate number of experts to run a bachelor degree program and a master degree program on “Land Administration”. Newly, also a PhD program was launched at ILA/BDU. Funded by EduLAND2, teachers at ILA/BDU support teaching activities at ILA/DMU. In addition, DMU enables some members of their teaching staff to attend the master program at BDU. Both activities are improving the partnership between these institutions.

All Austrian staff members cooperated closely with their colleagues at Debre Markos University during the provision of specific courses for regular students and land administration experts. Austrian and Ethiopian experts discussed the contents of the courses together. In some cases, also the lectures were delivered in a team teaching approach.

High representatives of the institutions of the project partners are giving attention to the project, as all four coordinators paid attention to organize meetings with rectors of DMU, BOKU and BDU, as well as with a high-ranking representative of TUW.

The sharing of responsibilities and the continuous exchange of information enhanced the commitment of all project partners to cooperate in the project. The main communication tool between the partners is e-mail, which worked properly. Coordinators of DMU and BOKU communicated periodically by internet phone. Meetings between project members in the specific institutions and project coordinators in the specific countries are held regularly or if necessary. Face-to-face meetings were held once a year with venues alternating between Debre Markos, Vienna, and Bahir Dar. All communication tools increased the partnership.

In addition, the cooperation with the APPEAR-office, the representatives of the funding, is very good. The project coordinators try to keep the APPEAR-office informed continuously. Open financial issues are discussed in advance. The project management team of EduLAND2 is very satisfied about competent and helpful contact persons at the APPEAR Office.

All project partners are interested on an enhanced dissemination of the project. This is done by web pages at DMU homepage, at BOKU homepage and at the APPEAR homepage. Additionally, the project team informed the scientific environment and the broader public society by specific events (e.g. appear in practices, broadcasting “Welt im Ohr”, presentation of project to Appear Advisory Board). For promoting the project at the involved institutions, project coordinators informed the leading management of all

universities about the project as well as stakeholders in the land administration institutions. Most of the outlined activities were elaborated in close cooperation of all project partners.

Mutual learning was a component of EduLAND2. Therefore, the project was presented for and discussed with Austrian students in a lecture at the Technische Universität Wien.

Since the preparation of the project, the partnership between all coordinators at the institutions increased. All the partnership-building measures in EduLAND2 resulted in friendships between project partners. These friendships are sustainable sources for ongoing cooperation. Common cultural activities enhanced the knowledge about history and way of life of partner countries and contributed to a better mutual understanding.

### **3.3. Challenges**

The equal partnership is an important factor for the success of EduLAND2. All project partners worked on this partnership. Nevertheless, there are some challenges in the process of establishing close, equal and long-term partnerships as outlined below.

#### *Staff rotation*

Personal relationship is an important factor for partnership between institutions. If staff members are moving to other institutions, new contacts have to be established. Especially, young universities in Ethiopia suffer on a high level of turn over, as some of the teaching staff has to be trained in long-term programs (e.g. master programs or PhD programs). In addition, well-educated experts were recruited for high-level jobs at governmental level.

#### *Keeping in touch with all project partners continuously*

Equal partnership requires continuous communication between all project coordinators and in a top-down process to all project staff members at the individual universities. Hindering factors for carrying out these requirements are shortage of time due to other duties (teaching, research, administration) as well as some problems with the internet in Ethiopia due to power-off situations.

#### *Sustainability of partnership beyond project period*

As mentioned above, the preparation of new projects aims at maintaining the cooperation between all project partners also after the end of EduLAND2. Due to shortage of research funds, most of projects calls

are competitive. This fact includes the risk that the submitted project proposals will not be considered for funding.

#### *Political Troubles in Ethiopia*

Personal meetings between project partners are very important drivers for partnership. The second project meeting was scheduled at the beginning of March 2017 at BOKU, Vienna. Because of political troubles in Ethiopia, university management staff of DMU and BDU had to attend a short-term announced compulsory meeting in Addis Ababa at the same time. The Vienna EduLAND2 meeting had to be postponed with the impact that due to other obligations not all project members could attend this meeting.

### **3.4. Lessons Learnt**

During the first three years, the project coordinators gained some experiences how to efficiently establish and run an equal partnership properly. Some findings will be outlined in the next paragraphs. The authors are aware that the following list of lessons learnt are the result of their own experiences gained in EduLAND2 and therefore neither complete nor objective.

#### *Partnership between all institutions is required for the whole duration of the project*

EduLAND2 is characterized by a broad spectrum of activities, reaching from organizational tasks (e.g. implementation of the Institute of Land Administration at DMU), educational tasks (e.g. developing a curriculum, delivering of lectures, providing teaching material), and community services (e.g. training for farmers) up to research activities (e.g. elaboration of two feasibility studies). The cooperation of all project members from the very beginning until the very end of the project is necessary to manage the workload and to be successful in the project. In EduLAND2, a sustainable partnership between all project institutions was established during the preparation of the project and maintained for all project stages.

#### *Incorporating of university managers and stakeholders are essential for sustainable and equal partnership*

Staff rotation at universities is very usual due to short-term contracts or professional changes of high-end researchers. Staff changes are always risks for intact partnerships – especially in cases of a limited number of involved staff members at partner institutions. The integration of new project members is easier, if university managers and/or stakeholders are involved in the project.

#### *Knowledge exchange instead of knowledge transfer*

Austrian project members were very satisfied about their national land administration system. Therefore, the initial intention was to transfer practices from Austria to Ethiopia forgetting equal partnership. During the project implementation, the Austrian project members realised in discussions with the Ethiopian colleagues that the proposed solutions are not applicable for Ethiopia. Knowledge exchange between partners resulted in better solutions than implemented in the “developed country” Austria. In EduLAND2, Austrian partners recognized the importance of shifting the academic approach from knowledge transfer to knowledge exchange.

#### *Knowledge about historical areas and culture of partner countries contributes to mutual understanding*

Culture and way of life is very different between Ethiopia and Austria. Project partners have to learn about both, the culture and the ways of life to understand characters and behaviors of the other. Only the mutual understanding can guarantee a successful partnership.

#### *Friendship is an important success factor for sustainable partnership*

Key staff members of all institutions are knowing each other since many years, as the project coordinators of DMU and BDU successfully made their PhD at Austrian universities. The idea of a common project was born shortly after the return of the Ethiopian colleagues to their home country and resulted in the successful application of EduLAND2. Within the last years, the relation between the project coordinators developed from equal partnership to friendship, which is increasing the resilience of the partnership and with it guaranteeing the sustainability of the partnership.

#### *Memorandum of Understanding between universities is not mandatory for good partnership*

A Memorandum of Understanding between universities can help form a good partnership, but it is not a guarantee for it in a project. This document only gives evidence of an intended partnership between universities on a strategic level and not of a partnership between researchers on a personal level in a project.

### **3.5. Recommendations**

Finally, the authors of the current article will summarize their experiences gained in the last three years of the EduLAND2 and formulate the following recommendations for a successful implementation and running of equal partnership in capacity building projects:

- Interest for co-operation in research, teaching and community involvement are the basic needs for running a project successfully;
- At the very beginning of the project, focus has to be given on brainstorming, on discussions between concerned professionals of the universities and on outlining joint research topics;
- Try to get some preparatory funding for the preparation of the project and for elaborating the project proposal as well as for launching the partnership;
- Recognition of equal partnership between all project partners is essential for continued engagement by the project partners;
- Include staff and student mobility in your project;
- Involve university managers and stakeholders to the project;
- Promote and communicate project content and results to the national and international community;
- Launch partnerships in different disciplines at same universities;
- Continue capacity building and staff exchange upon the finalization of the project by applying other funds for the successful continuation of joint research and teaching activities.

#### **4. Summary and Outlook**

Until yet, the project EduLAND2 is running very successfully. An important factor for the success is the equal partnership in the project. EduLAND2 will increase the number of land administration professionals in Ethiopia and it extends knowledge, skills and competences in problem solving on the topic of land administration in Ethiopia and in Austria. EduLAND2 is delivering demand-driven community services in the area of land administration. EduLAND2 is promoting gender mainstreaming on land rights in Ethiopia and in Austria and the project is increasing the number of female experts / academics in the Ethiopian land administration.

However, EduLAND2 is more. Equal partnership is developed and lived in the project. Moreover, EduLAND2 is a driver for long-term cooperation between the partner institutions DMU, BOKU, BDU, and TUW. Many components in the project contribute to the strengthening of the partnership. It is the intention of the authors of this article to share experiences with the readers and based on this to provide recommendations for implementing and running successfully an equal partnership.

EduLAND2 is until yet a success story. To date, all formulated objectives were achieved in the proposed time schedule and the evidence of equal partnership is obvious. Nevertheless, all the project partners have

to work on the project activities and on the partnership until the very end of the project. To keep the cooperation alive, further project proposals have to be elaborated and the submissions have to be successful.

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