Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) Project:
Connected higher education in crisis through international partnerships and inclusion in national systems

Abdikadir Abikar, Arte Dagane, Mohamed Duale, Sahra Ismail, HaEun Kim, Ochan Leomoi
Context: Dadaab, Kenya

- Prolonged conflict, protracted displacement, restrictive refugee policies (i.e., encampment, no mobility & employment rights, some insecurity, etc.), underserved host communities; however, recent refugee policy shift towards economic inclusion (2022)

- Education in Dadaab (under-resourced & overcrowded classrooms, lower enrolment & achievement among refugee & host communities, gender disparity, limited opportunities to pursue higher education)
The BHER Project began with the intent to improve the quality of primary/secondary education in Dadaab camps & vicinity through provision of blended accredited post-secondary teacher education certificates, diplomas, and degrees.
The BHER Consortium

Kenyatta University (KU)
Moi University (MU)
University of British Columbia (UBC)
York University (YU)
Windle International Kenya (WIK)
Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

2010-2012: SSHRC, IDRC, (partner workshops) & Mastercard Foundation (feasibility study)
2013-2018: $4.5 million from Global Affairs Canada
2018-Present: Open Society Foundations & York University
PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

KEY PRINCIPLES OF BHER

• **Stackability**
  Allow students to stop at any one level of programming

• **Portability**
  Enabling students to continue studies wherever they go

• **Gender equity & inclusion**
  Take all necessary measures to ensure participation of women, ethnic, religious, linguistic minorities, students with disabilities

• **Peaceful co-existence with host community**
  At least 25% of BHER student body is from local sites
Phase 1
InSTEP
non-credit
3 months

Managed by WIK
(InSTEP program phased out in 2017. Post-2017, students enrolled directly at CES-E level)

Phase 2-A
Certificate in Educational Studies
(Elementary)
30 credits / 10 units
12 months

Offered by YU

Phase 3-A
Diploma in Teacher Education
(Primary)
30 credits / 10 units
12 months

Offered by YU

Phase 2 & 3 - B
Diploma in Teacher Education
(Secondary)
60 credits / 20 units
24 months

Offered jointly by MU and UBC

Phase 4
Bachelors' Degrees
90 credits / 30 units
24 months

Offered by MU, KU, YU

- B.Sc. Community Health Education (MU)
- B.Ed. Science Arts or Primary Teacher Education (KU)
- B.A. Geography or Educational Studies (YU)

Phase 5
M.Ed. Graduate Degree
18 credits + Major Research Paper
24 months

Offered by York University
Blended Modes of Teaching and Learning

- BHER Project used a **blended model** for teaching/learning, integrating both face-to-face and online modes
  - **Face-to-face**: Intensive on-site sessions where instructors travel to the BHER Learning Centre in Dadaab
  - **Online**: Stretched over the semester with students engaging through eLearning platforms (Moodle, eClass, KUSOMI, etc.)

- Each institution had varying proportions of F2F/online
Program Engagement

Since 2013, BHER has engaged with over 400 individual students:

• Certificate in Educational Studies – Elementary: 170 graduates (39% women)
• Diploma in Teacher Education – Primary: 55 graduates (24% women)
• Diploma in Teacher Education – Secondary: 85 graduates (6% women)
• Bachelor’s degrees (Arts, Education, Science): 84 graduates (19% women)
• Master’s degrees: 9 graduates (22% women)

This past year YU had 60 active students:

• Bachelor of Arts in Educational Studies: 39 students (36% women)
• Master of Education: 19 students (42% women)
Emerging refugee and local researchers, community leaders

• Bachelor’s and Master’s graduates working in schools, national & local gov’t, NGOs, RLOs in Kenya, Somalia, Rwanda, and beyond

• Refugee and locals conducting community engaged research on education, displacement, gender equity issues etc.
Connected Learning Impact

1. **Access**
   - Issues of ‘aging out’ of other scholarship programmes
   - *in situ* programs = able to study from home with families

2. **ICT Skills**
   - Extremely low technological literacy prior to connected learning programs
     (accustomed to mobile phone, not necessarily computers)
   - Emails, word processing, powerpoints, navigating eLearning platforms, online research, etc.

3. **Voice**
   - Research projects, published papers, ongoing collaborations as local researchers and experts with global and local NGOs/universities
   - Advocacy work and knowledge dissemination (conferences, presentations, meetings, etc.)
Longitudinal Impact Study (on-going)

‘Holistic’ framework

- Study sought to produce a holistic analysis of the Project's impact on the lives and livelihoods of students who have engaged with BHER programs in the context of voluntary repatriation (graduates in Somalia) and local integration (refugee and host community members in north-east Kenya)

Methods

- Online survey of past and current students (212 respondents) and interviews (20 individuals) focused on 5 key areas: livelihoods/employment, continued studies, family life, community life, and mental health

Study session in BHER computer lab (H. Kim, 2019)
Longitudinal Impact Study con’t

Preliminary findings:

- **93.8%** of respondents report their program of study helped them develop the necessary skills and knowledge to attain work.
- **82%** report improved mental health/personal outlook post-BHER
- **95%** report families became more supportive of education post-BHER
- **77%** report strong community involvement in issues/initiatives in education, social justice, etc.

*Report to come in Summer 2022*
Understanding **holistic impact** of connected learning in personal / regional development

- Importance of **partnerships**
- Working/innovating in **one place**
- Steps forward for BHER

*Teacher in the camps (E. Antze, 2015)*
Thank you / Merci!

See [www.bher.org](http://www.bher.org) or *Borderless Higher Education for Refugees* book (Bloomsbury Publishing) to learn more about BHER

Learn more / En savoir plus