

Building Resilience Through Education: rationale and conceptual underpinnings

Concern Worldwide's irrigation project has proved successful in changing the livelihoods of hundreds of households in Wolaita, Ethiopia. Seeds that lay dormant in this dry landscape have come to life following the introduction of the missing ingredient: water. In a strange yet comparable analogy, the young people of Wolaita are dormant because of limited opportunity. Education is proffered as the missing ingredient by the BRTE Programme to awaken the capacities in these youths and to enable them to transform their livelihoods to overcome the shocks and stresses that repeatedly impact their society.

The Building Resilience through Education (BRTE) Programme presents a novel approach for academia to engage with established relief and development stakeholders to transform the livelihoods of communities that are plagued with recurring shocks and stresses. BRTE is being introduced in the wake of the Agenda for Humanity that provides a framework for action, change and mutual accountability in the effort to meet the commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda for humanity comprise five core responsibilities one of which advocates 'working differently to end need' by: reinforcing not replacing local and national systems; anticipating and not waiting for crises; and delivering collective outcomes that transcend the development and humanitarian divide (UN OCHA, 2016).

This position paper presents the rationale and conceptual underpinnings of the BRTE Programme in its bid to work differently to end need. It describes the background as a rich inter-sectoral partnership of stakeholders that has been in gestation for almost five years. It then proffers the aim of this academia led inter-disciplinary approach that is central to the BRTE thesis to break the cyclical chain of crises experienced in the Wolaita¹ zone. The paper concludes by offering examples of collective outcomes that should benefit all programme partners while not losing sight of the goal – to build a resilient society in Wolaita.

Background and Rationale

The BRTE consortium builds on the outcome of an ex-post evaluation undertaken to assess the impact of Concern Ethiopia's interventions in Damot Woyde² over the period of 25 years from 1985 to 2010. The study was carried out by UCD's Centre for Humanitarian Action and commissioned by Concern Worldwide. The study found that Damot Woyde progressed from one of the poorest districts in the Wolaita³ zone in 1985 to be ranked among the more developed districts in 2015 largely due to strengthened human, social and financial capital (Gibbons, Dupre, & Stirling, 2017). However, Damot Woyde's agro-ecological conditions and lack of availability of water continue to render it extremely vulnerable to cyclical extreme weather hence chronic exposure to disasters. The recurring disasters continue to interrupt development progress despite the population's undoubted enhanced capacity to absorb climatic extremes. Wolaita has experienced disasters of varying degrees in 1984, 1991, 1991, 2003, 2010 and it is also currently experiencing severe drought. UCD

¹ Wolaita is a zone with a population of over two million in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region, Ethiopia

² Damot Woyde is one of thirteen woredas/ districts in the Wolaita zone

³ Wolayta is a zone with a population of over two million in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region, Ethiopia.

CHA's study found that the absorptive and adaptive capacities of communities had been greatly advanced due to Concern Ethiopia's interventions, however many advances were short lived due to recurring disasters (ibid).

Recurring disasters are not unique to this region. The world is experiencing a growing number of disasters due to both natural as well as manmade hazards. In 2015 alone, the world experienced 346 disasters due to natural hazards which claimed 22,773 lives, affecting over 98 million others and causing economic damages of up to US\$66.5 billion (EM-DAT, 2016). Most of the people affected are in the global South. For instance, between 2003 and 2013, disasters in developing countries affected more than 1.9 billion people and caused over US\$494 billion damage. Least developed countries continue to rank highly on the INFORM index, especially in relation to hazards and exposure, vulnerability and lack of coping capacity dimensions (IASC and EC, 2016). Food insecurity and recurrent crises in Sahel and the Horn of Africa persist despite massive expenditure by the humanitarian sector since at least the 1980s. Ethiopia is currently experiencing the worst drought in 50 years due to the El Niño effect, affecting over ten million people.

Due to the protracted nature of crises in these regions, there has been a growing demand for both humanitarian action and development to focus on building greater resilience of vulnerable communities beyond focusing solely on absorptive and adaptive capacities that passively accept the likelihood of recurrent crises, but to achieve greater transformation of societies in order to end the pattern of such crises (World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat, 2015). This thinking is not new - the European Union recognises the significance of enhancing transformative capacity in addressing chronic vulnerability (European Commission, 2016). Significantly, the European Agenda on Migration emphasises the need to create economic and education opportunities to address the root causes of irregular migration. The EU also emphasises the need for more collaborative and targeted approaches such as system wide approaches, which consider that causes of vulnerability and poverty are multifaceted and interlinked and hence demand a multi-level, multi-sectoral and holistic response. The recently adopted *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*, which will guide global efforts to address disaster risk, recognises that, **'there is a need for the public and private sectors and civil society organizations, as well as academia and scientific and research institutions, to work more closely together and to create opportunities for collaboration.'** This sentiment echoes the EU's Resilience Communication (2012) 586, where it calls for a fundamental reconfiguration of the working relationships between public, private and third sector aid actors in enhancing resilience. Recognising EU Council resolution on resilience which calls for investing in capacity strengthening across all relevant sectors and ensuring that analysis and solutions are rooted in local ownership and the experience of affected communities, countries and regions (ibid). **However, while the rhetoric is well advanced, there are few tangible examples of how to realise this level of resilience.**

BRTE Conceptual Underpinnings

The BRTE Consortium aims to provide a model for achieving this level of resilience by building the capacity of the educational institution to build resilience in Wolaita. It will do so by adopting a **novel approach that is inter/multidisciplinary, intersectoral and that recognises the multi-dimensional nature of resilience**, involving transformative as well as absorptive and adaptive capacities. The BRTE project is inter/multidisciplinary in the sense that it harnesses the insights of the range of disciplines of the comprehensive universities that are members of the consortium. It is also intersectoral in that it draws together a complementary set of stakeholders to address this

topic. The Consortium comprises the following members: two universities, Wolaita Sodo University and University College Dublin; NOHA, an association of universities engaged in humanitarian education and research; Concern Worldwide, a humanitarian NGO with a long-standing presence in Wolaita; and Future Analytics, a private sector consultancy company engaged in resilience planning and research. Finally, while cognisant of the ethical obligation to continue to support the absorptive and adaptive capacities of residents of the Wolaita zone, the BRTE consortium recognises the potential of a long-term partnership in research and education in ultimately transforming the livelihoods of the people of Wolaita.

The methodological approach of BRTE is founded on three inter-related components: The first component is **principled research partnership**. Experience has shown that innovation-oriented research conducted by institutions with vastly different capacities must be guided by explicit guiding principles to be both effective and sustainable. Such partnerships need to be principled to be effective to the extent that research problems and research methodologies are appropriately framed and led by the institution from the global South. Equally, such partnerships need to be informed by principles that cultivate and sustain capacity to undertake independently-guided research. The fundamental principles underlying the BRTE consortium will ensure that such an approach is undertaken. These principles derive from the long-standing interaction between the BRTE consortium members and are motivated and sustained by the mutual interests, and shared benefits, identified by the parties. Thus, the principles underlying the consortium are respect, commitment to equality, transparency and reciprocity.

The second strand of BRTE's methodological approach is its commitment to a **transdisciplinary approach that draws on disparate knowledges into service to a society facing recurrent crises**. Traditionally, research partnerships between institutions from the North and South have been confined to disciplines or, less frequently, address a limited number of issues from an inter-disciplinary perspective. This has led to a somewhat fragmented approach to addressing challenges in the regions in which research institutions often have an important outreach mandate. Such mandates are important justifiers of the significant demand on public expenditure that research institutions of the global South tend to make. By adopting a whole-of-university approach that incorporates the arts and humanities as well as the natural sciences and engineering in addition to the social sciences, a holistic approach to addressing societal challenges by the research institution in the global South is enabled. The engagement of Concern Worldwide and NovaUCD (the UCD body responsible for UCD's highly successful private sector engagement) within the consortium ensures a strong and dense system of inter-sectoral collaboration that will aid in ensuring that the outputs of the consortium create societal impact.

The third key feature of BRTE's methodological approach is its **explicit orientation towards research and innovation outcomes that lead to transformative resilience**. In undertaking a transdisciplinary approach that is rooted in addressing societal challenges identified and driven by WSU, the consortium's methodological approach can be oriented towards achieving transformative resilience. Although initiatives are urgently required in Wolaita aimed at enhancing the absorptive and adaptive capacities of communities in the face of recurrent crises, the research approach adopted by the consortium is much more ambitious, aiming at enhancing the transformative capacity of communities so that the recurrent crises to which communities are exposed become increasingly resolved rather than merely responded to. To this end BRTE is cognisant of the enormous contribution that enhanced research and education capacity can make in helping to make the most of increasing opportunities to harness the human capital of the region in overcoming recurrent crisis.

Operationalising BRTE

The BRTE Programme will be operationalised through three work packages, with the following objectives:

- *To build the requisite critical educational infrastructure to shape an economy oriented towards resilience actions:*
- *To establish the educational platform to deliver appropriate and relevant education to guide resilience thinking at all levels:*
- *To develop capacities to conduct innovative research to transform livelihoods in Wolaita.*

In building the **requisite critical infrastructure to shape an economy oriented toward resilience actions**, O'Brien (2011) argues that building transformative capacity demands a combination of technological innovations, institutional reforms, behavioural shifts and cultural changes among the relevant stakeholders at all levels. These elements require thorough research to position transformative thinking in resilient livelihood system thinking. In pursuit of this objective the following outcomes will be pursued:

Outcome 1: Establish an appropriate educational strategy to progress resilience education and research that is fit for purpose - This will involve bringing a team of five high-ranking staff members from WSU to UCD for networking and training towards agreeing a joint strategy to progress further education and research. The joint strategy will be progressed by a team of experienced researchers from WSU that will engage in a peer-mentoring approach with UCD counterparts for at least three months. This research team will address key academic infrastructural issues, including education, research, buildings, IT, International Office, NovaUCD, and the Research Office. The team will be provided with 'space' to both work together to review WSU's structure and work closely with counterparts from UCD to develop the most appropriate educational structure to support resilience education and research. The teams will present their research findings to their respective senior management for agreement and implementation. There will be follow-up visits by the UCD team to support the roll out of the envisaged educational infrastructure enhancement strategies.

Outcome 2: Information and Communication mechanisms – building the critical cyber and physical infrastructure: Adequate IT infrastructure is crucial to the success of any university in the 21st century. Much of education and research materials are currently available online and the trend towards greater online education seems inexorable. WSU is well placed, as a relatively new university, to develop a state of the art IT system to support resilience education and research. It will be important for WSU to develop a system that is suited to its own standards. Engagement of WSU's staff members with their counterparts in UCD's IT Services will be crucial in achieving this task.

Outcome 3: Administration and technical: The seconded WSU staff will attend various trainings ranging from leadership to university management. The visiting staff will be expected to engage in a peer mentoring approach with counterparts in various schools across UCD in relation to various modules, courses and research activities. The findings of the research will give direction to infrastructural improvements to enhance research and education exchange. UCD will second a team of experts to support WSU in the implementation the envisaged changes.

In establishing **the educational platform to deliver appropriate and relevant education to guide resilience thinking at all levels**, the tendency has been for universities and other education providers to focus on sharing courses and materials without addressing the asymmetries that hamper cooperation between educational institutions. While there is both a need and a willingness to share information, the value of this sharing of academic staff and resources is limited in the absence of an

educational qualifications framework to guide exchanges. In addition, a new focus on transformative resilience will require creating an educated workforce to attract new industry and business into the area. In pursuit of this objective the following outcomes will be advanced:

Outcome 1: relates to the establishing of a qualification framework to facilitate joint degrees:

This will involve bringing together international, inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary (3is) researchers to draw and strengthen collaborative relationships to undertake this task. The scientists will be drawn from the fields of education, engineering, health, agriculture and political science to examine the applicability of EQF and other similar qualifications frameworks to the joint degrees. This will be conducted collaboratively by University College Dublin (UCD), Concern Worldwide (CWW), Wolaita Sodo University (WSU), and local NGO staff members normally engaged in Ethiopia with NOHA taking the lead. The output of this will be the establishment of a qualifications framework between the two universities that will enable awarding of joint degrees.

Outcome 2: relates to the joint development of educational programmes at all university levels:

Academics from a range of disciplines, including: disaster management, education, public health/medicine, sociology, agricultural science, veterinary medicine, engineering, business and the natural sciences will examine the potential to share materials and programmes. A range of modalities will be employed, depending on the discipline, including: staff exchange, developing joint modules, e-learning modules, and blended methods.

Outcome 3: relates to the review and development of extension materials on resilience for training and outreach programmes:

Academic staff will review and develop outreach extension education material in order to engage wider society in Wolaita. While academics from both WSU and UCD will provide the necessary guidance on this task, CWW with more than 25 years experience working in Damot Woyde will provide the necessary expertise on contextualisation of the messages to enhance the relevance and appropriateness. The effectiveness and impact of the training and outreach programmes will then be traced through methodology designed by UCD Agribusiness and Rural Development Section.

In **develop capacities to conduct innovative research to transform livelihoods in Wolaita**, BRTE seeks to identify innovations that will allow the people of Wolaita to better manage crises and promote new ways to enable them to expand their livelihood base beyond agriculture and local service provision. In pursuit of this objective the following outcomes will be advanced:

Outcome 1: to establish a research innovation hub – linked to NovaUCD: This task will focus on introducing WSU to NovaUCD, the Irish Humanitarian Innovation Hub and other initiatives housed at UCD. At NovaUCD, state-of-the-art facilities, new high-tech and knowledge-intensive companies are nurtured and supported to enable them to grow, develop and create jobs. Research that leads to innovative products and services is fostered. Therefore, this task will provide a platform through which WSU will develop appropriate products across a range of food, engineer, medical hence supporting new ventures and entrepreneurs. This will enable the introduction of private sector engagement at WSU in line with WSU needs and priorities. The identified private sector companies will help to design, create and make innovative products for various enterprises.

Outcome 2: Further research on DRR and Disaster Management: WSU staff members will be hosted by CWW, which has a long established practical experience in DRR, and will collaboratively adopt a research design based on a conceptual framework and guided by a cutting-edge literature review. The research design will allow for the investigation of the under-explored nexus between transformative resilience and DRR. The seconded staff members will benefit from the expertise provided by CWW experts. WSU members will be joined at UCD by their counter parts from NOHA. Together with Experienced Researchers (ER)

and Early Stage Researchers (ESR) from UCD they will review key concepts and philosophical thinking on how education can enhance transformative resilience.