



# Erasmus+

## Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) action

### Regional Report Asia



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# **Erasmus+**

## **Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) action**

### **Regional Report Asia<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Defined as 'Region 6' in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide and covering Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, DPR Korea, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam.





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# 1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE REPORT

This report is based on the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency's evaluation of the final project reports of the first generation of Capacity Building for Higher Education (CBHE) projects selected for funding in 2015<sup>2</sup>. Altogether 138 projects were funded in 2015 and 88 finalised projects have submitted their final reports in 2019, among which 26 were implemented in Asia<sup>3</sup>.

The report's results are therefore based on a relatively small sample of finalised CBHE projects<sup>4</sup> and are to be considered as preliminary and to be reviewed at a later stage. The analysis also takes into account the institutional monitoring visits and cluster meetings that were organised by the Agency as part of its monitoring strategy.

The report analyses the role of the CBHE action as regards the **impact and sustainability of the funded projects** together with their **inclusiveness** (participants with disadvantaged backgrounds and fewer opportunities compared to their peers). More specifically, the report looks into the institutional development of higher education institutions (HEIs), their modernisation of study programmes and their teaching and learning methodologies, structural reforms and the strengthening of HEI technical capacities. It will zoom in on the **opportunities created for individuals** (students, academic and administrative staff) and third parties such as enterprises, chambers of commerce, etc.

The report will also examine how the EU projects have influenced **national policy developments in the education sector**, mainly but not exclusively through 'Structural Projects'. Special attention is given to the strengthening of **regional cooperation** through CBHE projects that include two or more countries from the same Region.

Finally, the analyses will be used to identify **challenges** and provide a set of **recommendations** for future reference.

2 CBHE projects have a funding between EUR 500,000 and 1 million and normally last 3 years; with very few shorter projects of 2 years duration. A high percentage of projects asked for a contract extension to catch up with implementation delays and will last between 3-4 years

3 27 projects were funded in 2015 but only 26 have submitted their final reports in 2019.

4 There are about 700 running projects after 5 annual calls, starting in 2014.



## 2. INTRODUCTION

The CBHE action of the Erasmus+ Programme supports the modernisation and development of HEIs and the educational systems in Partner Countries. Capacity Building projects are expected to have a long-term structural impact and their direct influence is on institutions and educational systems rather than on individuals.

European HEIs have a key role to play in supporting the modernisation efforts of emerging and developing parts of the world. Via the development of the educational systems of Partner Countries, they contribute to a sustainable development of the economies and societies as a whole and they allow challenges to be addressed at national, regional or even global level (e.g. climate change). In this context, the involvement of national authorities (Ministries of Education) plays a critical role.

International consortia of HEIs (including private businesses) strengthen the quality of higher education in the Partner Countries by providing to students new and upgraded skills needed in the labour market, introducing innovative approaches in teaching and learning and providing entrepreneurial skills.

The CBHE action is implemented through two types of projects, which aim to have an impact on HEIs or on the educational system as a whole. While '**Joint projects**' aim at the development of HEIs (e.g. curriculum development, governance of institutions, etc.), '**Structural projects**' address important challenges for the educational systems of the Partner Countries (accreditation, quality assurance in Education, PhD education, etc.).

Both project types address one of the following **three pillars**

1. Curricula Reform
2. Modernising university governance and management
3. Strengthening of relations between HEIs and the wider economic and social environment

based on *pre-established national<sup>5</sup> and/or regional priorities*.

Countries in different regions worldwide - listed in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide- are able to take part in CBHE. Region 6 comprises the Asian countries that benefit from the Erasmus+ programme. After the end of Asia Link programme in 2006, no EU-funded cooperation programme between HEIs from Europe and Asia existed to support capacity building activities until the launch of the Erasmus+ programme in 2014. Therefore, the first CBHE projects selected in 2015 can be considered in a way the pioneers of this new generation of cooperation between Europe and Asia after this long gap.



<sup>5</sup> For the ex-Tempus countries defined by the Ministries of Educations of the Partner Countries.

## 3. CBHE IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Higher education varies considerably across the different countries in Asia, but also across the different regions of each country. The Asian countries concerned have a variety of HE systems and level of education, different distribution of public and private HEIs and number of students enrolled. The two emerging nations of Asia, India and China, are drastically expanding the capacity of their HE systems, which include a number of “world class” universities (especially in China). This is not the case for the majority of other countries in the Region, notably the countries designated as Least Developed Countries<sup>6</sup>.

The gross enrolment rate (GER)<sup>7</sup> is low compared to the world average, except for Mongolia, Thailand, Malaysia the Philippines, Indonesia and China. The gross domestic product per capita differs also greatly across the Region. All countries have been going through unprecedented changes during recent years. One common challenge is the poor performance of the labour market as reflected in very low employment rates and high levels of unemployment. HEIs have to tackle a mismatch between graduates’ skills and employers’ requirements.

HEIs in the Region are facing many challenges to meet the huge market demand (increasing student enrolment), the expectation on research activities, the shortages of qualified teaching staff, concern over teaching quality and, in many cases, severe financial constraints. At the same time, the number of private institutions has increased rapidly, not always with common standards or control on the quality of the education they provide.

Structural reforms are a key element of public policies for improving competitiveness, upgrading skills of the work force and underpinning the economic growth. Among the reforms required, upgrading labour force skills (last but not least to attract foreign investment) is an essential element of the structural reform processes.

The CBHE action targets the above challenges through the implementation of international cooperation projects. The results accomplished have contributed to the modernisation of higher education in Asia. HEIs and individuals (staff and students) have benefited from institutional and study programme reforms by using and mainstreaming results of CBHE projects, primarily related to creating new curricula, modernisation of university structures and updating educational

processes. As a result of the first CBHE projects implemented in Asia, the impact can be mainly assessed at individual and institutional level, while changes on the structure and legislative framework of higher education at national level are still not so evident.

The CBHE action applies both a bottom-up and a top-down strategy to align national decision-making with priorities of university development and internationalisation.



<sup>6</sup> Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Nepal

<sup>7</sup> 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



However, effective impact on the normative and hence structural level often remains disconnected from legislative and administrative reforms. Attainments directly traceable to CBHE projects are visible mainly in curriculum developing: creating new student-centred study programmes at bachelor and master level and their national accreditation.

The achievements obtained through CBHE projects, in particular the introduction of new and updated degree programmes and innovative teaching methodologies have provided students in the Region with new competences and possibilities, and this was possible thanks to the input of the European partner institutions. Tangible results become also highly visible through the setting-up/improvement of laboratories, new platforms connecting students and companies and other student-oriented structures and services at university level. This has had an effect on the quality and variety of the academic offer of the participating HEIs in the Partner Countries and hence the quality of training offered to their students.

The support for the management of HEIs and from national authorities is pivotal in this context and vital for the sustainability of the achieved projects' results. The CBHE action has also enhanced the capacities of universities in the Region to manage international cooperation projects.

Thanks to CBHE projects with European partners, bridges have been built for intra-national, regional or cross-regional cooperation that are otherwise unlikely to have occurred due to the national/regional/cultural and academic differences in Asia.

### 3.1. Institutional Development

#### 3.1.1. Curricula Reform

One of the main objectives of the CBHE action is curriculum reform. Partner-Country HEIs work together in high-quality international consortia to revise study programmes or to develop new ones, to engage in new learning and teaching methods and to prepare students with new and better skills for a changing job market and a developing economy.

- ▶ Almost 50% of all CBHE projects in the Region focus on with curriculum reform. Among the projects selected in 2015, based on the information available in the final reports, 300 courses were newly developed/updated. Out of 12 curriculum development projects of the 2015 generation for which the final report has been received, eight have developed courses taught in a foreign language (English).

The modernisation and launching of new study programmes and the introduction of innovative learning and teaching methods (not previously available in the participating Asian HEIs) have improved the landscape of the university sector. Curriculum reform projects can be considered highly sustainable only when all newly created study programmes at graduate and postgraduate level have become an integral part of regular degree programs taught at the HEIs:

### **Implementing quality of education & training of the young Universities in rural area of Cambodia (UNICAM) (562006-EPP-1-2015-1-ES-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

A comprehensive Master Curriculum in Sustainable Agriculture (MSA) has been successfully accredited and launched at three universities in rural areas in Cambodia. Overall, the project has improved the academic capacities of the Cambodian universities in terms of designing curricula according to new standards, training of lecturers and new generations of master students. In a more extensive way, the project has successfully promoted international cooperation in the field of sustainable agriculture.

### **European quality Course system for Renewable Energy Development (ECO-RED) (561571-EPP-1-2015-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The ECO-RED project aimed at helping Vietnamese HEIs to offer five new courses on renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainability at three Vietnamese universities, based exactly on the labour market needs. These specialised programmes for both undergraduate and graduate level allowed also to enhance the experience for Vietnamese staff in curriculum design, teaching methods and didactic material elaboration according to international standards. MOOCs on “Renewable Energy sources and Management” and on “Biomass and Biofuel”, were also designed and recorded, enriching the offer of Vietnamese universities with online courses.

### **Promoting inclusive education through curriculum development and teacher education in China (INCLUTE) (561600-EPP-1-2015-1-CN-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

According to the original project proposal, a new master programme should have been launched at all Chinese universities. However, due to legal requirements at national level and institutional regulations, the consortium realised this is not been possible during the project duration. Six new modules on inclusive education were then created at each university and integrated into existing master programmes (accredited at all universities).

Additionally, CBHE projects have supported the institutions to adopt a more multi-disciplinary approach to curricula development.

- ▶ For the 2015 generation of projects implemented in Asia, three out of 13 Curriculum Development CBHE projects cover interdisciplinary study programmes.

#### **Specific remarks**

The majority of projects focus on the update of existing study programmes through the introduction of new modules rather than creating completely new study programmes. When new study programmes have been created, not all were able to start during the CBHE project’s implementation period or immediately after the project completion. This is because of the long time required for study programme accreditation and the reform of the education system. Therefore, some study programmes could only be launched after the end (eligibility period) of the project. Furthermore, curriculum development projects often **lack guidelines for students and a proper information**

**policy about the new possibilities**, which is a deficiency for this type of project. In general, projects do not give sufficient weight to the **involvement of students** as end-beneficiaries. In most of the cases student involvement in curriculum development takes place only at the end for testing purposes and on an individual bases.

Despite these difficulties, the new study programmes created focused on academic disciplines that are very relevant for Asia, such as sustainable agriculture, renewable energy development or inclusive education. They have contributed to improving the academic offer of Asian HEIs in critical academic fields in which the cooperation within the CBHE projects has brought a decisive benefit.

### 3.1.2. Technological Upgrade

The provision of funds to improve the technical structure of Partner Country HEIs is an important element of CBHE and the provision of **equipment** plays an important role (often almost one third of the total grant). It is an attractive offer to universities, which often lack modern and labour-market-orientated training facilities.

- ▶ Approximately EUR 3.6 million was invested in equipment for the 26 projects implemented in Asia.

Adequate provision of equipment at the universities is vital for supporting practical coursework, especially in the scientific disciplines. Provision of equipment allows the establishment of new and more sophisticated laboratories to support teaching activities, research and practical classes for students. The new facilities are also used to the upgrade universities' centres and modernise faculties and departments' offices.

#### **Toward an Open Resources Upon Services: Cloud Computing of Environmental Data (TORUS) (561797-EPP-1-2015-1-FR-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The TORUS project aimed to develop research on cloud computing in the environmental sciences and promote its education in Thailand and Vietnam. Operational techniques of cloud computing (CC) in the disciplinary field of environmental science and massive databases (Big Data) have been thus developed for future training and projects in Partner Countries. Besides the theoretical and requested practical skills, the project also delivered practical solutions deployed at three basic levels of cloud computing (infrastructure, platform and software) in the Partner Countries with computer hardware funded by the project.

The strengthening of HEI technical capacities by opening new laboratories for teaching is an obvious measure for CBHE projects. Additionally these labs are often used to conduct research and hence create a vital bridge between teaching and research. This is of the utmost importance for Asian countries where few universities have robust research infrastructures. Improving research is indeed one of the main pillars of HE reforms in most countries.

#### **Harmonising water related graduate education (WaterH) (561755-EPP-1-2015-1-NO-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

Universities in Sri Lanka could benefit from equipment that was installed in the environmental engineering & hydraulic engineering laboratories, to be used for student experiments in the courses taught and in their research activities. Because of the upgraded laboratories, HEIs became centres of competence and water quality assessment and started to offer practitioners new courses for professional development.

CBHE projects also strengthened the digitalisation of education by using various IT tools in the teaching process:

#### **Modernizing Indonesian Higher Education with Tested European Pedagogical Practices (INDOPED) (561866-EPP-1-2015-1-FI-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

Indonesian universities purchased audiovisual equipment that was used to organise online mentoring sessions during the pedagogical pilots and online training sessions for students.

Considering the specificities of some of the Asian countries (e.g. the size of the country for India or the geographical composition of Indonesia with its thousands of islands), the improvement of the teaching IT methodologies and tools opened access to higher education to people in remote islands or territories who would have faced difficulties.

#### **Specific remarks**

The option of buying project-specific equipment is important. Nevertheless there are a number of projects in which equipment was used for general purposes (such as the provision of laptops to students and teachers), contributing to the digitalization of Asian universities. However, a thorough state of affairs of the equipment already in place, as well as a real needs analysis at time of application, would ensure better use of the equipment grant.

Moreover, many HEIs reported challenges in the handling of the tendering procedures. Since different tendering rules have to be followed, universities are facing sometimes a multi-layered bureaucracy.

The procedure to understand if HEIs were exempted or not from VAT under CBHE projects, and the requirement to check this with the local authorities and receive a written confirmation, was also confirmed to be quite time consuming. In some countries, like India, it was almost impossible to obtain this written confirmation and this provoked some delays in the implementation of the projects.

#### **3.1.3. Governance and Management Reform**

Despite the diversity in the Region, the majority of Asian universities' governance/management bodies still require institutional strengthening to be able to compete with European and worldwide universities. Universities' structures are still quite conservative and bureaucratic and even when new managers and staff members are hired, they are, very often, not experienced enough to launch



new strategic planning and modernise governance. Moreover, the training opportunities available for university leaders and other key administrative officers are very limited.

HEIs in the Partner Countries need to improve the efficiency of their governance processes and their structures to make them grow internationally and offer study programmes of high quality, which attract the interest of academics, students and of society at large. This implies among other things, sustainable strategies and regulations, efficient international relation offices, quality assurance units endorsing international and European standards, financial autonomy, structures for collaborating with the labour market and strong alumni associations. In this regard, the experience of EU partners is very valuable.

CBHE projects have clearly contributed to improve university governance and make changes at institutional level.

Examples include the modernisation and reform of the management system by creating new units, updating financial management procedures and strengthening the international relations offices:

**Through Academic Cooperation Towards Innovative Capacity (TACTIC)**  
(561653-EPP-1-2015-1-CZ-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The project contributed to the modernisation and reform of the management system within HEIs and to strengthen the competencies of top and middle managers of universities in Cambodia, Mongolia and Vietnam, so that the universities can face the new challenges brought by globalization and the knowledge society. Staff Advisory Offices (SAOs) have been established at all partner universities as centres of a modern approach in solving managerial problems.

However, much remains to be done in the area of governance and management reform for the HEIs in Asia. Possibly new CBHE projects could support the efficiency of the structures in place (e.g. approaches to involve stakeholders in governance, especially employers and alumni), quality assurance procedures, digitised procedures, optimised processes, and mechanisms to trace the employability of the graduates, centres for students and disadvantaged people etc.

#### 3.1.4. HEI's International strategies

The internationalisation of higher education in the Asia is high on the political agenda of governments and HEIs. However, while in Europe internationalisation is considered as a vehicle for enhancing the competitiveness of HEIs and economies, in many countries in Asia it is seen primarily as a mean of supporting national reforms and institutional capacity building. Internationalisation definitely offers a chance to gradually get involved and to improve and develop through cooperation with strong European partner institutions. CBHE projects also provide the Asian HEIs (that traditionally look towards Japan, Australia, New Zealand and the United States ) with new opportunities to cooperatwith European countries.

**Individual academics remain the most important driver of international cooperation** in the region. It is through bottom-up initiatives of academics that short-term mobility, research cooperation, development of joint-study programmes, and other activities are being developed. While there is a high level of commitment to internationalisation almost everywhere, these

academics often do not receive sufficient support to enact their cooperative ventures. Also, the participation in CBHE projects most of the times relies on initiatives of individual professors, without a strong support and involvement of university management. Internationalisation efforts and the participation in international cooperation projects are hampered by certain shortcomings, such as weak International Relations Offices (IROs), an insufficient number of courses offered in foreign languages, relatively poor foreign language skills among students and academics in some countries, lack of staff and weak support for finding and managing research funding. However, the intensity of these shortcomings varies significantly across the countries.

CBHE projects have **increased the visibility** of the HEIs involved, through their strong outward orientation and focus on international cooperation, not only with European universities but also with other universities in the Region and even with universities in the same country with which they have never cooperated before. One of the most visible aspects of the projects' impact is the establishment of informal networks of CBHE beneficiaries. Through the organisation of several national cluster meetings by EACEA, informal contacts have been established among universities' representatives, with exchange of good practices, common or different experiences and challenges. Moreover, this has led to the launch of new joint initiatives such as research projects among universities.

Via CBHE projects, Asian HEIs managed to strengthen research capacities and to increase the impact of the projects:

#### **Strengthening National research and innovation Capacities in Vietnam (ENHANCE) (561749-EPP-1-2015-1-ES-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP)**

The ENHANCE project aimed at strengthening capacities of the Vietnamese Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the generators of Research and Innovation (R&I) by promoting effective R&I management and implementation. This was achieved by 1) building the human capacities in R&I management and implementation through a relevant targeted training programme and by 2) strengthening the institutional capacity and enhancing national networking by setting up a Network of R&I Units in Vietnam.

Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that the impact on the institutional level cannot be considered accomplished, as confirmed by the results of the institutional monitoring visits carried out by EACEA. In most cases, universities are still involved in proposals upon request of the European universities (except for some few cases). It is difficult to assess any strategy of the university to participate in the Erasmus+ programme and to understand how the projects fit in their institutional/ international strategy. An improvement of the impact at institutional level has become evident only in the subsequent years of CBHE implementation in Asia, considering the increase of projects coordinated by Asian HEIs and of their experience in managing EU-funded projects.

## 3.2. Broadening Horizons for Individuals

### 3.2.1. Academic staff

The CBHE action has given professors from Partner Countries the opportunity to meet their peers in different countries. By working together in international consortia, professors have become aware of different perspectives, gained new insights into their academic field and familiarised themselves with international quality standards in education. The CBHE projects have allowed them to work with other experts in their area, leading to direct peer-to-peer knowledge transfers from Europe to the Partner Countries. They have also gained valuable work experience through teaching students in a different country and from different countries (sometimes in a foreign language).

#### Advancing Skill Creation to Enhance Transformation (ASCENT)

(561712-EPP-1-2015-1-UK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

Through the organisation of training courses and workshops, academic staff from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Thailand have improved their abilities in research methods and are now able to apply this new knowledge in their teaching and research activities pertaining to disaster resilience. Building and enhancing capacity to conduct international collaborative research on global issues such as Disaster Resilience will be helpful for scientists in Partner Countries who are going to initiate locally based research in their own countries.

#### Modernizing Indonesian Higher Education with Tested European Pedagogical Practices (INDOPED) (561866-EPP-1-2015-1-FI-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The project targeted the Indonesian Higher Education system. INDOPED pilot teaching and learning methods increased lecturers' capacity for changing the culture of university education by improving their interpersonal communication skills and promoting supportive relationships with the students. The project has also brought student-centred innovation-oriented teaching methods to Indonesia, which provide teachers with new pedagogic skills and prepare students to enter the labour market.

Access to EU projects remains under the responsibility of the same professors who are gaining experience, knowledge of EU rules. This 'territorial gain' is not necessarily always seen as something to be shared. In addition to this, in some of the Asian countries the limited participation of academics is also due to language barriers and the hierarchical system of the universities. This holds true also for Programme Country staff members for the same reasons and is leading to networks of these 'peer groups' risking to produce 'mediocre' project outcomes. It also needs to be outlined that the motivation to be part of a CBHE project is not always only connected to the project's content or cooperation aspects but also to the **generous funding** that the CBHE project offers for personnel costs of professors. The additional remuneration is covering tasks that should be part of the normal tasks of the academics, namely the updating of their degree programmes in the case of curriculum development projects.

This goes 'hand in hand' with the **one-size-fits-all programme structure** of the CBHE action that makes it possible for academics/universities to include a huge variety of project ideas in their applications. Academics and 'professional project writers' sell/recycle project ideas that do not

always correspond to the real needs of the HEIs in Asia (and other Regions) and the CBHE action suffers from a high number of ‘recurrent beneficiaries’.

In general, trainings and workshops organised within the CBHE projects allowed academics to get new knowledge in various disciplines and the **university’s management to be trained**:

#### **Governance and Academic Leadership of Chinese and European Universities in the Context of Innovation and Internationalization (LEAD) (561995-EPP-1-2015-1-BE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The trainings, workshops, seminars and job-shadowing have benefited Chinese academic leaders in enhancing their understanding and capacities in university governance and academic leadership. The project has benefited Chinese HE institutions from different regions. These training sessions and workshops have facilitated and enhanced academic cooperation and exchanges between Chinese and European HEIs (across China and Europe).

- ▶ In the 26 projects of the 2015 selection that were implemented in Asia **2910 instances of training of academic staff** were reported, which mostly took place at Programme Country institutions. The new skills and knowledge also strengthen the home HEIs and improve education standards.

The CBHE action allowed academics to overcome national boundaries and also to link with other disciplines within their HEI. EU countries have been experimenting with **multi-disciplinary courses** for some time and most academics recognise the benefits. Therefore, this concept was also introduced in certain Partner Countries and helped to promote innovation and synergies between departments, and broaden the academics/institutions way of thinking.

Working with the **private sector** within a CBHE project has been a new experience for many professors. They have gained greater insights into business realities and could make the study programmes more relevant to business needs.

#### **Supporting Entrepreneurial Development in the Field of IT in Vietnamese HEIs (ICTentr) (561492-EPP-1-2015-1-FI-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The project developed curricula in order to develop entrepreneurial, IT-related and industry-relevant methods of teaching, new content and introducing extracurricular activities that support entrepreneurialism and improve ways of communicating and collaborating with regional businesses and other actors - University Business-Collaboration UBC. Furthermore, the partner universities were supported in enhancing their collaboration with the industry in order to benefit students, teachers and the community.

During the Agency’s monitoring visits, which always took place in the presence of the university management, it turned out that professors working on CBHE projects in different departments/faculties were often not aware that other colleagues in their HEI were also working on CBHE projects. Hence, it was through the Agency’s monitoring visit that a connection between different CBHE projects was established. By the same token it also became clear that some HEI managers were unaware of the activities taking place on the ground, which shows that **proper monitoring is missing** and CBHE projects are not always perceived as institutional cooperation projects to be part of the universities’ internationalisation strategy.



The CBHE action gave staff from the Region the opportunity to **develop their intercultural** skills, by working together with colleagues in a multi-country consortium. Academic and administrative staff gained intercultural experience of working with EU countries and with their neighbouring countries not only from Asia but also other regions such as Central Asia, Eastern Partnership and Russia Federation. For most of them, the mobility under CBHE projects has been the first and the only opportunity to visit another country in Asia or in Europe for academic reasons.

Many stakeholders complain about the lack of job-readiness of HE graduates in Asia, while others report graduates' lack of interactive skills, IT skills, organisational skills, and ability to work in teams. The majority of HEIs are seen as focusing on theoretical knowledge to the detriment of providing graduates with practical knowledge and experience, which is a key concern of employers. In addition, the curricula of many study programmes fail to reflect the combination of skills that employers seek.

### 3.2.2. Students

One of the main drivers of internationalisation has been the need for universities to attract better students and professors to raise the level of education offered and to become more competitive in the global education market. The CBHE action has helped HEIs to set up high-level study programmes, which increased the visibility and attractiveness of the HEI in the national context. Cooperation under EU-funded projects also provides students with guarantees as regards the **fair treatment of their merits** in societies that are often marked by **nepotism and corruption**.

- ▶ Within the 26 Asia CBHE projects, 2900 students were enrolled in new or upgraded courses and 11,400 students received training or took part in mobility.

The impact of the CBHE projects on students has been multi-faceted. They have been beneficiaries of modernised or new study programmes and have been exposed to innovative

teaching and learning methods and motivational approaches. The work with new or improved equipment/infrastructure, interchanging with foreign academics, using new methodologies and short and long-term mobility (available to all three cycles) have enhanced both the academic and practical competences of students.

There are also some examples of joint research projects and joint publications initiated after successful cooperation within CBHE projects. In fact, this research work takes place in parallel to the CBHE project. The mobility of staff and students has allowed the supervision of doctoral candidates by staff from international partners, improving the quality of research and enhancing the reputation of the associated HEI.

#### **Toward an Open Resources Upon Services: Cloud Computing of Environmental Data (TORUS) (561797-EPP-1-2015-1-FR-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The objective of the project is to acquire skills in cloud computing open not only to academics but also to students and technicians. Several theses will be defended in 2020 and 2021. A major reference work (two books) has being edited.

Graduate **entry to the labour market in Asia is often precarious** and they experience periods of unemployment before they find stable employment. This transition from the academic world to the labour market is hampered by a relatively low level of cooperation between HEIs and employers in relation to curriculum design and recruitment. Few employers are involved in discussions of new curricula.

The CBHE action **strongly encourages cooperation of HEIs with the labour market**. In a number of projects, private sector representatives are involved in designing new curricula that are more appealing and relevant for the business world. Professors who internalise this entrepreneurial and long-term perspective have been the standard-bearers of this cooperation, which has translated into internships for students and, in some cases, job offers after graduation. Evidence shows that curriculum development projects working closely with private sector partners and including internships within university education have a higher graduate employability rate and are therefore much more attractive to national and international students.

However, the overall involvement of private business partners in HEI curricula development has slowly started:

#### **Opportunities for the young and graduates employability in Vietnam (Voyage) (561656-EPP-1-2015-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The Voyage project developed an online Database on the graduates that allows enterprises to search for graduates to employ according to specific skill needs, giving the graduates a comprehensive and democratic access to labour market. The graduates data platform enhances the linkage between education and socio-economic partners, the reform of curricula in line with labour market needs, the enhancement of the whole HE system's efficiency, the production of documentary evidence (graduate profile survey) on which to base decisional processes.

- ▶ Overall **23%** of the 2015 generation of CBHE projects include placements and internships for students. Thanks to CBHE projects, many students established their first contacts with the private sector and this interaction increased their employability.

Although the students are the main end-beneficiaries of the CBHE projects, during the different monitoring visits implemented by the Agency it became clear that they are sporadically involved in project activities. The development and modernisation of curricula and therefore the identification of student needs for their future is mainly under the aegis of the HEIs and their academic staff.

#### **3.2.3. Administrative staff**

CBHE projects also have an impact on administrative staff. Although administrative and financial staff are key persons in international cooperation, in most of the universities the role of the Financial Department is very limited, while the International Relations Office is mainly involved in the management of mobilities under ICM without any active involvement in CBHE projects, as confirmed during the institutional monitoring visits. Given the nature of their work, they are rarely the first to participate in mobility opportunities. However, some projects focusing on training and building up the capacity of management and governance gave the opportunity to staff from financial and administrative offices to get a better insight into best practice in financial and grant

management. Sometimes, they have been able to **introduce new practices in their own HEI systems**. Dealing with international projects, they have to work in English and thereby considerably improve their language skills. The equipment budget has allowed administrative staff to purchase new technology and to use their newly acquired skills for the benefit of their home HEI. Some CBHE projects specifically target administrative staff:

#### **Advancing university financial management practices in Southeast Asia (ADVANSE) (561905-EPP-1-2015-1-AT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The project aimed at promoting the modernisation of financial management practices in the HE institutions in Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, mainly through training of financial officers and administrative staff. Training materials have been developed to be used by universities as an annual training for financial officers.

- ▶ In total, 856 administrative staff members of Asian universities were trained within the 26 CBHE projects.

#### **3.2.4. Entrepreneurs/Employers**

The number of local stakeholders involved as partners and associated partners in CBHE projects implemented in Asia is still quite low. However, the projects involving this type of partners demonstrate that private companies, NGOs, Research Institutes and public entities can also benefit from this participation to develop new products and to find students for working on new processes and working tools. HEIs are a rich recruitment ground for businesses, which would like to test potential future staff during internships. Businesses and local stakeholders should participate directly in the curriculum design process. However, this is not always the case. Most curriculum development projects carried out industry surveys to establish the precise needs of the labour market and local stakeholders are mainly involved in offering internships to students

#### **Heightening University-Business partnerships FOR smart and sustainable GROWTH in Asia “HUB4GROWTH” (HUB4GRO) (561978-EPP-1-2015-1-UK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The objectives of the Hub4Growth project were to strengthen the managerial, strategic and administrative capacities of personnel of the 8 PC HEIs (Cambodia, Mongolia, Nepal and Vietnam) for the implementation of university-wide collaboration with local enterprises and to establish and pilot the implementation of interface structures (University-Enterprise Centres, UECs) and services for the development and maintenance of universities-enterprises cooperation at the PC HEIs.

In addition, some CBHE projects have developed new curricula and tools in order to enrich traditional professions with skills for facing increasing social problems in Asia, such as rapid urbanisation:

**Building Inclusive Urban Communities (BInUCom)  
(561478-EPP-1-2015-1-AT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The project aimed at meeting the demand for architects and urban planners in India where rapid urbanisation is expected to lead to a housing shortage in Indian cities of about 30 million people by 2022, which creates difficult conditions for urban poor people. The architects need to be able to deal with the complex challenges of sustainable social housing and the development of inclusive urban communities. The project supported the production of Open Educational Resources, increasing the relevance of architecture and planning studies by introducing multidisciplinary topics like social inclusion, sustainable housing.

- ▶ In total, 3000 individuals active in the private sector, including NGO and civil servants, were trained by the 26 CBHE projects.





## 4. REGIONAL COOPERATION AND NATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT

### 4.1. Regional Cooperation

There is significant potential for internationalisation through intra-regional cooperation. Several important initiatives already exist to foster such cooperation in both teaching and research. Academics in Asia are eager to seek cooperation with institutions from the same Region. Indeed, when there is a preference for international cooperation, the geographic or cultural closeness (expressed in factors such as language and religion and a tradition of cooperation) tends to prevail.

In certain countries, relations between HEIs, before they started their collaboration in the frame of the CBHE projects, were quite competitive. However, after having worked together HEIs often discovered the hidden benefits of this collaboration. For example, some HEIs realised that sharing resources, such as research databases, open learning platforms and scientific laboratories, saves costs.

The sharing of resources within the CBHE projects led to greater interaction between professors and more intensive sharing of ideas. Hence, when cooperation went particularly well within a CBHE project, the universities involved decided to sign Memoranda of Understanding for exchange of students and staff (also under ICM) and launch other common initiatives such as research projects:

#### **Universities as key partners for the new challenges regarding food safety & quality in ASEAN (AsiFood) (561630-EPP-1-2015-1-FR-EPPKA2-CBHE)**

Montpellier SupAgro (France) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for student learning mobility with the Asian Institute of Technology and Kasetsart University (Thailand). Montpellier SupAgro has also set up International Mobility Credit Programmes with Cambodia and Thailand for PhD students. A MoU was signed between the National University of Agriculture in Vietnam and Kasetsart University to promote staff and student exchange, and the recognition of credits taken from both universities.

#### **Network of universities and enterprises for food training in Southeast Asia (Nutri-C) (561945-EPP-1-2015-1-BE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

Hanoi University of Science and Technology and Ghent University started to develop a new bilateral project to promote and create a joint Research Development centre on milk, dairy products and co-products.

The CBHE action has contributed significantly to the strengthening of the cooperation in the Region. It provides a means by which HEIs can work together on themes of mutual interest across national and ethnic boundaries and it promotes people-to-people contacts, which help to change mentalities and diminish prejudices.

A number of academic subject areas lend themselves to a regional dimension, such as agriculture, engineering and environmental studies, and have proved to be a suitable fora for cooperation. In working together, exchanging best practice and benchmarking against each other, each country has learned from its neighbours. In terms of geographical scope, 61 % of the projects are regional or cross-regional projects involving 11-15 institutions from different countries.

It is also interesting to note that thanks to cross-regional projects there is cooperation with other countries in various other world Regions:

#### **Harmonising water related graduate education (WaterH)**

**(561755-EPP-1-2015-1-NO-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The project involves China, Sri Lanka and Ukraine and has developed learning and teaching tools, methodologies and pedagogical approaches in water related graduate education, targeted to the two Regions involved.

#### **Training Against Medical Error (TAME)**

**(561583-EPP-1-2015-1-KZ-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The project involving Kazakhstan, Vietnam and Ukraine introduced innovative pedagogy methods providing training for students against medical error (TAME), minimising morbidity and mortality resulting from medical errors in the three countries from different regions involved.

## **4.2. National Education Reforms**

**Structural projects** are of particular importance for triggering and supporting developments and reforms of the national education systems in the Partner Countries. They are therefore usually single-country (**national**) projects.

With only one Structural Project selected in 2015, the contribution to the policy objectives of the Partner Countries in the Region is still very limited in terms of policy reform.

#### **Strengthening National research and innovation Capacities in Vietnam**

**(ENHANCE) (561749-EPP-1-2015-1-ES-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP)**

Within the ENHANCE project, encounters and workshops have fostered an increased dialogue among academia, HEIs and national authorities to improve R&I units of Vietnamese HEIs. A White Paper -"Recommendations towards the improvement of R&I management and implementation in Vietnam"- has been produced both in English and Vietnamese.

However, it should be stressed that Joint Projects as well may contribute to initiate national debates, highlight policy gaps and indirectly give an input to national reforms:

**Supporting Entrepreneurial Development in the Field of IT in Vietnamese HEIs (ICTentr) (561492-EPP-1-2015-1-FI-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The project activities supported the Vietnamese national and local ICT development strategies and especially the ICT Development Strategy of the Vietnamese Prime Minister. This is in line with the Prime Minister's strategy to promote Vietnam as an ICT industry country.

**Advancing university financial management practices in Southeast Asia (ADVANSE) (561905-EPP-1-2015-1-AT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

As a result of round tables organised with local stakeholders, the project has developed a number of White Papers that have been submitted to policy makers. The objective of these documents was to support future national reforms in terms of financial management at universities in Cambodia, Mongolia and Vietnam (which are more and more driven towards being autonomous).



## 5. INCLUSIVENESS

### 5.1. People with fewer opportunities

- ▶ Around 27% of the CBHE projects in Asia include a priority for the involvement of people with fewer opportunities.

#### Promoting inclusive education through curriculum development and teacher education in China (INCLUTE) (561600-EPP-1-2015-1-CN-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

Improving teaching strategies with a focus on inclusive education, and as a consequence improving the capacity of schools to deal with students who are more vulnerable (especially ethnic minorities and people with disabilities) was the main objective of this project.

Given the socio-economic difficulties of some Asian countries, especially the Least Developed Countries, it can be said that many projects have involved people (staff and students) from a lower socio-economic background.

### 5.2. Institutions Located in less developed regions

Institutions located in the main cities of Asian countries participate more often in CBHE consortia but there is no ‘geographic monopoly’: in Asia the CBHE action reached also HEIs outside the capitals, with participation from HEIs located throughout the territory.



## 6. PARTICIPATION OF LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES (LDCs)

Under the CBHE action special attention is given to the LDCs, which in Asia are **Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Nepal**.

These countries still face disparities in access to higher education, female participation is still low, access to higher education is very poor for the people in the rural areas and disadvantaged groups. Even if there has been an increase in the number of higher education institutions, the quality of most institutions remains a challenging issue.

Under the first CBHE call the participation of LCDs was still very low. Only eight projects were selected, targeting HEIs from Cambodia (6), Bangladesh (1), Bhutan (1) Myanmar (3) and Nepal (2) and none of the projects selected included HEIs from Afghanistan or from the Lao People's Democratic Republic. During the first selection, the lack of participation of HEIs from Afghanistan was due to the difficult political situation of the country and in particular the challenges to cooperate with these universities (i.e. visa problems, impossibility to travel to the country).

The implementation of CBHE projects in these countries is still a challenge: they have to confront long and difficult accreditation processes, sometimes very fastidious fund transfer procedures, challenging implementation of mobility of academics or students, not to mention visa procedures. There is a widespread lack of funds to integrate more staff in international cooperation projects. Moreover, it should be emphasised that access to internet – even if growing – is not available everywhere. Many participating universities want to become flagship higher education institutions. Through the implementation of CBHE projects, the need to set up a university internationalisation strategy has grown.

All projects selected in 2015, except one, were regional projects tackling all three specific activities, namely Curriculum Reform, Modernising university governance and management, Strengthening of relations between HEIs and the wider economic and social environment. Despite the low participation of LDCs under the first CBHE call, the selected projects have addressed important topics that are of high priority on national governments' agenda, such as the following:

- ▶ **Promotion of clean renewable energy generation** to cope with the rising energy demand in both rural and urban areas:

### **Curricula Development of Interdisciplinary Master Courses in Energy Efficient Building Design in Nepal and Bhutan (CIMCEB)**

(561585-EPP-1-2015-1-SE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The CIMCEB project successfully developed and implemented an MSc in Energy Efficient Building (MSEEB) master's program and established energy efficiency laboratories for conducting regular practical classes as well as trainings related to energy efficiency. The project allowed the implementation of the first master programme in engineering in Bhutan. The Royal Government of Bhutan is strongly promoting the use of energy efficient technologies to respond to the need for energy efficient buildings. In Nepal, the project influenced the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction that now integrates energy performance in the National Building code.



- ▶ **Sustainable agricultural development**, which is needed to improve the production of food products for local market and export:

**Network of universities and enterprises for food training in Southeast Asia (Nutri-C) (561945-EPP-1-2015-1-BE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The project has contributed to the capacity building of individual teaching staff at universities in Cambodia and Myanmar on the subject of food technology, food safety and entrepreneurship. Reinforcing the linkage with enterprises for curriculum design and research collaboration, the quality of food-related education has improved.

- ▶ **Research capacity development**, one of the most critical challenges faced by HEIs:

**Advancing Skill Creation to ENhance Transformation (ASCENT) (561712-EPP-1-2015-1-UK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The project aimed to ensure that the targeted HEIs in Bangladesh had the research and innovative capacities to tackle the challenges associated with developing societal resilience to disasters, Asia being the region which has experienced the most natural disasters worldwide in the last three decades. Cooperation with Thailand, Sri Lanka and the EU Programme Countries increased the capacity of HEIs in Bangladesh.

- ▶ Improving **Quality of Education**:

**Implementing quality of education & training of the young Universities in rural area of Cambodia (UNICAM) (562006-EPP-1-2015-1-ES-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) in Cambodia emphasised the contribution of this project in improving the quality of higher education. The four provincial universities of Cambodia have learned and adopted new methods on curriculum design for the master program, which will now be applied by other universities in the country. Thanks to the participation in this project, the MoEYS has started to support the promotion of CBHE in Cambodia and has become very active in projects in which they participate (especially in the Structural Projects that have been selected in the following years and are in line with the Ministry's "Higher Education Vision 2030").

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

A first analysis of the final reports of the projects selected in 2015 has shown that CBHE projects play an important role in the support and the development of the education systems in the Partner Countries. The higher education sector is a driving force for the economy and the society as a whole and the role of the CBHE action is important, as it has a long-term structural effect on the countries. A number of best-practice examples show the benefits that CBHE projects can have on educational systems, HEIs and individuals (academics, administrative university staff, and students).

However, the impact of the CBHE action can be further improved by looking at the challenges that were identified via the sample of final project reports and the monitoring activities (desk monitoring, monitoring missions, cluster meetings) conducted by the Agency. Some of the challenges refer to the CBHE action as a whole, others specifically to Asia.

### 7.1. Challenges

- The CBHE action has a large number of **recurrent beneficiaries** both institutions and individuals. In the long term, this leads to a **lack of innovative and creative project ideas** (and few new collaborations) and diminishes the impact of the CBHE action in the Region.
- **Internationalisation strategies** in HEIs are often absent or insufficiently developed. The creation of project consortia often lacks a long-term strategic vision for the development of the HEIs, and proposals are developed because of existing or recurrent collaborations.
- The large maximum grant amount of EUR 1 million sometimes leads to **'inflated' project budgets** and lowers cost efficiency of project activities. In terms of staff costs, it was observed that individuals (professors/consultants) worked on several CBHE projects in parallel, thus incurring high staff costs. This kind of 'monopolisation' of projects by individual persons is not desirable and leads to projects that are repetitive in their topics, and sub-optimal project results.
- Many difficulties are faced by Asian beneficiaries in complying with CBHE rules and requirements, especially regarding the financial management and the collection of all required supporting documents (due to the bureaucracy and often very hierarchical structure of the universities).
- The participation of **non-academic partners** in CBHE projects is limited and the involvement of private business remains a challenge. Finding mechanisms for the integration of more non-academic partners is vital given their importance for ensuring the relevance of new and updated study programmes for the labour market.
- **Accreditation** is most of the time problematic because it takes a long time and does not allow degree programmes to start within the eligibility period of the CBHE project.
- **Regional and cross-regional projects** face various administrative and management challenges due to different rules and regulations applicable in different countries. This is particularly true for tendering procedures. On average one third of the CBHE grant is planned for the purchase of equipment and complications. Delays in the tendering procedures generate serious implementation problems for the projects and sometimes equipment will only be available at the very end of the project duration.

- The creation of **key project management documents** for quality assurance, management processes, promotion and disseminations often does not meet the expected quality standards (lack of indicators, milestones, responsibilities, and timelines) for a well-managed project.
- **Reaching out beyond the initial partnership** needs to be further developed and should become a key priority for the projects. Intensive dissemination of project outcomes and results during and after the project funding period plays an important role. Excellent results should be better exploited and shared with other HEI working in the same field and facing the same challenges.
- For a number of CBHE projects there is no - or only partial - appropriate **institutional endorsement** by the HEI administration. HEIs must invest more in using CBHE projects for strategic development and provide adequate support via international offices and financial departments. Often, there is a lack of synergies between different CBHE projects (and with other funded Erasmus+ initiatives) within the same institution.
- **Students** are not involved in the project conception, design and implementation in the majority of cases. They are mainly integrated at the end of the CBHE project in its testing phase, if at all. If the expectations and needs of students or student associations (which could be part of project consortia) are not sufficiently taken into account, this lowers the relevance of their studies for the labour market and the sustainability of the funded degree programmes.
- The **sustainability of project results** is often not sufficiently addressed by the CBHE consortia.

### 7.2. Recommendations

The analyses of the 2015 CBHE projects together with the challenges identified suggests the following recommendations for changes and improvements:

- A dialogue with the Ministries of Education should be launched to **facilitate the accreditation of study programmes** developed under CBHE projects and the visa procedure for mobilities under Erasmus+. This should be discussed with the EU Delegations as well. A more active involvement of the Ministries involved in this process would also help to have more projects in line with the national priorities (as the example of Cambodia has demonstrated).
- **Synergy at institutional level** between projects implemented at the same university and at national /regional level between projects dealing with the same topic needs to be increased.
- The action should focus more on **targeted structural changes** in the Partner Countries. The **Structural Projects** should be better integrated and brought in line with the national priorities of Partner Countries for the development of their educational systems. The Ministries of Education play a critical role for the exploitation, upscaling and mainstreaming of CBHE project results and adequate measures should be set up to better link them to the Structural Projects. The organisation of project 'cluster meetings' in the presence of the Ministries of Education brought some good results but this is still not sufficient to guarantee good value for money for Structural projects.

- HEIs must adopt a **strategic approach** and focus their participation in the CBHE action on projects that are in line with their medium and long-term priorities and development goals. This ‘strategic interest’ orientation should then lead to better support of the CBHE projects (e.g. by the international office and finance department), the exploitation of synergies between projects implemented at the same HEI and above all to the sustainability of the projects after the end of their funding period.
- Participation in CBHE projects should be based on **Asian HEIs’ ideas and real needs**, rather than on European initiatives (which are often based on projects implemented in other Regions during the previous years).
- The **ownership** of the CBHE projects by all the partners should be increased via different cooperation mechanisms, guaranteeing a participative involvement of all partners and in particular those from the Partner Countries.
- The **institutional capacity of Partner Country HEIs** to manage international projects needs to be further developed. Although there is a positive evolution of institutions taking over the coordination of CBHE projects, the Partner Country HEIs need more training and support to develop innovative project ideas, to submit competitive proposals and to ensure high quality in the implementation and management of international projects.
- The **diversity of HEIs** and individuals in the CBHE action needs to increase. The CBHE action focuses on high-value projects and this favours experienced (often recurrent) and big HEIs. The ‘entry barriers’ for smaller institutions and newcomers are high. One way to counterbalance this challenge would be to dedicate a share of the budget to smaller projects covering certain types of activities only (e.g. staff training activities, exchange of university professors, update of few modules, summer schools, etc.). However, such an approach is more labour-intensive to manage from EACEA, and would require the introduction of simplified funding modalities (e.g. lump sums) and simplified or external monitoring of project activities.
- The **involvement of some professors in several parallel projects** (as coordinators and/or partners) – and benefiting from generous (top-up) funding of salaries – needs to be reviewed as it undermines the quality of project outputs.
- The **involvement of private business and relevant stakeholders** (e.g. Chambers of Commerce, professional associations, etc.) in CBHE projects needs to be increased when the connection to the world of work is important and students need relevant labour market skills. New approaches to ensure a quantitative and qualitative significant participation of companies active in the Region should be developed. Mandatory involvement of non-academic partners could be envisaged, where appropriate.
- **Students, and student associations** should take part in CBHE projects (where relevant) from the very beginning. This would enrich project development and implementation and allow a better match between project outcomes and the expectations and interests of the students. This would also contribute to guaranteeing the sustainability of the projects, particularly for curriculum development projects.







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# Erasmus+

## Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) action

### Regional Report Asia

#### Resume

This report is based on the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency's evaluation of the final project reports of the first generation of Capacity Building for Higher Education (CBHE) projects selected for funding in 2015. Altogether 138 projects were funded in 2015 and 88 finalised projects have submitted their final reports in 2019, among which 26 were implemented in Asia.

