



# NEWSLETTER - WINTER 2024

## ABOUT THE COVER

The UEA UNESCO Chair Team attended the **International Forum of UNESCO Chairs and Partners** at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa in September 2024. From left to right: Ms. Tizita Lemma Melka (Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia), Dr. Ahmmardouh Mjaya (UEA UNESCO Co-Chair and University of Malawi UNESCO Chair Coordinator), Dr. Catherine Jere (UEA UNESCO Co-Chair) and Mr. Abiy Gizaw Menkir (Bahir Dar University). © UEA UNESCO Chair

## UEA UNESCO Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social Transformation

### UEA UNESCO CHAIR

The UNESCO Chair Programme in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social Transformation was established at the University of East Anglia (UEA) in the UK in May 2016. The programme builds

directly on the expertise of the UEA Literacy and Development Group, which brings together researchers from the School of Education and Lifelong Learning and the School of Global Development at the University of East Anglia. The UEA UNESCO Chair is led by Chairholder Professor Anna Robinson-Pant (UEA), with Co-Chairs, Professor Sushan Acharya (Tribhuvan University CERID, Nepal), Dr. Catherine Jere (UEA) and Dr. Ahmmardouh Mjaya (University of Malawi). The UEA UNESCO Chair programme is an international partnership with university departments specialising in adult literacy and community learning at the University of Malawi; Tribhuvan University Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID) in Nepal; Ain Shams University, Egypt; Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia; and the University of Santo Tomas, Philippines.

This UEA UNESCO Chair aims to develop understanding about how adult learning - particularly for women and young adults - can help address inequalities in the poorest communities of the world. Through investigating how or why adult literacy might facilitate or respond to processes of social transformation, including women's empowerment, the Chair sets out to strengthen the interaction between formal, non-formal and informal learning in research, policy and programmes.



## **ETHIOPIA**

**Bahir Dar University**  
**Adult Education and Community**  
**Development Department (AECD)**

Ms. Turuwark Zalalam Warkineh (Ethiopia  
UNESCO Chair Coordinator), Ms. Tizita Lemma  
and Mr. Abiy Menkir Gizaw,  
Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia



## **NEPAL**

**Tribhuvan University, Research Center for**  
**Educational Innovation and Development (CERID)**

Professor Sushan Acharya (UEA UNESCO Co-Chair  
and Nepal Coordinator), Dr. Kamal Devkota,  
Professor Surendra Giri (Director), Ms. Sudha  
Ghimire, Tribhuvan University CERID

*1 - Nepal*



**MALAWI**  
**University of Malawi**  
**School of Education and the**  
**Centre of Language Studies**

Dr. Ahmmardouh Mjaya (UEA UNESCO Co-Chair and  
Malawi Coordinator),  
Dr. Symon Chiziwa, Dr. Jean Chavula,  
Dr. Foster Gondwe, Ms. Elita Kananji  
and Mr. Alick Bwanali,  
University of Malawi, Malawi

*2 - Malawi*



**THE PHILIPPINES**  
**University of Santo Tomas**  
**The Graduate School**

Professor Camilla Vizconde (Philippines UNESCO Chair  
Coordinator),  
Professor Belinda De Castro, Dr. Gina Lontoc,  
Dr. Ma. Teresa Tricia Guison-Bautista and  
Dr. Elizabeth Hashim-Arenas  
University of Santo Tomas, the Philippines

*3 - The Phillippines*



**EGYPT**  
**Ain Shams University**  
**Adult Literacy Education Centre**

Dr. Eslam Mohammed Al-Saieed (Egypt UNESCO Chair  
Coordinator) and Dr. Nahla Gamal,  
Ain Shams University, Egypt

*4 - Egypt*

## NEWS



### UNESCO Chair newsletter moves to Kathmandu!

This newsletter has been prepared and edited by Co-Chair, Professor Sushan Acharya and Dr. Kamal Raj Devkota, UNESCO CHAIR Coordinator along with Prof. Dr. Surendra Giri, Executive Director, and Sudha Ghimire UNESCO Chair member for Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID) at Tribhuvan University, Nepal. We would also like to thank Abigail Martinez Renteria, Helene Binesse and Qingru Wang for their technical assistance with this newsletter.

The Centre was established in 1975 with the aim of providing research input to policy formulation in school, adult and tertiary education. As a partner organisation of UNESCO Chair, CERID has recently engaged in research initiatives in the areas of family literacy and intergenerational learning, and university and community partnership, in public health in collaboration with the University of East Anglia and our UNESCO Chair partner universities from the Philippines, Malawi and Ethiopia.

In our UNESCO Chair renewal application, we added a fifth objective: to find new ways of decentralising and democratising the leadership of the UNESCO Chair. From now on, the production of the newsletter will revolve between the UNESCO Chair partners and UEA. It



promotes the active participation of the UNESCO Chair partners in knowledge generation, dialoguing and dissemination.

### **Professor David Barton remembered**

To start at the beginning, the idea of applying for a UNESCO Chair was suggested to me by Dr. Mari Yasunaga and Dr. Keith Holmes at UNESCO HQ. We were discussing ways to take forward our collaboration on the IFAD-UNESCO research project on 'Learning knowledge and skills for agriculture to improve rural livelihoods' in Egypt, Cambodia, and Ethiopia (2013-15). Our current UNESCO Chair coordinator in Bahir Dar University, Turuwark Warkineh, was a researcher on this project in Ethiopia, and the Egypt partner was Ain Shams University Adult Education Centre (with Dr. Nahla Gamal as researcher). The concepts of 'situated literacies' and informal learning were central to the IFAD-UNESCO project, along with training for the team in ethnographic and participatory research approaches. While preparing this newsletter, we received the sad news of David's death on Wednesday October 23rd. He leaves a huge legacy for the literacy research community, and was such a dynamic and creative force in life, as well as his writing. There are few of us in this field who haven't looked at 'everyday literacies' in a different way, due to his work on 'situated literacies'. David came as a keynote speaker to the Brian Street memorial lecture at UEA in 2018. Waving a handwritten note by Brian, he shared a detailed textual analysis of the note and his memories of this literacy event. Through his characteristic humour and curiosity, the audience had an unforgettable experience of what it meant to approach literacy as a social practice. David will be greatly missed by all of us in the UEA UNESCO Chair. We offer our deepest condolences to Professor Mary Hamilton and their family at this difficult time.



*5 - David Barton and Mary Hamilton at the Brian Street Memorial Lecture in UEA Council Chamber, March 6th 2018*

*©Anna Robinson-Pant*

## UEA UNESCO Chair Team Join International Forum of UNESCO Chairs and Partners in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Dr. Catherine M. Jere (Co-chair at the University of East Anglia, UK), Dr. Ahmmardouh Mjaya (Co-chair at the University of Malawi, Malawi), Ms. Tizita Lemma Melka, and Mr. Abiy Menkir Gizaw (UNESCO Chair team members at Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia) participated in the International Forum of UNESCO Chairs and Partners convened by the African Union Commission and UNESCO under the patronage of H.E. Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The overall theme of the forum was ‘Transforming Knowledge for Africa’s Future’ and it was held from 30/9 – 2/10/2024 at the African Union Headquarters, in Addis Ababa. More than 550 participants from 90 countries attended the Forum, comprising 60 plenary and parallel sessions.

**The International Forum aimed to strengthen interdisciplinary and collaborative research capacity in Africa**, including through more inclusive and effective South-South and South-South-North research partnerships. Emphasising **that the future of humanity is inextricably linked to Africa’s future, the Forum noted that** established narratives around the future of the continent still reflect the long-standing imbalances in knowledge production and in academic research on Africa. Research remains largely dominated by institutions in, or with close links to, the Global North, and the Forum noted the need for a paradigm shift in how knowledge is generated, shared, and used in Africa. Reframing the narrative requires the mobilisation of diverse knowledge traditions and recognising that the opportunities offered to future younger generations will be shaped by how well Africa harnesses knowledge and innovation.

Our UNESCO Chair team ran a parallel session entitled ‘Youth participation, intergenerational learning and sustainable futures’. The session built on our youth-focused workshops held in Ethiopia and Malawi last year, which were designed to raise youth voices and promote policy dialogue with key stakeholders. Our team set out to share key findings and facilitate discussion among participants on best practices and aspirations for sustainable, stable employment and livelihoods for young people in Africa.

Dr. Ahmmardouh Mjaya introduced the session and the UNESCO Chair and its objectives. Ms. Tizita Lemma Melka introduced the team and moderated the panel presentations and discussion. Dr. Catherine M. Jere kicked off the panel presentations with an overview of participatory methodology used in these workshops. This was followed by Dr. Mjaya’s presentation entitled *Understanding and addressing youth unemployment and livelihoods in Malawi* which described key challenges (including lack of skills or work experience, inadequate opportunities and support, unrealistic requirements and nepotism, which have wide-ranging consequences) identified by youth at the workshop, and subsequent recommendations (improvements in relation to learning new skills; consideration of a variety of forms of on-the-

job training, internships and mentoring, including current non-formal approaches and expertise; and, better understanding of intergenerational learning in the context of rural livelihoods). Mr. Abiy Gizaw Menkir presented on *Youth concerns for peace and security in Ethiopia*, highlighting the role of peace and security as a cause, aggravating factor and consequence of youth unemployment. Finally, discussions were held with the parallel session participants to extend the ideas raised by the presentations.

This Forum offered an excellent opportunity for our UNESCO Chair team to actively engage in discussions and network with other UNESCO Chairs and forum participants.



6 - Ms. Tizita Lemma Melka, Mr. Abiy Gizaw Menkir and Dr. Catherine Jere at the International Forum in Addis Ababa

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## INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY 2024 CELEBRATIONS

Every year, celebrations take place around the world to mark International Literacy Day on September 8th. Here is a glimpse of how our UEA UNESCO Chair colleagues marked this event.

### [UEA UNESCO Co-Chair Panellist at International Literacy Day Global Celebration](#)

UEA UNESCO Co-Chair, Dr. Ahmmardouh Mjaya, was this year honoured by being invited to attend this year's global celebrations of International Literacy Day organised by UNESCO in collaboration with the Government of Cameroon. The conference on 'Promoting multilingual education: Literacy for mutual understanding and peace' was held in Yaoundé from 9 to 10 September 2024. Ahmmardouh was fully funded by UNESCO to attend the conference in person as a panellist but, due to unforeseen circumstances, he was unable to travel to Cameroon and participated virtually instead. The other panellists came from Egypt, Austria, Panama, Indonesia and Nigeria.

The panel discussion, focusing on 'Effective programmes for promoting literacy and peace in multilingual societies', sought to explore effective initiatives that can enhance literacy and peace

in multilingual contexts. The discussions dwelt much on the links between literacy and peace and literacy and language, with the panellists being invited to address two key questions:

1. What are the main factors that make literacy programmes and practices more relevant and effective to foster mutual understanding and peace in multilingual contexts?
2. What are lessons learnt from existing fast language-based and multilingual approaches to literacy development? How can the effectiveness of such approaches be measured?

In his role as panellist, Ahmmardouh was able to draw on his long experience in adult literacy, language and development in Malawi to respond to these questions.

### [Nepal International Literacy Day event](#)

In Nepal, the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) organized an event on the occasion of 58th International Literacy Day on September 8th 2024 at Center for Education and Human Resource Development. The Minister of MoEST, Ms. Bidya Bhattarai along with NFE (Non Formal Education) participants and facilitators from different organizations, CLCs (Community Learning Centres) and I/NGOs and UNESCO Kathmandu Office participated in the event. Best learners and CLCs were felicitated by the Minister. One of the highlights of the event was an experience sharing by a woman NFE school graduate who attained tertiary level education and is currently working as a journalist; and a 71-year-old woman who also studied throughout in NFE school and reached grade 12. The CLC participants presented a play that highlighted the importance of education and the availability of the providers like CLCs. The publications produced by the I/NGOs were on display



*7 - Minister of MoEST with the awardees and participants*

*©Center for Education and Human Resources Development*





*8 - Professor Sushan Acharya (centre, front row) with Adult NFE school learners, Principal and CEHRD staff*

*©Center for Education and Human Resources Development*

## Second International Conference on Youth and Adult Literacy and Education of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries

Dr. Ulrike Hanemann, UNESCO/UII consultant and UEA UNESCO Chair Academic Associate, was invited to the Second International Conference on Youth and Adult Literacy and Education of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) which took place from 9 to 11 September 2024 in Praia, Cape Verde. She was asked to present on lifelong learning and its relationship with youth and adult literacy and education. This input framed the consequent exchange on good practice examples among delegates from Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Portugal, Sao Principe & Tomé, and Timor-Leste. Participants came up with a couple of recommendations that will be circulated to the Ministries of Education of the CPLP member states.

## Esther Priyadharshini invited as UKFIET Panelist

Professor Esther Priyadharshini, UEA UNESCO Chair faculty member, was pleased to be invited to share ideas as part of a panel organised by Yvette Hutchinson, for her inaugural UKFIET Chair's event. The event's focus was on knowledge production/generation and its current biases. Ideas for why the status quo around knowledge production needed disruption, what this disruption could look like and what can be done differently were shared by Dr Bukola Oyinloye, University of York; Dr. Sharon Walker, University of Bristol; Dr. Samuel Asare, Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) and Esther. Esther's presentation focused on inequalities in how knowledge was recognised and disseminated, including the 'Matthew Effect' of few authors and few kinds of publications being cited and circulated in the knowledge economy. Ideas for disrupting such effects include moving away from the property ownership model of citations to a more 'mutual aid' one. Examples from the very different citational practices of Robin Wall Kimmerer (treatment of indigenous knowledge and its citation) and of Kamau Brathwaite (technological innovation to circumvent European bibliographic/publishing traditions) were

shared. Yvette Hutchinson's more detailed blog on the event is available here: <https://www.ukfiet.org/2024/knowledge-generation-and-generations-of-the-same-perspectives/>



9 - @UKFIET

### Meeting at UNESCO Nepal Country Office

On November 5th, Professor Sushan Acharya (Co-Chair) and Professor Anna Robinson-Pant (Chair) were invited to meet the UNESCO Representative in Nepal, Mr. Michael Croft, and colleagues working on education. The purpose of the meeting was to share ideas on future collaboration, in relation to the UEA UNESCO Chair renewal proposal and UNESCO Nepal's current programme. We discussed ideas on developing CLCs (Community Learning Centres) as a holistic approach to lifelong learning and the UNESCO Nepal team shared their work on CLC capacity strengthening. Sushan has been collaborating with UNESCO Kathmandu in their review of the Nonformal Education framework and she highlighted some of her observations on the curriculum. In terms of UNESCO Nepal's future directions, 'greening education' will be an important priority for the next two years and they are involved in a pilot project on climate-smart schools. They will also be looking at indigenous knowledge in relation to climate change, including initiatives relating to the national action plan for the Decade of Indigenous Languages (which started in 2022). We noted that this is a focus which the UEA UNESCO Chair is also developing. The UNESCO team were particularly interested in our research on indigenous health practices and public health as this is an area they may move into. The UNESCO Representative emphasised that UNESCO Nepal is keen to continue collaboration with the UEA UNESCO Chair and could offer a valuable platform for us to integrate our research into policy and practice.



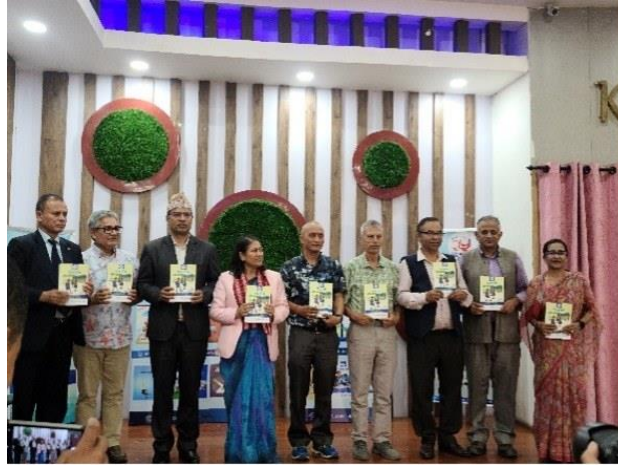
10 - Sushan and Anna meet with UNESCO Nepal country team at their Kathmandu office

*From left to right: Prativa Shrestha, Ujin Shim, Sushan Acharya, Anna Robinson-Pant, Aagat Awasthi*

©UEA UNESCO Chair

### **UEA UNESCO Co-Chair recognised for contribution to educational journalism**

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Educational Journalists' Group (EJG), Professor Sushan Acharya was recognised for her contribution to education field and particularly to EJG's efforts. She was provided with token of appreciation by the Minister of MoEST, Ms. Bidya Bhattarai and the National Examination Board Chairperson Dr. Mahashram Sharma. On the occasion, Sushan and other educators who were also recognised for their contribution, launched EJG's publications.



*11 - Professor Sushan Acharya and colleagues at the Educational Journalists' Group anniversary celebration*

*©Education Journalists' Group*

### **Sudha Ghimire Receives Fellowship in US**

Sudha Ghimire, Assistant Professor at Tribhuvan University and UNESCO Chair Nepal team member, was awarded the 13th Echidna Global Scholar fellowship at The Brookings Institution, in Washington, D.C. Through this fellowship, she is focusing on advancing the sexual and reproductive health rights of adolescent girls in Nepal, particularly through school education. Sudha is using a girl-centered, participatory action approach to raise awareness, promote advocacy, and empower girls to take action for their rights.

In her recent blog, *The Harms of Inadequate Sexual and Reproductive Health Education in Nepal*, she has highlighted the negative effects of misinformation and stigma surrounding menstruation, family planning, body shaming, and abortion. These issues not only harm girls' health but also limit their opportunities. Her research aims to strengthen adolescent girls' agency regarding their sexual and reproductive health rights.

Sudha wants to use this fellowship to promote gender-responsive education and health policies, ensuring that girls in Nepal have access to the information and services they need to make informed decisions about their health and rights. Sudha recently worked as Research Assistant on the MRC-funded project 'Empowering Communities through University Partnerships in Public Health', sharing her expertise in participatory research through Photovoice activities with women in the pilot field site.



12 - @Sudha Ghimire

### **Integrating Transversal Competencies in Teaching and Learning in Nepal**

Dr. Kamal Raj Devkota, UNESCO Chair coordinator for Nepal, has been appointed as an expert in the project 'Integrating Transversal Competencies in Teaching and Learning in Nepal'. This project is being implemented by MoEST's Development Assistance Coordination Section in collaboration with UNESCO Kathmandu. The Task Team, with whom Kamal will be working, has been assigned to review and integrate the transversal skills that UNESCO has outlined in the school curricula and tools and materials for classroom pedagogy.

### **UNESCO Co-Chair's continued collaboration with UNESCO Kathmandu**

Professor Sushan Acharya (UEA UNESCO Co-Chair in Nepal) has been providing technical support to CEHRD (Center for Education and Human Resources Development) and UNESCO



Kathmandu office on nonformal education (NFE) curriculum related work. She conducted an overall review of the NFE and Lifelong Education National Framework with a specific focus on the mainstreaming of gender equality and social inclusion.

### **UEA UNESCO Chair is appointed BAICE Honorary Fellow**



13 - ©Anna Robinson-Pant

At the BAICE 2024 Annual General Meeting in Sussex, Professor Anna Robinson-Pant was appointed Honorary Fellow. This was in recognition of her contribution to BAICE over many years, including as Editor of *Compare* journal (2005-2010), the development of the *Compare* writing-for-publication programme (with Dr. Anna Magyar) and as BAICE President (2018-2019): <https://baice.ac.uk/person/anna-robinson-pant/>

### **Former Newsletter Editor takes up University Position in China**

Dr. Qingru Wang, former PhD student of Professor Anna Robinson-Pant and Dr. Harry Dyer and editor of this newsletter, has moved to a tropical island (Hainan, China) to start her new role in Hainan University this autumn. She completed her PhD earlier this year and decided to stay in higher education and pursue a different path. Qingru is working in Talent Recruitment team, under Human Resource Department, which mainly focuses on high-level talent recruitment, postdoctoral fellow management, and international communication. She has been able to use her skills in intercultural communication to help international postdocs and university staff to better understand each other and solve problems in a more inclusive manner.



14 - Enjoying after work sunset

©Qingru Wang

## WELCOME TO NEW UEA UNESCO CHAIR MEMBERS

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*The University of Malawi has three new UNESCO chair members. They bring varied experiences to the team, including teaching language and literacy, innovative research methodologies and curriculum development and assessment.*

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*Dorothy Bwanaisa Nkhata*



15 - ©Bwanaisa Nkhata

Dr. Bwanaisa Nkhata is the head of the Centre for Education Research and Training (CERT) of the University of Malawi. Her key interest lies in methodological innovation.

*Gerson Mutala Phiri*



16 - ©Mutala Phiri

Dr. Mutala Phiri is a research fellow at the Centre for Education Research of the University of Malawi. He is an assessment specialist and expert in SPSS, RStudio, STATA, Ex-Calibre and use of Excel spreadsheet for data analysis.

*Ms Bubire Jere-Kitha*



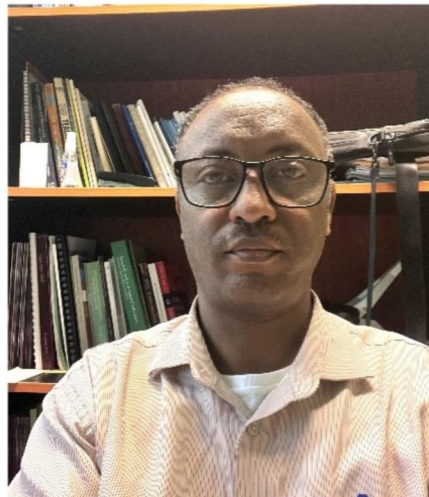
Ms Jere-Kitha is a language education lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Malawi. Ms Jere-Kitha is also a facilitator in foundational literacy courses and a research-mentor for Participatory Action Research (in early grade literacy projects) for the Strengthening Teacher Education and Practice (STEP) Activity through School to School (STS)

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*At Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia, four additional faculty members have joined the team, following the renewal of the UEA UNESCO Chair agreement*

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*Dawit Asrat Getahun*



18 - ©Dawit Asrat Getahun

Dr. Getahun is an associate professor of educational psychology in the Department of Psychology at the College of Education, Bahir Dar University. His PhD is in Learning Sciences (2014) from McGill University, Montreal, Canada. His research focuses on science and mathematics teaching and learning, inquiry learning and instruction, scientific literacy, and scientific reasoning. He has been coordinating large scale projects, including two NORAD-funded projects entitled 'Enhancing the quality of science and mathematics education in Ethiopia and South Sudan' (15 million NOK project) and 'Advancing quality in education in the primary and lower secondary schools of Ethiopia and South Sudan' (20 million NOK project). He was also principal investigator of the CODE/CANADA funded project entitled 'Science Teachers' Understanding and Use of 'Learning Context' in Ethiopian Secondary Schools.' He has been involved in many national studies as a consultant and lead researcher, including the National

Education Road Map Development study and the General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP) national exit evaluation study. He has served in various leadership positions at BDU and is a member of the Education Advisory Council of the Federal Ministry of Education of Ethiopia.

*Tiruwork Tamiru Tolla*



19 - ©Tiruwork Tamiru Tolla

Dr. Tiruwork Tamiru Tolla is a faculty member in the department of Psychology, College of Education, Bahir Dar University. Dr. Tolla is among the few female associate professors in the university and the only one in the college. She has an academic and practical background in adult education as she began her career as adult community skills training center coordinator back in 1994. In addition to her engagement in teaching and supervising postgraduate students, she has been engaged in several regional and national level studies as a researcher. She is also managing her consultancy firm delivering research and community development services to government and non-governmental organisations in Bahir Dar City. Her research interests include family and child development, early childhood care and education, adolescent risky behaviours, menstrual hygiene management practices, gender-based violence, conflict resolution tactics, programme evaluation and other educational, social and psychological related topics.



*Seblewongiel Aynalem Kidanie*



20 - ©Seblewongiel Aynalem Kidanie

Dr. Seblewongiel Aynalem Kidanie is a faculty member in the Social Work and Social Development Department, Faculty of Social Sciences, Bahir Dar University. She is also certified in Mental Health Counselling from World Association of Positive Psychotherapy (WAPP), Mental Health Project Ethiopia. She was a postdoctoral Visiting Fellow of Institute of Social Studies (ISS) of Erasmus University of Rotterdam (EUR). Her postdoctoral research focuses on Women and Politics in Ethiopia. Apart from her teaching role in the university, she has been extensively engaged in research and consultancy projects with diverse local and international organisations. Her research interest areas include health promotion, gender development, women and politics, and social protection for vulnerable women and children. Dr. Kidanie has also experience in leadership as she has been serving a department head, dean of graduate programs, and board member at different universities.

## *Yohannes Mersha Belete*



21 - ©Yohannes Mersha Belete

Mr. Yohannes Mersha Belete is an associate professor in the department of Gender and Development Studies, Faculty of Social Science, Bahir Dar University. In addition to his Master's degree in Gender Studies, he has completed a one-year research methodology course in a PhD proposal development programme organised by the University of South Africa in collaboration with SANTRUST in 2011. He is the founder of the Ethiopian Gender Professional Association (EGPA). He has participated actively in various research projects and has shown excellent teaching ability. More importantly, he has provided wide range of gender and development-related consulting services (research, training, and manual preparation) for various governmental and non-governmental organisations. Currently, he is pursuing his PhD in the social anthropology programme at Bahir Dar University.

We look forward to working with Dr. Dorothy Bwanaisa Nkhata, Dr. Gerson Mutala Phiri, Ms Bubire Jere-Kitha, Dr. Dawit Asrat Getahun, Dr. Tiruwork Tamiru Tolla, Dr. Seblewongiel Ayenalem Kidanie and Mr. Yohannes Mersha Belete.

## EVENTS



### UEA UNESCO Chair at BAICE Conference

The BAICE (British Association for International and Comparative Education) 2024 Conference at the University of Sussex offered a fantastic opportunity for UEA UNESCO Chair members - many of whom are current and former PhD candidates at UEA – to showcase their research. A glance at the list below shows the wealth of research and knowledge-sharing that the UEA UNESCO Chair took to Brighton this summer. Dr. Catherine Jere, Professor Anna Robinson-Pant and Mohammed Naeim Maleki also participated in the conference, and the full team met for fish and chips on Brighton beach!

- **Dr. Chris Millora**, previous UEA UNESCO Chair scholarship holder, was a discussant/chair of panel led by Prof. Mario Novelli (University of Sussex) and colleagues titled *Laboratories of learning: Social Movement Learning & Knowledge-Making in Times of Crises and Conflict*. He also shared findings from his Leverhulme Project on conceptions/understandings of activism among Filipino youth: *(Re)bordering youth activism and learning in response to crises: a photovoice project in the Philippines*.

- **Dr. Hannah Hoechner** presented findings from a BA-funded project with Prof. Yagana Bukar, focusing on Qur'anic schools and their relationship to the insurgency, *Exploring the nexus between faith-based education and violent conflict: Islamic education and northeast Nigeria's Boko Haram crisis*.
- **Rohullah Hakimi** presented his PhD project, *Sustaining Localisation Efforts in Community-Based Education (CBE) in Afghanistan: The Role of International and Local NGOs*.
- **John Zimba** presented his PhD research, *Literacies and Coping Strategies in the post-Covid-19 Pandemic: Experiences of Rural Women in Zambia*.
- **Dr. H  l  ne Binesse** presented with colleagues from the REAL Centre, University of Cambridge: *The impacts and inequalities of donor-driven agendas on early learning research in Sub-Saharan Africa: an overlooked crisis? A mapping exercise of African research on early childhood development and foundational literacy and numeracy in sub-Saharan Africa, using a unique Africa-wide [educational research database](#)*.
- **Dr. Abass Isiaka, Theresa Frey and Professor Yann Lebeau** presented two papers with significant themes developed from interviews and analysis conducted as part of a UEA UNESCO Chair research project with funding from a [BAICE seedcorn grant](#). The papers were titled: *Who decides on refugees' access to HE? Article VII and the UNESCO Qualifications Passport in the movement for inclusive internationalisation*, and *Towards sustainable internationalisation? The UNESCO Global Convention as statement for fair access and inclusive mobility in HE*.
- **Lauren Bouttell** discussed how educators navigated structural precarity and the potentials for social transformation in the context of charities working with refugees in England and Scotland, with a paper based on her PhD research: *Facilitating learning under conditions of precarity: resistance and adaptability in UK refugee organisations*.





## Bahir Dar University Conferences

The fourth annual national conference on **Gender, Internally Displaced People (IDPs), and Health** was held on May 24, 2023, at Bahir Dar University's Gender and Development Studies department. A number of stakeholders attended the conference, including officials from local and international non-governmental organizations, the Amhara Women Federation, the Amhara Women Association, and the Amhara Health Bureau. Additionally, on October 7, 2024, the department hosted a workshop at Bahir Dar University on 'Gender Controversies and Gender Based Violence' in collaboration with the Ethiopian Ministry of Health. Higher officials, department heads and deans, postgraduate students from the department, and invited guests were among the university's attendees. Dr. Meseret Zewdu, the department head and master of the ceremony, stated that the goal was to make the university community more sensitive by clarifying gender-related controversies, and to generate inputs that would be useful for revising the department's undergraduate curriculum. The UNESCO Chair coordinator from BDU, Turuwark Zalalam Warkineh, was invited to both events and she actively participated and shared her insights.



23 - Mr. Amanu Mekonnen and Dr. Meseret Zewdu facilitating discussions at the second event.





24 - Turuwark sharing her insights at the conference

©Bahir Dar University



25 - Some of the conference participants

©Bahir Dar University

**The 10th Annual Conference on Language, Culture and Communication** was organised by the Humanities Faculty, Bahir Dar University. It was held on June 07/2024 with the theme of 'Engaging Minds, Transforming Society: The Impact of Language, Culture and Media'. Abiy Menkir Gizaw and Turuwark Zalalam Warkineh, from BDU UNESCO Chair team presented a paper entitled 'Exploring Indigenous Knowledge, Societal Uses and Continuity in Ethiopia' drawing on their research on indigenous knowledge for the past 10 years.





*26 - Some of the participants of the conference*

*©Bahir Dar University*

### **UEA Research Seminar ‘Culprits, Victims, Scapegoats? Exploring the Nexus Between Qur'anic Schools and the Boko Haram Insurgency in Northeast Nigeria.’**

On 17th October, Prof Yagana Bukar from the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria, and Dr. Hannah Hoechner from UEA, kicked off our regular Education and Development (EDU/DEV) Research Seminar series at UEA, which this year focuses on learning in situations of conflict and crisis and on refugee education.

Hannah and Yagana, who participated via a pre-recorded video message, presented findings from their British-Academy funded project [Exploring the nexus between faith-based education and violent conflict: Islamic education and the Boko Haram crisis in northeast Nigeria](#). In a global climate of heightened fears about Islamic militancy, existing studies often examine whether Islamic schools contribute to radicalisation, neglecting the lived experiences of their students and teachers during conflict. Drawing on interviews and group discussions conducted in northeast Nigeria in 2021–2024, the presenters explored how Qur’anic schools are both impacted by and implicated in the conflict. The paper problematised simplistic victim/perpetrator dichotomies and shed light on longer histories of structural and cultural/epistemic violence in northeast Nigeria. The paper also examined why certain groups, including Qur’anic students, are prone to being framed as ‘dangerous’, and what dangers ensue for them from being framed in such a way. Qur’anic students have suffered violence at the hands of the security forces and experienced a sharp decline in community support in the wake of the insurgency.

The seminar was chaired by Rohullah Hakimi, who is pursuing a PhD in Global Development at UEA. Naeim Maleki, who is completing a PhD in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at UEA, acted as discussant. Naeim shared how the paper resonated with his own lived experiences of violent conflict in Afghanistan, and drew on Islamic scriptural sources to highlight how the Islamic religion is often misused in violent conflict situations and its role misunderstood.



27 - ©Hannah Hoechner

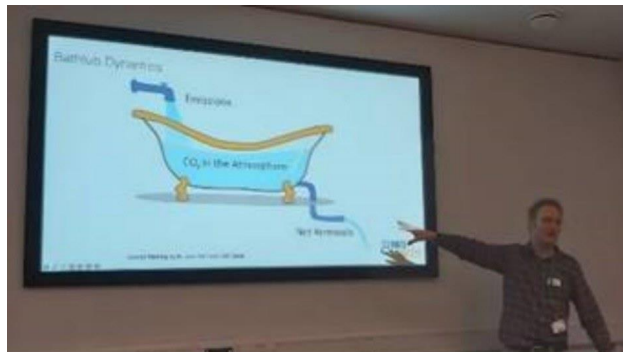
### **UEA Biodiversity and Climate Action Network ‘Critical Carbon Literacy Training’**

On 1st November, a team of UEA students and staff involved in the UEA Biodiversity and Climate Action Network ([UEA BCAN](#)) offered their newly developed day-long ‘Critical Carbon Literacy Training’ for the first time to UEA students. The BCAN team developed the idea of a *critical* carbon literacy training after finding that existing training materials often prioritised the practical/technical knowledge around carbon accounting, at the neglect of the political dimensions of human-made climate change.

During the day-long training, participants learned about scientific facts, including the greenhouse effect, the industrial social metabolism of carbon, and the variegated impacts of climate change. The participants familiarised themselves with carbon foot printing, looking at different diets, consumer goods and forms of travel, and reflected on the merits and pitfalls of counting carbon, considering for example how a focus on carbon footprints can individualise responsibility and displace more radical analyses of the current predicament. Participants then learned about paths to net zero by exploring energy systems and the idea of a just transition. The training also invited participants to reflect on the respective roles of individual change versus system change, and contrasted perspectives prioritising markets and economic growth

with perspectives centring degrowth and voluntary simplicity as the way forward. The training concluded by inviting participants to imagine a desirable future and to reflect on how we could get there.

Going forward, the UEA BCAN team hopes to further develop the training with a view to offering it to wider audiences and to making the materials available for other educators to use. The team would be thrilled to exchange notes with and learn from others running similar trainings. If you would like to get in touch, please email BCAN at [ueabcan@gmail.com](mailto:ueabcan@gmail.com) or Dr. Hannah Hoechner at [h.hoechner@uea.ac.uk](mailto:h.hoechner@uea.ac.uk) (part of the UEA UNESCO Chair faculty team).



28 - Group activities at the Critical Carbon Literacy Training

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### Conference Presentation at Kotebe University of Education

Mr. Abiy Menkir Gizaw, from BDU UNESCO Chair Programme team, presented a paper at the 2nd National Research Conference of Kotebe University of Education, Addis Ababa, on the theme of 'Empowering Educators: Revitalizing the Teaching Profession for Quality and Relevance across all Educational Levels'. The Conference, organised by Kotebe University of Education, took place from June 14-15/2024 at Haile Grand Hotel, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Mr. Abiy Menkir's paper was entitled 'Teacher Education in the Ethiopian Traditional Church Education: What Lessons Can Ethiopian Higher Education System Learn?'



29 - Abiy Menkir briefing an Ethiopian News Agency Journalist about the presentation

©Ethiopian News Agency



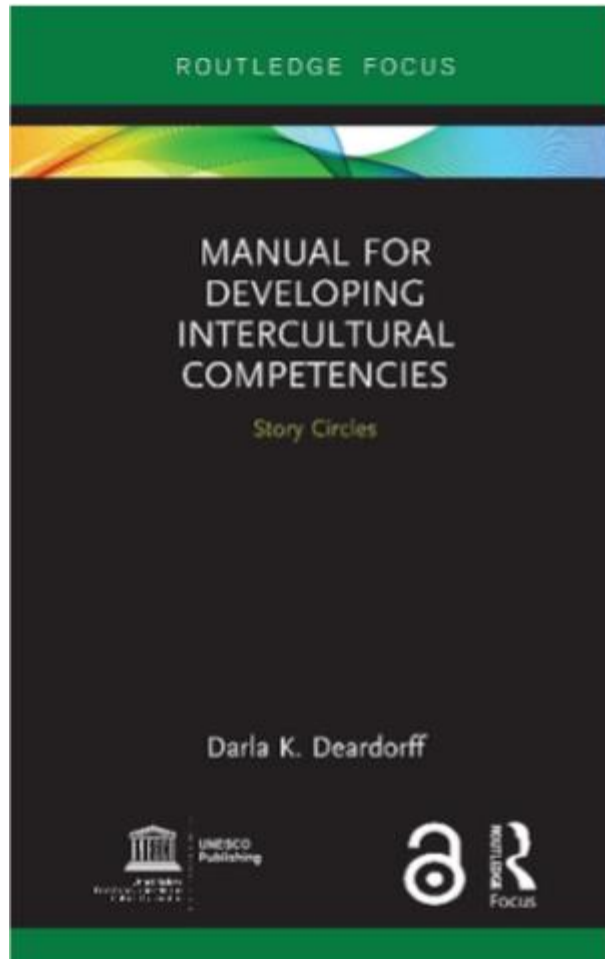


30 - Dr. Birhanemeskel Tena, President of Kotebe University of Education making a welcome speech on the conference

©Kotebe University of Education

### UNESCO Story Circles Train-The-Trainer

Theresa Frey (UEA UNESCO Chair PhD student) was invited to participate in a UNESCO Story Circles Train-The-Trainer event facilitated by Dr. Darla K. Deardorff, UNESCO Chair on Intercultural Competence at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. The event was a part of the UN Summit of the Future in collaboration with New York University and the [World Council on Intercultural and Global Competence](#) on 21 September 2024. The engaging event included an intercultural competencies workshop through practical protocols and methodologies detailed in Dr. Darla K. Deardorff's book the [Manual for Developing Intercultural Competence: Story Circles](#) available in 6+ languages and open access.

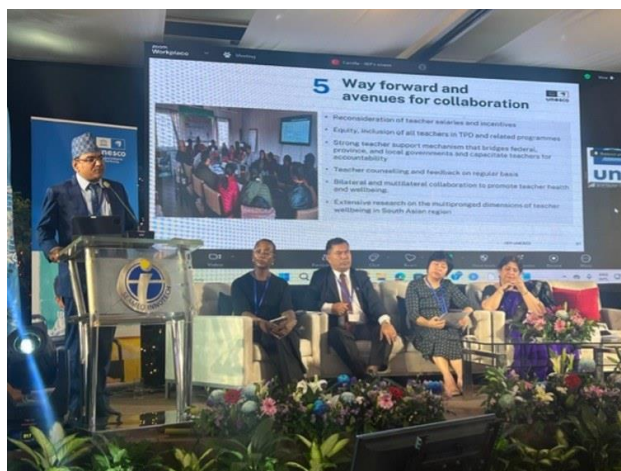


31 - Dr. Darla K. Deardorff, UNESCO Chair on Intercultural Competence, and Theresa Frey at the UNESCO Story Circles workshop  
©UEA UNESCO Chair

## Multi-pronged Analysis of Teacher Wellbeing in Nepal

Dr. Kamal Raj Devkota participated in UNESCO – International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) Regional Conference held in Manila in the Philippines from 5 to 7 November 2024.

Organised with the main theme of *Educational Planning in Asia: Common Vision and Future Prospects*, the conference provided the member institutions under the Asian Network of Training and Research Institutions in Education Planning (ANTRIEP) an important platform to set a new collaborative agenda for educational planning in the Asia-Pacific region with a strong focus on research and training. The conference engaged the education ministries of the Asia-Pacific countries, policy makers, education planners, researchers, UNESCO-IIEP officials and UNESCO regional and country offices to overview the current challenges and promising approaches in the area of educational planning and management in the region, discuss the position papers developed by each of the participant institutes, formulate and explore new modalities of collaboration of education planning for the Asian region. Kamal presented his research paper on learning, equity and wellbeing, focusing on teacher education and teacher professional development in Nepal.



32 - Dr. Kamal Devkota presenting at the ANTRIEP conference in Philippines

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## RESEARCH



### **Lifting barriers: Educated boys for gender equality**

UNESCO, Equipundo, and the University of East Anglia have launched the Lifting barriers: Educated boys for gender equality supported by the Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX) and Innovation Exchange (GPE-KIX), a joint endeavour with the International Development Research Centre, Canada. A research study exploring the potential of selected innovative programmes in Cambodia, India, Malawi, Portugal, the UK and Zambia to generate and mobilize evidence to support contextualising and scaling the impact of innovative approaches to strengthen gender-responsive and socially inclusive education has just been completed. The research is being conducted by a collaboration between the University of East Anglia, Equipundo and UNESCO. This scoping work will help inform the development of a global gender-transformative school-based model to address boys' disengagement from education and promote gender equality in schools and society. Dr. Catherine Jere, UNESCO Co-chair is the lead from UEA side. From Malawi Centre for Social Research, University of Malawi and Sushan Acharya, UNESCO Co-chair from Nepal is involved in the project. A planning workshop was held from November 13th to 15th at the University of Malawi, where further activities of the project were extensively discussed and planned. For



further information is available on [Lifting Barriers project launched nationally to address boys' disengagement from education](#) | GPEKIX

### UK Launch Workshop

On 18th August 2024, a workshop was held in London forming a part of the scoping study for the project 'Lifting barriers: Educating boys for gender equality'. Members of the UEA UNESCO Chair team Dr. Catherine Jere, Dr. Thi Bogossian and Ms Lauren Bouttell alongside Dr. Victoria Cann and Ms Agnes Ilakut organised and facilitated the workshop and produced a report of the findings. The workshop hosted expert stakeholders from the UK working in the field of gender equality and education representing NGOs, government, trade unions, and research institutions. Participants discussed key questions through a world café format, on challenges and enabling factors around gender transformative approaches in education, best practices for collaboration and opportunities for scaling innovations. UK NGOs working on gender equality in education spotlighted their activities, sharing insights into the ways in which they work on the question of boys' disengagement in education in the UK context. The workshop formed a part of a wider scoping study which includes findings from Cambodia, India, Malawi, Portugal and Zambia as well as the UK. Drawing on the insights gathered from promising innovation in these diverse contexts, the scoping study will inform the development of in-depth, country-specific case studies working directly with boys and youth, and the development of a global model for gender transformative innovation to address boys' disengagement from education.



33 - Workshop participants

©Victoria Cann



## Empowering Communities through University Partnership in Public Health

The University of Sussex's Medical Research Council (UK) PHIND project based in CORTH (Centre for Cultures of Reproduction, Technologies and Health) in the School of Global Studies, has been successfully completed. The project was set up under the UEA in 2023 and continued to collaborate with the UEA UNESCO Chair team after moving to Sussex University.

Our interdisciplinary team from education and public health set out to explore how universities can contribute directly to transforming attitudes towards marginalised communities. Bringing together two institutes of medicine at our UNESCO Chair partner universities in Nepal and the Philippines, the project drew on participatory and ethnographic methods to share beliefs and co-construct knowledge around food and nutrition. During the final stage, the team prepared research reports which are now available on our project website, along with reflective blogs and videos: <https://empcommunitiespublichealth.com/>. The University of Santo Tomas and Tribhuvan University-CERID (project partners) held dissemination and engagement events in August for public health stakeholders, students and communities involved in the research (see below). We were delighted that our Research Assistants at UST, Philina Pasicolan and Adonis Basu, were able to travel to Nepal to share the Philippines research findings with stakeholders at the CERID workshop. The team are now planning to work together on publications, including a journal Special Issue.

## Empowering Communities project dissemination in Nepal and the Philippines

**In Nepal**, a national level dissemination of the MRC-PHIND project was held on August 12, 2024 at CERID. The Chairperson of the Sahid Lakhani Rural Municipality, where the research was undertaken, two representatives of the PAR participants, health professionals' education providers, the Rector of TU and personnel of the Ministry of Health and Population participated in the event. Additionally, the two Research Assistants from the Philippines also attended to share their research findings. The main highlight of the dissemination event was a panel discussion involving researchers and two women, representing the PAR participants who had been involved in photovoice activities at Sahid Lakhani.

As part of the project, a Participatory Action Research workshop was organised for medical education students and faculty members at CERID, lead partner for the project in Nepal. Participants commented that they found the PAR training very informative, worth the time and useful to their professions.

**In the Philippines** on August 22, 2024, a community report ('Ulat sa Barangay') was held at Barangay 429, Sampaloc, Manila. This event focused on showcasing of the food safety practices of the community members in different formats, namely: (1) photovoice pictures processing and synthesis using the World Cafe method; (2) interactive games to reinforce learning about correct food safety practices; and lastly, a communal meal with the community members.

The pictures captured during the interviews were placed on manila paper and shown to the participants before the start of the World Café to introduce the context. The participants and the students were then distributed into 5 stations and asked to discuss food safety practices in their community in relation to the following questions: Why do folks in the neighborhood buy prepared meals instead of making them at home? What are the usual issues with food prep and cleanliness among vendors? How can we make sure home-based vendors have clean water and good sanitation? How can we educate home-based sellers about food safety?

A synthesis per station was also done by the research assistant and the medical students. Residents explained that purchasing ready-made food was easier and cheaper than cooking at home but some would still prefer to cook at home, as it was safer for their health. They mentioned that vendors struggled to keep their food preparation areas clean due to cramped spaces and not enough clean water. Pests hanging around food stalls are also a problem. To tackle this, the community suggested doing regular checks and giving out covered trash bins. Some residents pointed out that water supply in some areas was not reliable, and speculated that vendors often used untreated water to prepare food. A former vendor suggested that provision of clean water was a big challenge that needed teamwork with local officials.

After the World Café, interactive games of charades, bingo and word relay regarding food safety were facilitated. In these games, the medical students taught vital concepts about food safety.

The event concluded with a communal meal shared between researchers, vendors, and community members. This practice of communal eating or 'salo-salo' symbolised the close-knit nature of the barangay, reinforcing the idea that food is central to the community's social fabric. During the meal, vendors proudly offered their food. They were assisted by the medical students and the Family Medicine residents. Around 80 people were able to participate in this symbolic 'salo-salo'. This includes families whom the medical students provided home visits, barangay council members and their families and *ulat sa barangay* participants. Sharing a meal together provided an opportunity for informal discussions on food safety, where the vendors exchanged their experiences and showed a genuine desire to enhance their practices. Despite some gaps in knowledge and resources, it was clear that the community was receptive to change and eager to collaborate in making food safer for everyone. The participants were both happy and grateful for the learning experience and meal, expressing their enjoyment of the food and their appreciation for the cooks.

A full summary of the World Cafe discussion can be found on the Empowering Communities website:

<https://empcommunitiespublichealth.com/>



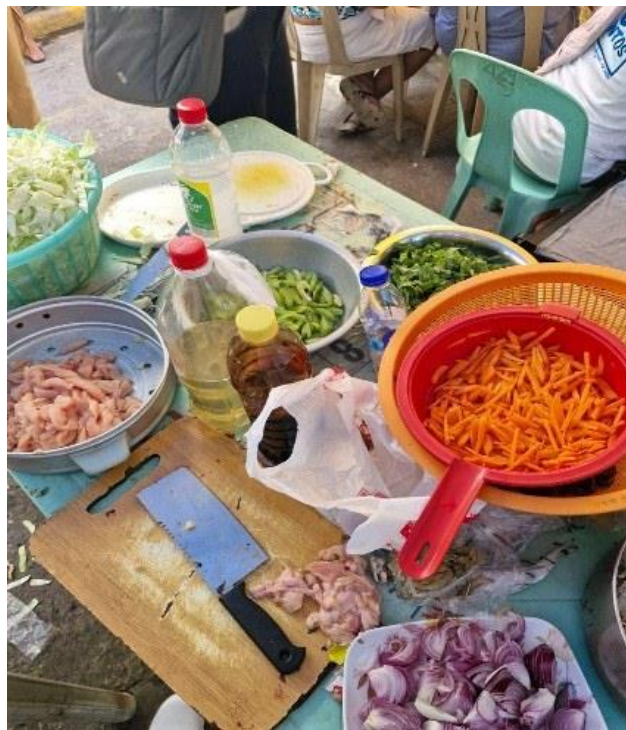
34 - Panel discussion with PAR participants and researchers with TU Rector and CERID Director listening

©CERID



35 - Participatory Action Research workshop participants and facilitators

©CERID



36 - Food preparation for communal eating

©UST





37 - World Cafe facilitated by UST team in Barangay 429, Sampaloc, Manila

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### ***Literacies of Dissent Project Update!***

Dr. Chris Millora's post-doctoral project *Literacies of Dissent: Youth Activism, Learning, and Social Change* will come to a close in December 2024. Formerly hosted within the UEA UNESCO Chair, the project continues to receive support, including mentorship for Chris, from UNESCO Chair colleagues at UEA, where Chris remains an Academic Associate. The project explored the learning and literacy dimensions of youth activism in the Philippines and Chile and is funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

Chris conducted a youth-led participatory action research project in Iloilo City, Philippines, working with Ugyon Youth, a youth-led community organisation advocating for youth participation in local governance. Earlier this year, Chris interviewed over 15 youth activists in Santiago, Chile, reflecting on recent youth activist movements in the country. During this time,



Chris was invited as a Visiting Professor at the Universidad de Chile, where he delivered a public lecture about his research attended by university students, faculty, a government representative from Chile's youth commission and the Philippine embassy.

The project brought fresh insights into how young people co-create and transfer knowledge informally within their groups, ensuring that newer members are equipped with strategic skills to sustain their campaigns (e.g. letter writing to government officials, setting up public consultations, and creating manifestos). In partnership with the Global Campaign for Education, the project has produced a *Youth Toolkit on Meaningful Youth Engagement in Educational Campaigning*, which will be launched in mid-December (more information to come) in line with the International Human Rights Day celebrations.

Next for Chris is a new Goldsmiths-funded project to explore climate change activism and educational futures in South and Southeast Asia, venturing into new contexts (East Timor, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam) while continuing work in others (Nepal and the Philippines).

Please get in touch with Chris at [C.Millora@gold.ac.uk](mailto:C.Millora@gold.ac.uk).



38 - Youth leaders in the Philippines participating in a mapping exercise, Iloilo City, Philippines, February 2023

©Chris Millora



39 - A large mural in one of the main buildings at the University of Chile. UChile campus is filled with murals representing historical and more recent student uprisings on various issues – education equality, fairer labour practices and better healthcare. Taken April 2024

©Chris Millora

### Meet our UNESCO Co-Chair in Nepal: an interview with Professor Sushan Acharya

*Professor Sushan Acharya was appointed Co-Chair earlier this year. For many years she has been taking forward the UEA UNESCO Chair programme, particularly through her strong established links with UNESCO Kathmandu and her long research experience in adult literacy, gender and lifelong learning. On her recent visit to Nepal, Professor Anna Robinson-Pant interviewed Sushan to share some of her experiences and reflections with our newsletter readers.*

**Anna:** What do you remember about your early educational experiences?

**Sushan:** Before I started school formally, I actually went to school with my mother. She had got married before finishing high school and my father wanted her to continue studying. So she took me along and enrolled in grade 1 to keep me entertained while she was studying in the grade 10 class. I sat in the younger class but I would go running to her class, call her and hug her from behind while a teacher was teaching in her class. After that, my father taught me at home for a while and then sent me to the nearby primary school from grade 3. It was attached to an orphanage, Baal Mandir, though children from outside could attend too, the royal family were the patrons and it was in a former Rana palace. My particular memory from there was a very strict teacher from Darjeeling, I think. She was so strict, for a punishment, she used to put a pencil between your fingers and squeeze! I didn't know it could be so painful!

One day, my uncle came to take me to his school, where my mother had studied so the teachers knew me well. I studied there until the school leaving examination. I remember I was out walking with my mother and we met the teacher who taught Nepali and Sanskrit. She asked him

how I was doing and he said that I was good at studying but very naughty. My mother said 'does she sit at the back?' 'No, the very front row!' he replied.

**Anna:** It sounds as if you enjoyed school at least! And what about your higher studies?

**Sushan:** I then studied at the women's college for intermediate and bachelors, and was married at 20 years old after my BA degree. My mother-in-law was keen that both her daughters-in-law should study Masters, though she would have wished we were medical doctors! I studied English literature and had my first daughter during the MA course. I started teaching in the women's college but couldn't manage at all as the classes started at 6 am. The system had also changed since I started my studies. A colleague warned me that I would have to say everything first in English, then explain in Nepali and then in any other language required! Previously it was just in English so I didn't find it easy.

**Anna:** So how did you end up moving away from English literature and doing your EdD on women's empowerment and literacy? I remember we discovered that we were both doing our doctorates on the same topic in the 1990s!

**Sushan:** After my MA, I worked with a women's NGO for two years and learned such a lot about gender issues through that experience. The NGO was run by popular feminists and I got orientation on women's issues, also the chance to go to the field and develop their newsletter. My EdD was at Amherst, University of Massachusetts and I did my fieldwork back in Nepal in Syangja with women's groups and literacy programmes.

**Anna:** So when did you start working at Tribhuvan University, our UNESCO Chair partner in Nepal?

**Sushan:** I started teaching nonformal education at TU in 2001. But before that I worked as a temporary teacher for DANIDA (Danish aid agency) supporting MPhil students, specifically designed for the Ministry of Education personnel. While doing this job together with other TU professors, I was approached to apply for a job at the university. At first, I said I couldn't possibly teach large classes – there were 200 to 300 students in each class in those days!

**Anna:** And you stayed until your retirement this year! What did you enjoy most?

**Sushan:** Working with like-minded colleagues in different research projects. And what gives me most pleasure is when students appreciate what we are doing to support them. That's what makes me happy. However, it is painful to see how s party politics and balkanization gradually destroyed the University system and its image.

**Anna:** You must have seen some very big changes during your time at TU. I remember you telling me some years back about the challenges when mobile phones came along!

**Sushan:** Yes, at first I told students that I didn't have a mobile phone, because they expected to call you at day or night for help. Then one student said he had seen me in town talking on my mobile so they knew I had one! Later, the university gave our phone numbers to everyone – they put up a notice with our numbers on. The biggest change has been that the university became more party politicised. If it was now, I would never be able to join the university as I did then, as I was not in anyone's group. If now, I wouldn't expect to get a job. Though some really good people have joined through free competition, but it's no longer possible through a local contract like I had.

**Anna:** And what about the situation for women academics? You were one of the first women professors in education, how has that changed?

**Sushan:** Most women academics, I can talk particularly about my faculty, i.e. Education, are now aligned with one group or the other. The problem is that they get less opportunity in terms of work. They may get the position but not on the work front. Work alone gives the exposure and competency. That's what the younger women are missing out on. They are often not as actively engaged in academia as they have young children – whatever little time they have left, they spend on getting into a group. But also English language is a problem. Even though they teach in Nepali, they need English to get on.

**Anna:** I know you have been working with UNESCO for many years and I have read many of your UNESCO papers. Can you tell us about your various assignments?

**Sushan:** It started with Girls in Science and Technology Education: A Study on Access, Participation, and Performance of Girls in Nepal, a research study sponsored by UNESCO Paris in 2004. Then I went on to do various research works for the Kathmandu UNESCO office, like I did the first UNESCO Nepal monograph on literacy and presented this in South Africa in 2004. I'm currently supporting the government Centre for Education and Human Resource Development on NFE (Nonformal Education) through UNESCO, with a review of the curricula of accelerating learning for children and NFE for adults.

**Anna:** There have been so many changes in NFE provision and curricula, particularly adult literacy, in Nepal over the years. What has struck you most?

**Sushan:** We assume that the literacy rate has increased so the learning materials have changed and the focus shifted to equivalence education, higher level learning and skills-based education. Many NFE schools have opened, called 'housewife schools' for women who didn't get the chance to finish school or to go at all. Most are studying in these schools from children's school textbooks. They are OK with that as then they would get a formal school certificate. It's certainly a step forward to have women's schools. But I think studying children's textbooks is not right and there are plans to implement different materials. One woman I met from an NFE school had

heard about these new books but said ‘I am happy to study the children’s books as then we can get the same certificate’. The challenge will be to develop appropriate testing tools. The major thing is assessment – who assesses and how, as the system is so rigid. It’s a way forward but will take some time to settle.

**Anna:** I noticed that you said it was an assumption that literacy rates have increased – or is it actually true?

**Sushan:** It’s partially true as school enrolment has increased. But still there are lots of people who can’t read and comprehend. They have to learn not only to decode but to understand what they are reading. I still come across people who don’t read and they will be left out. The gender gap is also still the same, around 10% difference, with lower rates for women.

**Anna:** So, what do you think is the answer, given that Nepal has been running adult literacy programmes ever since we started work in this area?

**Sushan:** They have to equip the CLCs (Community Learning Centres) and consolidate policy. The CLC is a learning hub, expected to manage NFE, accelerated learning and adult and community learning activities. But in many places, the CLC is just a helping hand for local government, only organising micro training on kitchen gardening or doing advocacy campaigns. It has not turned out to be what was envisioned, as a library and place where people could read or use the internet. There are so many different policies and programmes. If we could make one strong platform. We could use schools, for instance. These days the school population is decreasing and schools are merging. But local governments have not managed to utilise the empty buildings. We need policy to actively link school and nonformal education, so that physical and financial resources can be shared. Though the school is a formal structure, if the CLC was inside, they could use the internet, lab etc. CLC people could come in the morning and evening.

**Anna:** This is certainly one area where the UNESCO Chair in Nepal has begun to share ideas and our research. You have been in the Nepal UNESCO Chair team since our inception and are now Co-Chair. What are the most memorable moments for you?

**Sushan:** The most memorable was our GRTA family literacy project as it was research in the real sense. I got to do something I really like to do, investigating local knowledge and how it was transferred. It has also been so exciting to interact and know the other countries and teams in our partnership. I will never forget the insights into numeracy and map weaving in Malawi and the video clip the team made about the fishermen there.

**Anna:** What are your ideas for future UNESCO Chair directions?

**Sushan:** I would like to explore literacy and intergenerational learning in a wider context, not only in relation to indigenous knowledge. We recently collected some case studies on



intergenerational learning for a local school publication and one was about a school where they taught Buddhist meditation and philosophy. A mother was sharing how her daughter would tell her to calm down and how to manage her anger when she got too stressed. It would be interesting to look again at intergenerational learning, and mental/emotional health.

**Anna:** You have been involved in many international partnerships as a professor at TU. What differences do you see with our UNESCO Chair partnership?

**Sushan:** It is similar as it's a consortium of different universities from different places. A major difference is that all our other university partnerships are in the context of higher education but this one is out of the structured education system. So, this is vast in that sense!



*40 - Anna interviews Sushan in Kathmandu*

*© Agat Awasthi*

## REFLECTIONS



Sharmila Pokharel is a PhD Scholar at the Graduate School of Education, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. She has just completed her fieldwork in teaching sexuality education in schools in Nepal.

My research journey has been sparked by the growing social issues in Nepal, such as teenage pregnancies, sexual harassment, and juvenile crime. I have often wondered why these problems are so prevalent, not only in rural areas but also in Kathmandu, and whether schools should play a more proactive role in addressing them through effective sex education (SE). I began to question if there were gaps in the SE curriculum or flaws in how it was being taught, and whether our societal values were contributing to these issues.

My own experience with my daughter's curiosity about menstruation highlighted a major gap in the school curriculum, which motivated me further to explore how SE is taught in schools. As a university teacher in human sexuality and reproductive health, I noticed a similar discomfort among students—future educators—when discussing these topics. It made me wonder how they would handle such sensitive subjects when they become teachers themselves.

In my research, I discovered that SE is often taught by teachers without relevant training, sometimes as a filler subject when there is extra time. One teacher even admitted that SE was taught not because of its importance, but simply because there was no designated teacher for

health education. This revealed a serious issue in the delivery of SE. I also found that existing literature on SE was mostly non-contextual, with very little research specific to Nepal.

To address this, I focused my study on teachers of eighth-grade students in the Kathmandu Valley. Despite challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and reluctance from some schools, I continued my research. My findings showed that socio-cultural factors, such as the mother's education and the teacher's background, significantly shape perceptions of SE, highlighting the need for comprehensive reform in how SE is taught in Nepal.



## PUBLICATIONS



### New publications by UNESCO CHAIR MEMBERS

Acharya, S., Mjaya, A., & Robinson-Pant, A. (2024). Special Issue editorial. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2024.2432363>

Bautista, T., Vizconde, C., Arenas, E., Lontoc, G., Basa, A. and P. Pasicolan (2024) *Empowering Communities Through University Partnerships in Public Health: Philippines Country Report*, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines, available at: <https://empcommunitiespublichealth.com/reports/>

Burke, L. and Robinson-Pant, A. (2024) *Empowering Communities Through University Partnerships in Public Health: Comparing perspectives and approaches from Nepal and the Philippines*, Synthesis Report, CORTH at the University of Sussex, available at: <https://empcommunitiespublichealth.com/reports/>

Choulagai, B., Devkota, K., Acharya, S. Sharma, P., Ghimire, S. and A. Thapa Pachya (2024) *Empowering Communities Through University Partnerships in Public Health: Nepal Country Report*, Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID),



Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal, available at: <https://empcommunitiespublichealth.com/reports/>

Devkota, K. R., & Sigdel, J. (2024). *Metrolinguistic Space, Youth and Identity: Implications for Linguistic and Language Education Research*. *Education and Development*, 33(1), 39-56. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ed.v33i1.66571>

Mjaya, A., Chiziwa, S., Chavula, J., & Bwanali, A. (2024). Unmasking the dynamics of intergenerational learning: an ethnographic study of two rural communities in Malawi. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2024.2429823>

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