

## **International Institute of Online Education (IIOE): Harnessing the Belt & Road Initiative to Increase Developing Countries' Access to Quality Higher Education**

### **Project Brief**

#### **What is IIOE?**

The International Institute of Online Education (IIOE) initiative is proposed by the International Centre for Higher Education Innovation under the auspices of UNESCO (UNESCO-ICHEI) with its partner higher education institutions (HEIs) in developing countries in Africa and Asia-Pacific, and its partner enterprises and HEIs in China. The proposal is developed based on the framework of Belt & Road initiative of talent cultivation and establishment of mechanisms for cooperative development across countries that draws on the Silk Road Spirit of “peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit”.

Over the last 3 years, UNESCO-ICHEI has developed a network of 12 partner HEIs in Africa and Asia-Pacific (Cambodia, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Indonesia, Kenya, Mongolia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Uganda) to build their capacity for quality higher education. The network activities included staff (teachers, leaders and technicians) professional development and establishment of smart classrooms. One of the key challenges facing these HEIs is the development and implementation of quality courses, especially ICT-related ones, that meet the demands of the industries as their economies transform. Most of these HEIs do not have the capacity to develop and implement such quality courses due to the lack of expertise and experience of their teachers. Aligning itself to the SDG 4 -Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, UNESCO-ICHEI proposes IIOE together with its 12 partner HEIs to address this key challenge.

UNESCO-ICHEI has conducted several rounds of consultation about this proposal with its partner HEIs and international higher education experts, and has received constructive feedback and enormous support. UNESCO-ICHEI will organize the International Consultative Meeting on IIOE on December 7-8, 2019 in Shenzhen, China, and jointly launch the establishment of IIOE with 12 partner HEIs, Chinese HEIs and partner enterprises.

IIOE initiative has received a seed fund of 10 million RMB from the Tencent Charity Foundation, and mobilized about 100 online courses from Chinese HEIs, and received provision of hardware and software to smart classrooms from some partner enterprises.

The mission of IIOE is to build the capacity of partner HEIs in developing countries to enhance their access to quality higher education. IIOE aims to fulfil this mission by:

- (1) developing ICT-related competencies of teachers in the partner HEIs in developing countries;
- (2) building the capacity of partner HEIs for blended and online learning; and
- (3) providing online courses to provide more professional development opportunities for female teachers in partner HEIs.

### **Who are IIOE's Main Beneficiaries?**

The main beneficiaries of IIOE are the teachers from partner HEIs in developing countries. With access to the courses available on the IIOE platform, these teachers could build their capacity to develop and implement courses of their own that offer their students better access to quality learning that prepares them for employment in value-added industries. Gender equality is an integral part of the IIOE initiative to encourage and support more female teachers and students to engage in quality higher education teaching and learning.

Although IIOE is started together with UNESCO-ICHEI's 12 partner HEIs, it intends to first extend its reach to more HEIs in countries that are part of the UNESCO-China Funds-in-Trust and UNESCO-Shenzhen Funds-in-Trust. These countries are all from Africa and they are Cote d'Ivoire, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, Togo, and Zambia. At the same time, IIOE is open to develop partnerships with HEIs from other developing countries.

### **How does IIOE work?**

IIOE provides an open online learning platform that hosts quality higher education courses (focused on developing ICT-related competencies) and learning tools that meet the professional development needs of the teachers in the partner HEIs. The repository of online courses will first be developed and provided by leading universities and enterprises in China. To ensure the sustainability of the IIOE initiative, the partner HEIs in developing countries will eventually develop their own online courses and share them on the IIOE learning platform. To enhance

access to this rich repository of courses and tools across the vast geographical locations of our partner HEIs, cloud technologies are employed with regional servers in Asia-Pacific and Africa. International copyright and privacy guidelines will apply to these courses, tools and platform.

There are three types of online courses on this platform: discipline-related (cloud computing, big data, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, and blockchain), technical and vocational related (robotics, e-commerce, and data analyst), and ICT in higher education teaching and learning courses. However, IIOE is more than a host for online courses to build teachers' ICT-related competencies. It has created an online learning quality assurance framework and mechanisms that will guide partner HEIs to develop and implement quality courses.

At the same time, IIOE will provide on-site and online professional development opportunities for master teachers from partner HEIs. These opportunities include how to use the IIOE platform for teaching and learning, how to use ICT to enhance teaching and learning (including the development of online courses), and how to use the online course resources for their own courses. To ensure the sustainability and scalability of the IIOE initiative, these master teachers are expected to serve as mentors and facilitators for other teachers in their own HEI and other HEIs in their own country.

In the next five years, the IIOE initiative intends to expand its reach to more HEIs in more countries, to provide a greater selection of online courses for its partner HEIs, and to offer more professional development opportunities for teachers from its partner HEIs. By doing so, the IIOE initiative is building the capacity of its partner HEIs to contribute to their countries' economic development with a talented pool of skilled ICT work force and hence, close the gap between developed and developing countries. The proposal for IIOE has been developed based on the core underlying philosophies of the Belt & Road initiative to strengthen exchanges and mutual learning between different countries, and promote world peace and development. This proposal will support developing countries to realise the Education 2030 vision, enhance international cooperation on higher education, reinforce knowledge sharing, offer quality, inclusive and lifelong learning opportunities for all, and build peace in the minds of men and women.