EDUCase

Higher Education Platform for Global Sustainability

International Networks in Higher Education:
Best Practices and Experiences

– Comments from EDUCase Platform

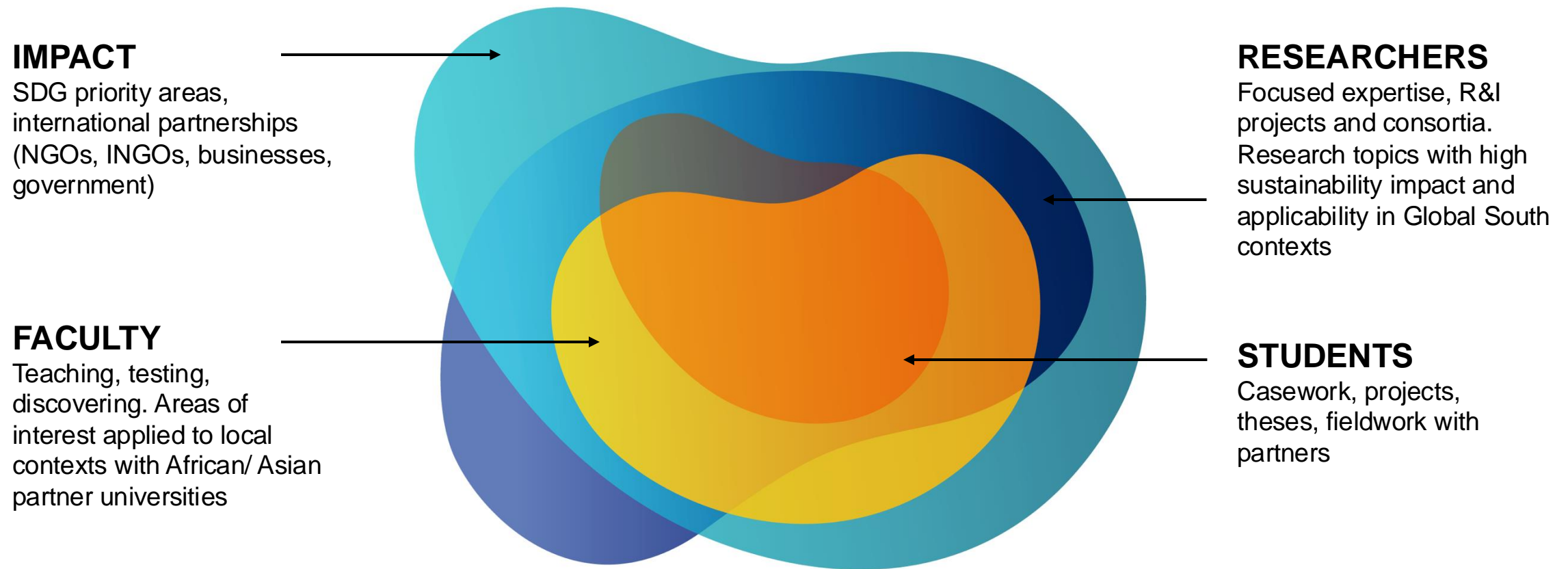**Webinar / Ministry of Education and Culture, 7.2.2025**

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EDUCase approach

Case studies as a means to partner across cultural, academic and institutional distances

IMPACT
SDG priority areas, international partnerships (NGOs, INGOs, businesses, government)

RESEARCHERS
Focused expertise, R&I projects and consortia. Research topics with high sustainability impact and applicability in Global South contexts

FACULTY
Teaching, testing, discovering. Areas of interest applied to local contexts with African/ Asian partner universities

STUDENTS
Casework, projects, theses, fieldwork with partners

Scope of reported activities

Partner countries: Tanzania, Kenya, Nepal, Mozambique, Ghana, Zambia, Namibia, South Africa, India, Bhutan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Lesotho, and various regional networks.

Academic fields: Arts and Design, Bioeconomy and Agriculture, Digital Transformation, Educational Systems and Methods, Economic and Industrial Development, Entrepreneurship, Climate Change, Innovation Ecosystems, Institutional Development of HEIs, Intercultural Dialogue, Health and Wellbeing, Humanitarian Contexts and Crisis Management, Science and Technology, Social Innovation, Sustainable Use of Natural Resources, and Urban and Rural Environments.

Project themes (examples): Intercultural dialogue, digital learning capacity, digital infrastructure, public health education, urban sustainability, health services, sustainable energy education, environmental collaboration and conflict resolution teaching network, sustainable experience design education, PBL, entrepreneurship education,enhanced service-learning, sustainable built environment, cultural heritage and transitional settlements,

Activities: online courses, open educational resources, workshops, capacity building, curriculum development, hackathons,fieldwork, research, travel grants, innovation hub partnerships, joint teaching, teacher training, summer schools, symposia, publications, mobility scholarships, networking, podcasts, engagement of diasporas in Finland

For details, see EDUCase Platform overview 2/2025 on MEC web page

Why EDUCase/ Global South partnerships, in 2025?

- *Global South (GS)* countries represent a major part of the world's population, economic growth and sustainability challenges, and have a fast developing geopolitical role. Traditional development aid has been complemented or replaced by direct engagement with varying degrees of reciprocity or co-creation.

- Socioeconomic development, innovation and sustainability *contexts in the Global South differ significantly from Europe* – in content, impacts on population groups, operational environment, vulnerabilities and opportunities, and societal repercussions. Knowledge creation needs to reflect these differences.

- *North-South dynamics are often underrepresented in research, education and innovation*. Adequate representation of the realities in countries of the Global South is necessary to create opportunities for academic development in lower-income countries, and to understand and influence how research and education translate into impact across borders

Develop academic competencies towards:

Hybrid competency profile emphasising the ability to address intersecting normative frameworks

More balanced representation of the world's social, environmental and economic realities in academic content

Participatory frameworks for integrating knowledge across distinct cultural and operational domains

For example:

- Environmental/ social / community impact assessments
- Human rights assessments
- Cultural mapping
- Thematic policy frameworks (SDGs, digital rights…)

For example:

- Partnership ethics, research integrity frameworks
- Methods such as participatory action research (PAR), Community-based action research (CBPR), Human-centered design (HCD)
- Focus on ownership, agency and multivocality in project designs

A changing environment

Volatile global trajectories: Changes in policy agendas and revisions in global governance architecture may impact the *mechanisms and objectives of North-South cooperation.*

New agendas (reflecting also GS priorities) complementing SDGs, in particular related to technology and societal transformations: for ex. the UN has adopted a Global Digital Compact (2024) and established a UN Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies (ODET) in 2025.

Many GS countries revising their own higher education development and cooperation plans: for ex. Africa Research Charter (2023).

EDUCase themes increasingly identified as crucial to higher education in coming years, across sectors: The ability to address intersecting normative frameworks, analysing impacts on people and society appears as a priority. Current trends expand the approach beyond the SDGs to for ex. AI, fair digital transitions and renewed debates on global citizenship.

In this context, partnership methods developed with a GN-GS lens, with their history of attention to multivocality and societal transformations can be even more, not less relevant and widely applicable in coming years.

Future internationalisation activities

Related to EDUCase approach and international networks:

- Fast growth in similar initiatives - the national and international network architecture should be considered to reflect shared interests/ mission alignment/ competition.

- Major added value in shared facilitation/ coordination to develop lasting initiatives with sufficient attention to policy/ governmental/ impact considerations.

Particular to Global South (GS) partnerships:

- Light but reciprocal seed funding (encompassing partner country participants) much in demand.

- HEIs working with operationally distinct, vulnerable or resource-scarce partners and communities face similar logistical, cultural, academic, systemic and institutional challenges, which require additional/ specialised facilitation in comparison with other regions (see for ex. Nepal report).

- University services vary according to partner countries and cooperation modalities: activities similar to EDUCase may benefit from administrative support when implemented with more traditional partner countries/ funding instruments, but lack institutional support when operating in challenging Global South environments or with for ex. capacity-building instruments.

- Policies and strategies for GS cooperation have evolved, but academic KPIs don't fully recognize the facilitation required to put these to practice. Administrative support and academic incentives could be considered.

- Rethinking the repartition of roles and responsibilities for GS partnerships in HEIs and academic networks can yield significant efficiency gains.

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