

The Learning Innovations Loan Funding Towards Capacity Building for Decentralization in Uganda

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Background

In 2000 Makerere University, the largest and oldest premier University in Uganda struck a rather unique relationship with Central Government through which the University offered to re-orient its curricula and research towards building capacity to support key government policy of decentralizing service delivery. The Rockefeller Foundation was at hand to support a planning process of how this new relationship could be nurtured to fruition. The Foundation thus provided a planning grant to support the initial exploratory phase of how such a relationship would work. Government and Makerere constituted a planning committee comprising of seven (7) academic staff from the University and seven (7) practitioners drawn from relevant ministries of education, local government and finance. An external member with rich international experience in transforming higher education institutions was also incorporated on the committee. The planning committee was chaired by the Vice Chancellor, Makerere University. An international facilitator familiar with higher education and a local facilitator familiar with government processes and programs in Uganda facilitated meetings of this committee.

The planning committee, among many other strategies, commissioned a study to identify human resource and capacity building needs by local governments in order to provide effective services to the population. The study's findings were very revealing. Capacities were lacking in nearly all sectors of service delivery at the local government levels.

The planning process lead to the development of a proposal along the above lines which was shared with both the World Bank and the Rockefeller Foundation. Rockefeller

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Foundation responded fast and provided funds to kick-start the implementation of the capacity building program. With the seed funding, the planning committee was transformed into an implementation committee, popularly known as the Innovations at Makerere Committee (I@Mak.com). The committee used this funding to pilot out a number of modalities for managing an innovations fund at Makerere University. A set of guidelines was developed to ensure transparent and competitive access to grants.

The guidelines defined eligibility, access and evaluation criteria for proposals including setting ceilings for amounts available for grants. Briefly, all Makerere University units (both academic and administrative) would be eligible and would apply for funding support on a competitive basis. The I@Mak.com would vet the proposals during business meetings, which were held between Friday evening and Sunday lunchtime in a hotel outside the city. No proposal would be read outside this arrangement. Proposals would be received and compiled by I@Mak.com Secretariat and issued to members of the committee on Friday night. Members of the committee would return scores by Sunday morning when they would be tabulated, weighted and successful ones determined in accordance with the guidelines. Policy meetings would be held at least twice a year to review the guidelines based on lessons learnt during the business meetings. The lessons learnt helped to refine guidelines further.

The Learning and Innovations Loan (LIL) from World Bank

In 2002, World Bank agreed to contribute to the initiative by I@Mak.com through a learning innovations loan. Being a loan it had to await approval by parliament of Uganda. This was finally done in September 2002 and the first disbursement against this loan was in December 2002 for a three-year period. Rockefeller provided a matching grant of an equal amount of US\$5 Million. The innovations would be funded through a joint funding by both the Rockefeller Foundation and the World Bank. However, two Special Accounts; one for Bank financing and the other for the Rockefeller Foundation would be maintained. More elaborate and stringent eligibility, access and evaluation criteria were defined. Procurements were to be done in accordance with the World Bank procurement guidelines. Reporting would be quarterly using Financial Monitoring Reports that would

indicate sources of funds and their usage according to agreed percentages between the two donors.

With the LIL only six disciplines would be eligible to apply for grants. These were (i) Agriculture, (ii) Basic health & Medicine, (iii) Education, (iv) Engineering, (v) Financial Planning & Project Management and (vi) Good Governance. It was agreed with Government that these were the key areas that have a potential to impact significantly on poverty eradication.

An additional five (5) universities and a degree awarding non-university institution would also be eligible. These partnering institutions were to be represented by only one person on the I@Mak.com. Meetings would continue to be facilitated.

The “Innovations Fund” at Makerere

The “innovations fund” at Makerere University is therefore supported through a Learning and Innovations Loan from the World Bank and Grants from Rockefeller Foundation. The “fund” is being implemented as a pilot project called “The Decentralised Service Delivery; a Makerere University Training Pilot Project”.

The learning and Innovations Loan is not a full-fledged Innovations Fund. It is a very small funding extended by the World Bank to enable beneficiary institutions to explore the feasibility of an idea that could be developed further into a full-fledged project. In Uganda the LIL was extended to explore the possibility of higher education institutions working closely with a national government to implement a national program through building adequate skills in the higher education institutions to orient their academic programs to the challenges facing the country, and for local governments to acquire relevant skills to offer improved services. The exploration is building on good lessons learnt from earlier interventions by the support from the Rockefeller Foundation to Makerere University. Thus ours can be looked as a “Pilot Innovations Fund” from whose lessons we would be able to establish a more comprehensive Innovations Fund. Indeed we have learnt and documented excellent lessons for setting up and managing a full-fledged Innovations Fund. We would like to clarify however that there are other donors

supporting specific innovations at Makerere University and other partnering institutions but the funding managed by I@Mak.com is the only one at the moment open to most of the units at Makerere and other partnering institutions.

Besides the support to academic and administrative staff of the participating higher education institutions the committee reviews proposals for funding for Masters and PhD students from the participating institutions. Such proposals should aim to enhance decentralized service delivery in the six areas supported under the project. The “fund” also supports collaborative activities with the National Council for Higher Education in Uganda whom we believe are poised to have a key regulatory role for a possible Innovation Fund in Uganda.

Staffing

The Innovations at Makerere Committee is a Committee of Council that oversees the implementation, sets policies and guidelines of operation and reviews proposals for funding. The Committee is supported by a Secretariat headed by an Executive Secretary who is a celebrated author and researcher. She holds a PhD and is a professor at the University of Toronto. A Task Manager who is familiar with higher education, decentralised service delivery and donor requirements, particularly the World Bank procedures, assists her. An Administrative Secretary with experience in planning for higher education helps to review technical proposals and also takes care of all administration and logistics associated with the program. A professional Accountant manages the accounts of the program under supervision of a Financial Manager who is also the University Bursar. A Monitoring and Evaluation officer takes care of the monitoring and evaluation aspects of the program. We have a support staff of four people. Consultants are occasionally hired to undertake specific assignments.

Evaluation of proposals for funding

The overall development objective of the LIL, and the Decentralized Service Delivery; A Makerere University Training Pilot Project, is to facilitate the central government, higher education institutions and local government councils to jointly build relevant capacity for improved and sustainable service delivery that would contribute to poverty reduction

through innovations. As stated earlier, the services targeted are those that have been decentralized to local governments. As such the overall evaluation criteria is that first and foremost a proposal must have a direct bearing to the objectives of decentralized service delivery. Proposals are evaluated using established guidelines, which have been widely disseminated to the participating institutions and beneficiaries.

The following criteria is used to evaluate proposals.

- 1) The Secretariat undertakes preliminary reviews of all proposals to ensure compliance with the guidelines and the above broad objective of I@Mak.com. Principal investigators may be asked to revise and repackage their proposals at this stage prior to submission to the committee.
- 2) Once the Secretariat is satisfied with the compliance, it receives 15 copies of the proposal to be forwarded to I@MAK.com. The Secretariat compiles all proposals by type and binds them into enough sets for the committee. Scoring sheets approved by the committee, which are also in the guidelines, are customized for each proposal and sets of these score sheets accompany proposals.
- 3) The committee then constitutes itself into a technical evaluation committee to consider those proposals in a secluded place. No member of the committee accesses the proposals before a scheduled business meeting. All proposals are evaluated during the weekend business meeting. Only voting members of the committee do the evaluation and scoring. The Secretariat staff participates in neither the scoring nor the voting.
- 4) The committee members then submit their scores to the Secretariat staff who tally them to determine average scores of each proposal. The Secretariat then displays the tallied scores with recommended actions in accordance with guidelines. The facilitators themselves do not review proposals but guide the evaluation in accordance with the guidelines.

- 5) Once a consensus has been reached on all the proposals, the meeting issues a resolution to bind the decisions made by the committee and these decisions are given to the Secretariat to implement. All score sheets are withdrawn from committee members and kept with the Secretariat. The Secretariat extracts any helpful comments from the score sheets and communicates them to principal investigators.

Procedure for Disbursing Funds to an Approved proposal

Makerere University is the approved implementing agency of the “Decentralised Service; a Makerere University Training Pilot Project”. Our disbursements go through the Makerere University system, which is ordinarily very slow. However as part of the commitment by the University, a fast track mechanism was put up to process payments. So although payments go through the normal University systems, payments for activities related to our program are processed expeditiously. It is possible to get a payment cheque through the system within 2 days. Different procedures apply for different activities/institutions.

- (i) Payment to other institutions:- All payments to these institutions are made in the names of the University Secretaries of the partnering institutions who disburse to beneficiary staff through their own system.
- (ii) Payment to staff at Makerere University:- Small amounts for concept papers (usually not exceeding US\$3000) are payable directly to individuals. Any subsequent amounts in excess of this are payable through Faculties of beneficiary staff.
- (iii) Payments for postgraduate students/graduate research: - All payments are disbursed to the School of Graduate Studies to manage.

All supported activities are phased and disbursements are based on approved deliverables at each phase. The committee reviews and approves the deliverables at each stage of disbursement. The following phases apply to different proposals.

Curriculum²

Phase	Concept	Feasibility	Pilot	Full implementation curriculum
Deliverable	Concept paper and application for feasibility study grants	Feasibility report and a proposal for Piloting a proposed curriculum	Pilot implementation report and an application for Full implementation	Full implementation report
Disbursement	√	√	√	X

Training³

Phase	Concept	Feasibility	Pilot	Full implementation curriculum
Deliverable	Concept paper and an application to develop short / usually refresher course	Feasibility report and an application to pilot the training materials for the short course.	Pilot report & proposal for full implementation	Course Full implementation report
Disbursement	√	√	√	√

Publication⁴

Phase	Concept	Pre-manuscript activities	Draft manuscript	Publishing ⁵
Deliverable	Concept paper and an application for Pre-Manuscript activities	Pre-manuscript report and a proposal to do a full manuscript	Draft Manuscript	Publication
Disbursement	√	√	X	√

² For curriculum and training, the committee engages a practitioner to evaluate the course content for its adequacy and relevance to service delivery challenges.

³ Preference is given to short courses that cut across a number of disciplines / sectors.

⁴ A formal contract is made between the Committee and the Principal Investigator. We however promote multiple rather than single author publications.

⁵ The project enters into a separate contract with a professional publishing house to undertake publications on behalf of the committee.

Research

Phase	Concept	Feasibility	Full Research ⁶	Dissemination
Deliverable	Concept paper and application for feasibility study support	Feasibility report and a proposal for full research.	Report and / or papers for publication	A proposal for disseminating research results.
Disbursement	√	√	√	√

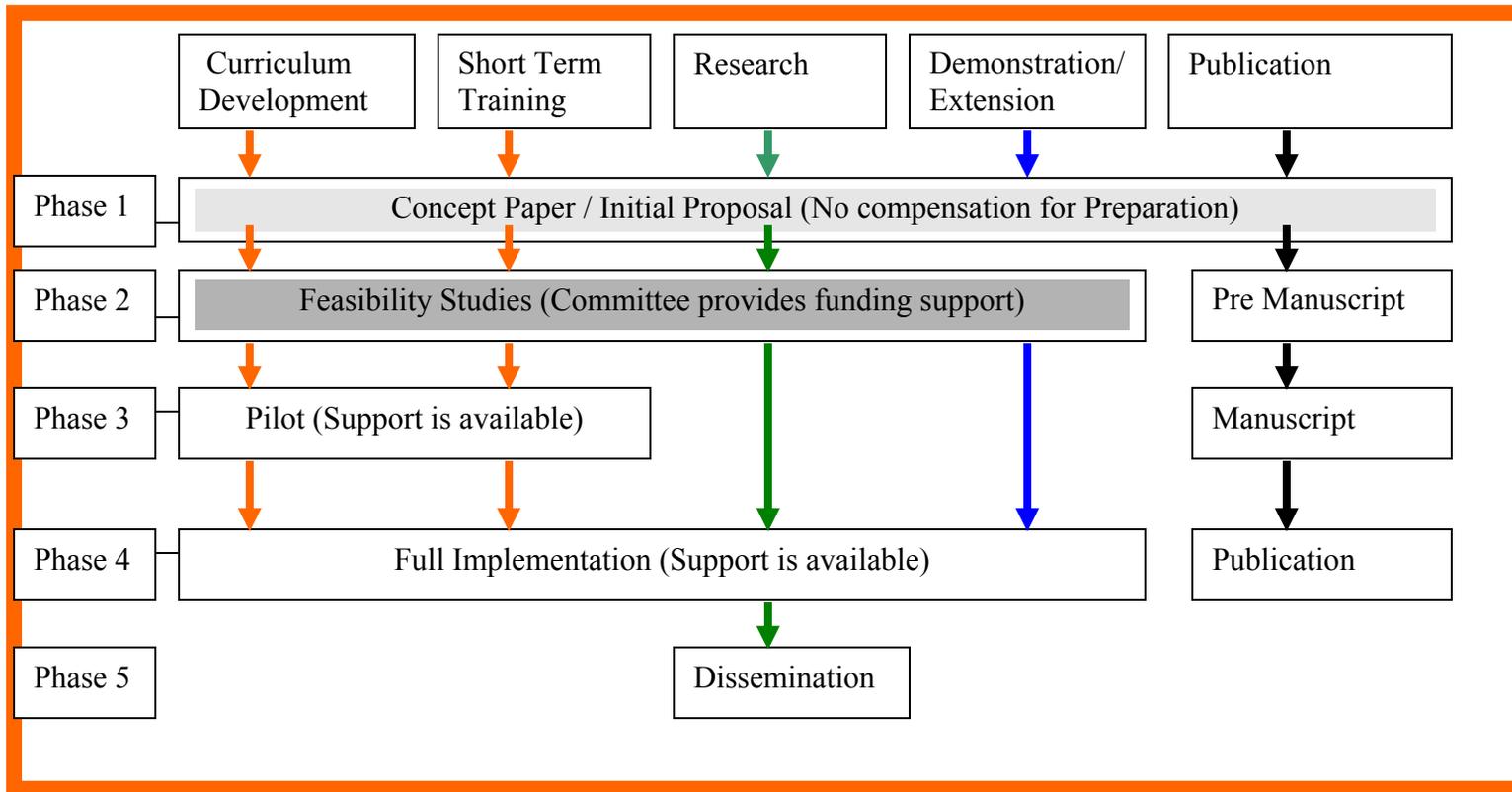
Demonstration / Extension

Phase	Concept	Feasibility	Full Implementation
Deliverable	Concept paper and application for feasibility study support	Feasibility report and a proposal for full research.	Report and / or papers for publication
Disbursement	√	√	√

No payment is associated with the final deliverable. Investigators / beneficiaries of our grants have been responding positively.

⁶ Support is extended to present approved papers at international conferences and workshops

Figure 1: Summary of Phased implementation of the various proposals discussed above.



Monitoring and Evaluation of the Performance of approved proposals

The phased approach was developed as an evaluation mechanism to ensure that the approved proposals comply with the objectives as outlined in the original proposals and also in line with the I@mak.com objectives. Evaluation of projects is at three basic levels

- ✓ Evaluations by the people participating in training
- ✓ By the concerned Local Governments and/or local government body
- ✓ Self evaluation by the executing unit

In addition to the normal evaluation, an independent external evaluator knowledgeable in the field under study is usually contracted to assess the validity, relevance, completeness, adequacy of methodology and expected benefits of the project at pilot phase.

All the above evaluation initiatives help the committee to make informed decisions regarding subsequent phases of implementation.

Constraints / problems

The two biggest problems encountered during the management of the funding are:

- Staff are required to combine normal teaching with the work supported under this initiative. This has in most cases led to delays in completing the approved projects. Of course this has an overall effect of making program implementation less efficient.
- Participation by partnering institutions has been lukewarm and very slow. We continue to proactively engage them through sensitisation and direct support in proposal writing.

Lessons Leant

There have been a number of important lessons learnt.

- Most important is from the relationship between Government and a Higher education Institution. Higher Education Institutions can work directly to solve

problems of service delivery by making their curriculum more practical oriented. Universities can be very reliable partners in policy analysis and formulation.

- To effectively manage innovative funds, the implementing committee has to continuously learn and adjust the guidelines for accessing funds to address challenges / weakness that may arise along the way. Guidelines are only reviewed at policy meetings during which no evaluation of proposals is carried out.

- The outreach programs of universities greatly influence the curriculum of the universities. Curriculum is enriched with the experiential learning that the university staff get from the communities. It is therefore important that Universities establish and maintain sustainable linkages and collaboration with both the Government and communities.

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