

# UbuntuNet CONNECT | 2017

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## **Peoples-uni: public health capacity building through online education**

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The mission of Peoples-uni (<http://peoples-uni.org>) is to build Public Health capacity to meet the enormous needs for improving the health of populations in Low- to Middle-Income Countries (LMICs). Open content and open access both facilitate the development of the programme we describe, and will further contribute to education for health professionals. Education is provided fully online, and a unified global education programme enhances collaboration among health experts.

Peoples-uni, outside but benchmarked to the traditional higher education system, has been offering very low cost online Masters level courses since 2008. 19 modules are available covering the foundation sciences of Public Health and health problems facing LMICs populations. Seventy percent of the students are from Africa and 12% from Southern Asia. Enabling factors include volunteer tutors (from 50 countries) and use of Open Educational Resources. A previous collaboration with a traditional university in the UK was a success, but a hindrance to further development is failure so far to identify an alternative university partner, either in a high-income country or an LMIC.

1474 students have enrolled on 5449 modules where 35% of the students have passed at least one module at the Masters level. In a partnership with a UK University, 128 students, who had already passed two modules, enrolled on the MPH programme: 73% graduated with an MPH and a further 14% gained a graduate Diploma or graduate Certificate. Many graduates collaborate by joining as tutors themselves or as Student Support Officers. Alumni perform collaborative research as a group, with so far one paper on the use of IT for guidelines in the peer reviewed literature and a further study on HIV management in the analysis stage.

A sister site for Open Online Courses (<http://ooc.peoples-uni.org>) allows self-paced learning in a number of areas not usually found in university courses. Most of these have been developed collaboratively with, or for, other organisations. An upcoming course for Continuing Professional Development is developed in partnership with a large healthcare organisation in Uganda.

Collaboration in Ethiopia, led by the Education Strategy Center, was to create and offer an online course in trauma. Included were the Ethiopian Civil Service University, ICE-Addis, Jimma University, Gonda University, the Ethiopian Research and Education Network (EthERNet). An EU grant application was unsuccessful, but we are exploring alternative ways of developing the course.

Programme development would not have been possible without collaboration from an IT group who understands the requirements of online education in LMICs, and has the skills to support students and tutors through an educational programme including for those with low bandwidth. MoUs have been signed with the Africa Training Institute, to provide content in the field of Public Health to the IT infrastructure offered by the ATI, and the Ivoirian Research and Education Network (RITER) and the Virtual University of Cote D'Ivoire to collaborate on modules for French speaking populations.

Challenges remain in how to further collaborate with African universities and to accredit our awards.

### **Summary**

The mission of Peoples-uni is to build Public Health capacity to meet the enormous needs for improving the health of populations in Low- to Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), and has been offering very low cost online Masters level courses since 2008. The programme is the result of, and leads to many opportunities for, collaboration. Outcomes, enablers and hinderance to further collaboration are described.

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