Background to August Newsletter Article by Catherine Ngugi

**Background:**

Since 2008, *OER Africa* has sought to respond to a growing urgency to meet the demands of students (and faculty) for improved pedagogical content and practice on the one hand and, the demands of African societies for competent higher education graduates on the other. *OER Africa* recognizes that extensive change in institutional practice is required to transform higher education provision. Institutional barriers – policy, regulatory, systemic, and cultural – to the sustainable adoption of pedagogical practices which take full advantage of the transformative educational potential of OER and ICT, must be overcome. While these barriers remain, mainstream adoption of OER practices is likely to remain on the margins of institutional activity.

**Current Approach: the *OER Africa* Institutional Engagement Grant**

In our current phase of work *OER Africa* is taking the new approach of integrating a Participatory Action Research (PAR) agenda into each of our institutional engagements. We believe that more focused interactions will facilitate a collaborative agenda and support the four carefully selected institutional partners to:

1. build a deepened understanding of how OER practices can support transformation of teaching and learning
2. ensure that such accumulated understanding is widely shared and incorporated into policy and advocacy

Through this current grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, *OER Africa* is supporting a selected group of academics to routinely look for OER to integrate into their emerging curricula, share back new and re-versioned OER as a matter of course, and be supported in this process by institutional policies and procedures. In this way, the four institutional partners will be well positioned to contribute to educational transformation within their own institutions.

**Participatory Action Research Agenda (PAR)**

*OER Africa* and its partners are integrating a PAR agenda into each institutional engagements. Whilst the emphasis of this grant is on in depth interactions with the selected institutions, focused attention is also being given to on-going documented reflection on the change processes involved. For the purposes of this grant, we have defined PAR as ‘collaborative research, education and action used to gather information to use for change on social issues’[[1]](#footnote-1). It involves people who are concerned about or affected by an issue and who take a leading role in producing and using knowledge about it. A PAR approach has the following features:

* It is driven by participants;
* It offers a democratic model of who can produce, own and use knowledge;
* It is collaborative at every stage, involving discussion, pooling skills and working together;
* It is intended to result in some action, change or improvement on the issue being researched.

By its very nature, PAR requires strong engagement with, and leadership from, key participants to be effective. A definite research methodology for the PAR agenda has emerged through specific engagements with our partner institutions. This hands-on practice at institutional level is already beginning to generate action-research and advocacy required to understand institutional transformation and the role of OER therein. Here we can insert a link / links to the resources already generated, e.g. Tony’s ANU Case Study.

These lessons will be of great value to all higher education practitioners but in particular, those working in Africa and making use of open educational resources.

# The 2016 *OER Africa* Convening of Institutional Partners

On 17th – 18th May, 2016, *OER Africa* convened representatives from institutions participating in the current *OER Africa* Institutional Engagement grant, identified experts from around the world, and members of the *OER Africa* team, to explore together, the two key themes of pedagogical transformation and participatory action research…

1. Pain, R. et al. Participatory Action Participatory Action Research Toolkit: An Introduction to Using PAR as an Approach to Learning, Research and Action. Durham University. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)