IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF MARGINALISED GIRLS IN ZIMBABWE

A studentship proposal from the Open University and World Vision UK, located in the Pathway in Development Policy and Practice in the ESRC Grand Union Doctoral Training Partnership

Inclusive and equitable primary education for all – and particularly girls - has been a high priority in the agendas of the Millennium Development Goals, the Education for All campaign and now the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs have expanded the focus to include secondary education and life-long learning. But in Zimbabwe – which will be the focus country of this PhD study – only two thirds of girls who enrol in primary school transition to secondary school, and many do not demonstrate levels of literacy and numeracy necessary for this transition. To address this challenge, the Open University are working in partnership with World Vision on a project called IGATE-T (Improving Gender Attitudes, Transition and Education outcomes). IGATE-T is focusing on 50,000 marginalised adolescent girls living in rural and remote parts of Zimbabwe. It aims to support the development of their literacy, numeracy and financial skills to enhance their access to post-primary learning opportunities. One of the key strands of IGATE-T is a whole-school development (WSD) programme focussed on strengthening the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy.

The Open University has been a global leader in developing large-scale teacher education and development programmes for over a decade. With particular experience in Sub-Saharan Africa, India and Bangladesh, our academics work in collaboration with governments, NGO and other partners, teacher education institutions, teacher educators and teachers themselves to develop innovative models of teacher-learning at scale. These models utilise both new and existing technologies and open resources to enhance teachers’ skills and agency, and improve children’s learning in some of the most remote classrooms in the world.

This PhD studentship has been co-created between World Vision UK, World Vision Zimbabwe and the Open University to carry out research which is inspired by, relevant to, and informs the work of IGATE-T. The precise focus of the PhD will be developed collaboratively between the student, the academic supervisors at the Open University, and the external supervisor based at World Vision UK, but we welcome proposals which consider one or more of the following:

- Approaches to enhancing literacy and/or numeracy skills, in school or non-formal settings, when these skills have not been fully acquired in early years
- Community-school literacy/numeracy attitudes and practices and/or the influence of community/social norms on girls’ learning
- The kinds of support to teachers and/or community educators that are most relevant and effective in supporting improved teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy skills
- The kinds of changes in teaching and learning practices that enhance motivation, confidence and success of girls in accelerated learning programmes
- Gender issues in relation to acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills for highly marginalised girls
- The role of leadership competencies and other non-cognitive skills on learning and transition outcomes for marginalised girls

The doctoral student will be based at the Open University and would be able to link to the World Vision office in Milton Keynes as well as the World Vision office in Bulawayo which houses the IGATE-T team. As well as the facilities available to doctoral students at the OU,
World Vision UK would hope to make office space available in the Milton Keynes headquarters, and the Bulawayo office (during the fieldwork phase) to enable the doctoral student to contribute to strengthening research capacity among staff at World Vision during and beyond the studentship. There may also be the opportunity to incorporate an internship element into the studentship.

Although not a requirement, we particularly welcome applications from those with connections to or experience of working in Zimbabwe as prior knowledge of the country context would facilitate working closely with the in-country team.

Guidance for applicants

Applications are now invited for this studentship with the deadline of 17.00 UK time, 19th January 2018. The studentship is for 3 years full-time (fully funded). Please note that for this studentship, you need either to have gained an MRes or have equivalent research training and experience. Please also check ESRC residential criteria: http://www.granduniondtp.ac.uk/eligibility

The application procedure should follow that laid out in the Development Policy and Practice Pathway. However please make clear that you are applying for this studentship on your application form by including the studentship title. As well as following the guidance for applicants in the Development Policy and Practice Pathway, in your proposal please explain how you would approach the research in way such that it would:

a. Make an original contribution to academic knowledge, and in particular a contribution that aligns with global evidence gaps as indicated here.

b. Build ‘research capacity’ through the process

c. Deliver appropriate practitioner focussed outputs during the process (details to be determined based on wider methodological discussions)

For further information about the World Vision see: https://www.worldvision.org.uk/

For pre-submission enquiries, prospective applicants may write to Dr Alison Buckler, Research Fellow in International Education and Development at Alison.Buckler@open.ac.uk

Completed application forms, together with a Research Proposal and a covering letter indicating your suitability and reasons for applying must be sent to FASS-PhD-Applications@open.ac.uk

Application forms are available from http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply.