Open Textbooks in Africa

Rationale
This proposal addresses Action Area 5 of the UNESCO OER Recommendation, “Promoting and reinforcing international cooperation”, specifically as relates to promoting and stimulating cross-border collaboration and alliances on OER projects and programmes, leveraging existing transnational, regional and global collaboration mechanisms and organisations.

Open textbooks are an important phenomenon in the global higher education landscape with compelling affordances around cost savings and content development approaches that address localisation and decolonisation of the curriculum. There is however very little open textbook conversation, publishing activity or advocacy taking place in African higher education institutions (HEIs).

This interactive event will be hosted by the Digital Open Textbooks for Development (DOT4D) project in collaboration with experienced open education practitioners at two African universities in order to discuss the contextual challenges and opportunities related to open textbook production in Africa.

Digital Open Textbooks for Development
The DOT4D project is an open textbook research, implementation and advocacy initiative in the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Having completed its first three-year research cycle on open textbook production at UCT, the initiative is eager to contribute towards the growth of a broader open textbook community of practice and to build upon the work it has undertaken to date in articulating models of open textbook production that promote social justice and are sustainable in resource-constrained environments.

DOT4D findings indicate that OTs have the potential to disrupt histories of exclusion in South African HE institutions by addressing issues of cost and marginalisation of voices through the creation of affordable, contextually-relevant learning resources. They provide affordances which enable lecturers to change the way they teach, include student voices and create innovative pedagogical strategies.

OT authors at UCT are motivated by different drivers and social justice imperatives to create these OTs and their contributions are driven by a strong sense of agency and reflexivity about how their ultimate concerns align with their practices of openness.

The contexts in which OT authors operate and their various drivers reveal the complexities of authorship and content development, quality assurance and publishing processes that make up their production. The intermeshing of these aspects helps to explain the success or lack of success of these initiatives, why some projects move further along the production cycle towards publication than others. Throughout their production, authors grapple with their open textbook processes and their professional identities.

The findings show that the valiant efforts by OT authors need to extend across the institution and across institutions. Institutional support in the form of OT awards, recognising open education work in promotion criteria, empowering academics through intellectual property rights and ownership, and sourcing funding to support the work of educators and students involved in OT production are crucial for transformation.

Session details
The purpose of this activity is to begin a conversation between key stakeholders who are involved in or have a potential interest in open textbook production in Africa.

This 90-minute interactive session will feature inputs from DOT4D, hosting partners and international collaborators from the DOT4D global network in order to stimulate the conversation with lessons learned and expertise gained to date.
The session will utilise a Conversation Café format with breakout rooms and digital interactive tools to engage participants in discussion on a range of topics related to open textbook development in the African context, including authorship, publishing and quality assurance models; dynamics related to translation and reuse of open textbooks; capacity development; and continental collaboration. Live notes from the session will be shared with OE Global participants via an open Google Doc.

The “Open Textbooks in Africa” interactive session is aimed at anyone interested in the role of open textbooks for promoting social justice, OER and open textbook advocates working in African HEIs, and potential funders of work in this area. The session has an explicit aim to explore longer-term mechanisms for continental collaboration and skills-sharing, as well as combined research and fundraising efforts.

Towards a greater agenda
The desired outcome of this session is an improved joint understanding of the contextual factors that enable or constrain open textbook production in African HEIs. The discussion will also be designed to surface strategies on how to move open textbook development forward in Africa and how to engage funders. The session hosts intend to utilise this session in order to identify potential collaborators for a greater African open textbook research, implementation and advocacy project.