



# "A BLENDED LEARNING PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION INNOVATION: LESSONS FROM AN INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION BETWEEN EUROPE AND ASIA AMIDST OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC"

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**PROF. DR. MANJULA VITHANAPATHIRANA**

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

**UNIVERSITY OF COLOMBO**

**SRI LANKA**



**NATIONAL COORDINATOR CONTESSA SRI LANKA**

# CONTESSA



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



- The overall aim of CONTESSA (Contemporary Teaching Skills for South Asia)
- To develop a teacher training program that provides high-quality contemporary education that will ultimately equip current and future teachers with the skills needed to develop a wide range of didactic methods which they can in turn use to engage, empower and educate their students.

# THE CONTESSA PROJECT CONSORTIUM

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- Project Coordination: University of Graz, Austria
- Technology Partner: Dresden University of Technology, Germany
- **South Asian Partners (Beneficiaries)**
- Two Universities in Cambodia
- Two Universities in Sri Lanka
- 7 Associated Members from the Project and Partner countries

# OBJECTIVES OF CONTESSA PROJECT

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CONTESSA has three main objectives that reach across three targets groups:

- **Teacher trainers** will be offered a comprehensive Train-the-Trainer (TTT) program
- **Trainee teachers** will be provided with access to an online-based learning program that consists of five modules and places an emphasis on **the acquisition of modern and applicable teaching skills**. This program will be introduced via an OER platform.
- **In-service teachers** will be provided with access to modified online-modules that have been adapted to **fit the continued education needs of teachers** who are currently working in classrooms.

# WHY CONTESSA IS IMPORTANT TO SRI LANKA?

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- Apart from conventional Face-to-Face modality, the distance teacher education has been practiced in Sri Lanka for several decades. This planned BLENDED LEARNING TEACHER EDUCATION is a new concept, especially in contexts where conventional teacher education has been the norm.
- The first planned blended teacher education program in Sri Lanka is currently being developed through the “Contemporary Teaching Skills for South Asia” project, CONTESSA
- My role in CONTESSA: University of Colombo Institutional Coordinator for CONTESSA and the National Coordinator for CONTESSA, Sri Lanka

# WHY DO I PRESENT CONTESSA TODAY?

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- To share the key lessons learned in continuing a large scale Erasmus + Capacity Building project through collaboration of two countries in Europe and two countries in South Asia during COVID 19
- To share the best practices of project planning ensuring sustainability and smooth functioning even during COVID 19 pandemic
- To share the human action and relationships in project implementation during COVID 19
- Discern lessons/ KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) in project management

# BEGINNING WITH STRONG TEAM BUILDING: *BUILDING BRIDGES*

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- Project proposal was done by Project Directors in Graz and submitted to EU for competitive evaluation after obtaining consent of potential project partners
- Project was awarded the grant in 2018 as a “Project Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union”
- Project Launch was in Graz in 2018, where a strong foundation for relationships was laid
- In Cambodia and in Sri Lanka kick-off meetings were held in 2019
- Project Duration 3 years (2019-2021)

# PROJECT LAUNCH IN NOV 2018 IN GRAZ, AUSTRIA

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# THE NEED FOR CLOSE COLLABORATION

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- CONTESSA framework did not include a 'Top Down' approach in the development of the teacher education program for South Asia. Thus a close collaboration was the main modality.
- CONTESSA framework adopted 'Needs Analysis' during each step of project implementation. Therefore, a close connectivity between project and partner countries was needed.
- A plan needing interaction between teams was embedded in the project plan with Annual Meetings to be held in Europe as well as in partner countries in Asia.
- The Year I (2019) plans were implemented smoothly with no disturbances. However, by early 2020 COVID 19 struck the entire world and continues to date.

# CONTESSA DURING COVID 19: THE CHALLENGES

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- The project teams could not physically meet although had planned for F2F team meetings
- All institutions of CONTESSA faced closures of countries with international travel restrictions, closure of Universities, within country travel restrictions, problems of progress, spending project funds for planned activities, issues of implementing project activities etc.
- School closures in South Asia posing problems for production of classroom video materials to prepare study material
- Uncertainties in holding Annual Meetings in 2020 and 2021
- Issues of scheduling Train-the-Trainer Workshops

# CONTESSA AMIDST COVID-19: A PARTNER PERSPECTIVE

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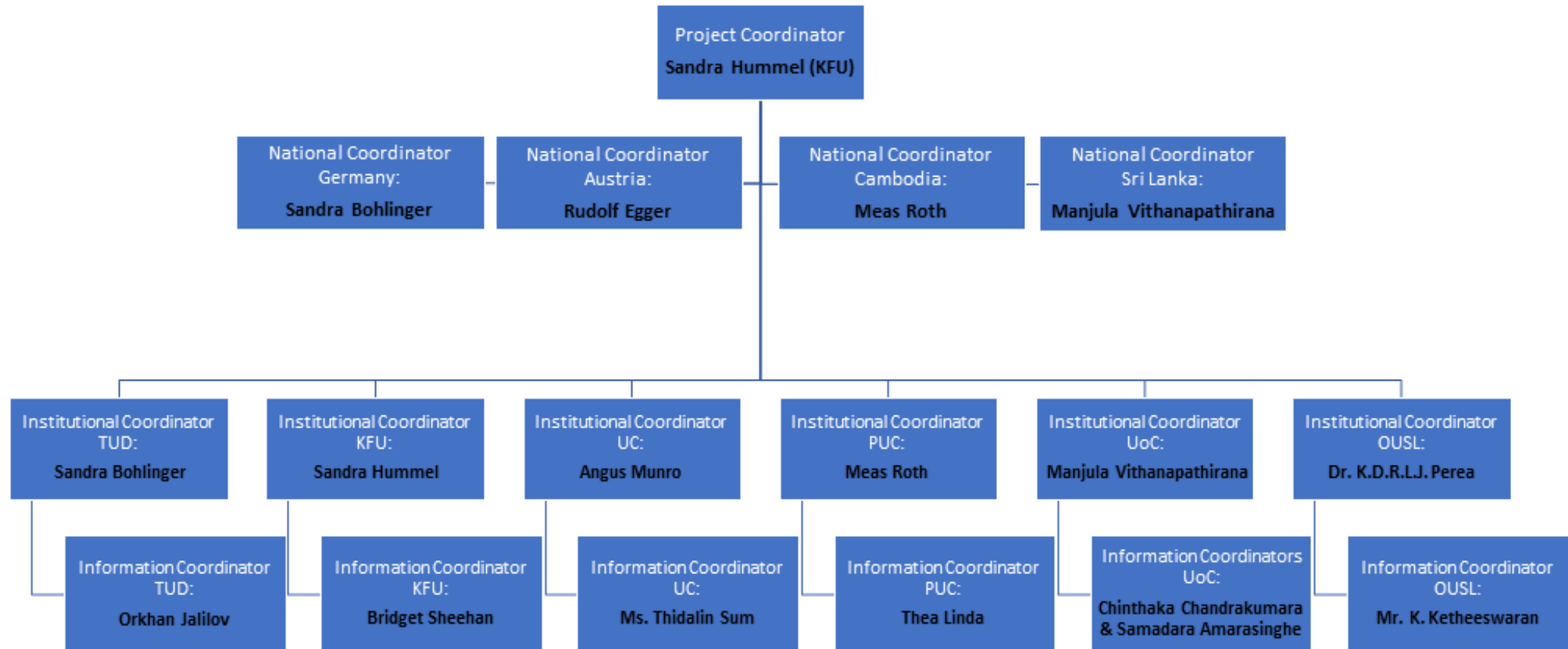
- There was no option other than getting on to 100% REMOTE approaches
- As a partner cum beneficiary of CONTESSA we realized that the project has to be driven forward, collaboratively finding alternatives to implement the core activities of the project.
- The project Directors attempted to motivate the us, the partners to find alternatives to conduct activities while giving support and encouragement
- The project had several inbuilt strengths which laid the foundation to sail through COVID 19 period

# I. STRENGTH OF PROJECT PLANNING

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- Project implementation divided into 6 Work Packages (Preparation, Train-the-Trainer, Online Modules, Quality Assurance, Dissemination, Management). Each was detailed and activities, responsible institutions, deliverables and due dates were identified.
- One of the key strengths of the project was the Organizational Structure, which depicts the communication channels, chains of responsibility and roles and responsibilities of team members.

# ORGANIGRAM OF PROJECT



# REMOTE PARTICIPATORY PROJECT MANAGEMENT (3 LEVELS)

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## 1. Project Management **across countries**

*between Project Director, Staff and coordinators (National and Institutional) in partner countries*

## 2. Project Management **within a country across institutions**

*between National and Institutional Coordinators*

## 3. Project Management **within institutions**

*between Institutional Coordinator, Information Coordinators and other project participants*



# MONTHLY MEETINGS (ONLINE)

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- The need for more meetings arose to keep abreast of the activities of each country team due to the dynamics of the pandemic.
- Each first Monday of the month CONTESSA team members met on a time slot convenient for all.
- All activities at a given time related to work-packages of the project were discussed and institution-wise progress, challenges, support requested were considered
- When necessary further mini-meetings were held with the specific institutional project staff.

# CONTESSA MONTHLY MEETINGS

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## 2. CO-DEVELOPMENT OF MODULES: ADDRESSING ISSUES OF MOTIVATION

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- The new primary teacher education programme design included development of 5 modules.
- Module frameworks were designed by the principal project team and were negotiated and revised with partner feedback.
- The content of each module was developed in collaboration with mutual support during the Covid -19 pandemic, where Institutional teams of South Asian partners, Sri Lanka and Cambodia contributed to the module writing-up.
- Coordination of the module development was challenging as everyone was somewhat demotivated during this period due to the anxieties arisen due to Covid. Patience, empathy and recovering lapses led to completion of modules.

# 3. TRAINING OF TRAINERS WORKSHOPS : NO OPTION OTHER THAN ONLINE

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The TTT workshops were to be conducted face-to-face with direct interaction with trainers. Due to the continuing pandemic, the workshops were transformed to be conducted exclusively online.

To conduct these online the workshop schedules:

All material co-developed through online communication to ensure contextual validity eg: Case studies of teachers/teacher educators of each setting, collating child friendly education principles and practices and mentoring strategies of each context.

Cross-national perspectives on teacher training were designed in detail through developing initial formats and getting the partners to add to formats to suit the online workshops.



## 4. MONITORING WITH FLEXIBILITY: A PARTNER PERSPECTIVE

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- The Covid-19 situation in the four countries fluctuated with different intensive waves taking place in various months since its onset.
- Although the deadlines of all work packages were laid down in the project plan, it became highly challenging to adhere to the deadlines. There was no option other than to be reasonably flexible without harming the final targets.
- It was in the hands of project directors and partners to find ways of completing tasks during the time of COVID 19.

# IMPACT OF CONTESSA: CAPACITY BUILDING

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- A new teacher training program with OER suited for train teachers for 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Knowledge for module development for Blended Teacher Education with a Learner-centered focus
- Training of trainers in a 'multiplier system' to implement the new primary teacher development program with contemporary teaching skills
- Establishment of SMART classroom infrastructure in partner institutions
- Institutional development through the project funding. Most project team members at each institution worked voluntarily for the benefit of institutions becoming members of a professional learning community.

# NOW WHERE ARE WE ? OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED ?

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- We are about to conduct the Train-the-Trainer Workshops online.
- The OER teacher training modules are being translated to native languages of partner countries.
- The modular primary teacher training program is being tested at least in two sites
- Applying for accreditation of module based teacher education programs is in progress in partner institutions (Sri Lanka)
- Gradual uploading of OER modules to the online platform by technical partner
- Writing articles for compilation of an Anthology of the Project as a dissemination strategy through a collaborative activity of all members

# THE REWARDING PATHWAY: THE VIRTUAL TEAM SPIRIT

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- Determination to '*sail through*' within all project members
- Clear virtual communication accompanied with collegiality
- Respectful participatory project management
- Unconditional collaborative relations
- Feeling connected and staying in touch to give priority for responding
- The notion of '*leaving a legacy*' for the future generations in mindsets of the team

THE SUCCESS OF TEAMWORK

*COMING TOGETHER IS A BEGINNING*

*KEEPING TOGETHER IS PROGRESS*

*WORKING TOGETHER IS SUCCESS*

*-HENRY FORD-*

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THANK YOU!