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Project 101128703

## **UNICATION**

Unify Communication by International Projects in Cambodia and  
Philippines

WP 2 project results report

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# Comprehensive analysis of the impact of the UNICATION project in Cambodia and the Philippines

## Introduction

Higher education institutions in Cambodia and the Philippines have made significant strides in internationalisation in recent years, but their internationalisation practices and the training and preparedness of staff responsible for this area lag behind the level seen in other countries in the Southeast Asian region. The **UNICATION** (Unify Communication by International Projects) project was launched to address these challenges, with the aim of improving internal communication and management of international projects at universities in Cambodia and the Philippines. The project focused on identifying communication gaps and overcoming barriers arising from cultural differences, as differing values and beliefs, as well as linguistic and cultural diversity, often result in communication barriers in international cooperation.

The UNICATION project set eight specific objectives and defined five main expected results. These included **developing communication skills, strengthening the capacity to manage international projects, developing the internationalisation strategies of partner institutions, expanding cooperation and networks between institutions**, and ensuring the **sustainability of project results** to guarantee long-term impact. In line with these objectives, the project implemented activities and training courses to enable the staff and project teams of the International Relations Offices (IROs) to initiate and implement international projects more effectively and to cooperate with each other.

To evaluate the results of the project, we conducted a questionnaire survey among staff at higher education institutions in Cambodia and the Philippines participating in the consortium who were directly or indirectly involved in the project. The survey focused on four key areas: (1) the impact of the project on the internationalisation strategy of the institutions; (2) the role of cultural differences in the international project management process; (3) the development of communication and project management skills; and (4) changes in the functioning and effectiveness of international offices.

## Methodology

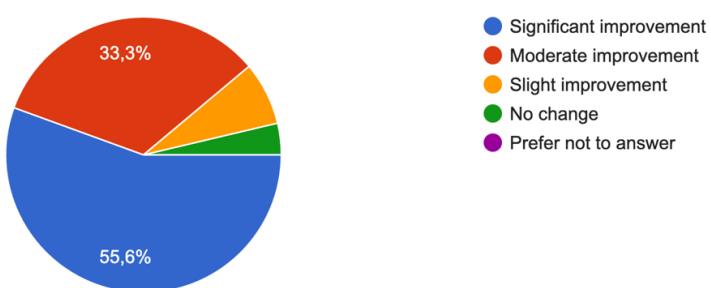
The research used an online questionnaire completed by staff members of higher education institutions in Cambodia and the Philippines participating in the UNICATION project. A total of **27 responses** (N=27) were received to the mixed-methods questionnaire, which included *structured (closed)* questions – such as multiple-choice and Likert scale items – as well as *open-ended* questions in which respondents could express their opinions and experiences in writing. The results of the closed questions were evaluated using descriptive statistical analysis (percentage distributions, frequencies), while the responses to the open questions were subjected to qualitative content analysis, categorising common themes and examples.

The modules of the questionnaire covered the main areas of development of the project, including: the impact of the project on individual and institutional experiences and motivation; the development of the internationalisation of institutions; the adaptation of good practices; changes in the role of the International Office; experiences of cooperation with European and Asian partners; the practical implementation and sustainability of the project; intercultural communication and inclusion; and the future prospects of the project. The responses to the questionnaire were grouped around four research questions.

## Results

### The impact of the project on the internationalisation strategy

Section 1: Progress in Communication and Project Management Since participating in the UNICATION project, how would you rate the improvement... practices related to international projects?  
27 válasz



*Figure 1: Improvement in internal communication in the field of international projects since participation in the UNICATION project. More than half of the respondents (55.6%) reported a significant improvement, while a further 33.3% reported a moderate improvement. A smaller proportion, 7.4%, reported a slight improvement, while only one respondent (3.7%) indicated that there had been no change (N=27).*



The responses clearly show that the UNICATION project has made a tangible contribution to strengthening the internationalisation strategies of partner institutions. The vast majority of respondents indicated that their institution **had developed its internationalisation strategy** to varying degrees, particularly in the area of international project communication, as a result of the project. Almost all institutions have introduced new internal communication practices or tools in the management of international projects since the start of the project, as evidenced by the fact that 89% of participants reported at least a moderate improvement in international project communication. In addition, **the number of projects prepared or implemented in international cooperation increased** at most institutions during the project period.

Has your institution implemented new practices/tools to improve communication in international projects?  
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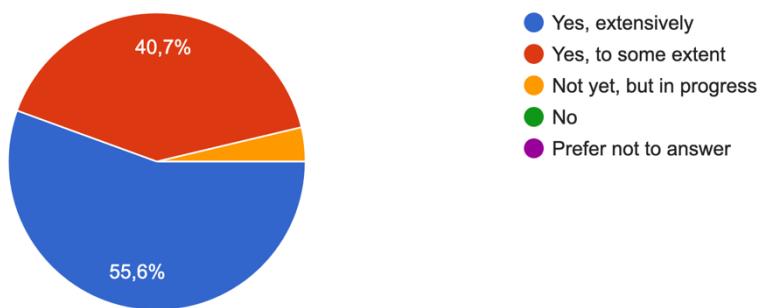


Figure 2: Has your institution implemented new practices/tools to improve communication in international projects?

The responses to the open-ended questions in the research area also confirm the previous results. Several respondents highlighted that through the project, *they had "built external international networks, improved internal communication within the institution in the field of internationalisation, and gained a broader perspective and more complex knowledge of internationalisation"*. This means that universities are looking at their own international strategies with a broader, ASEAN and EU-focused perspective and have begun to build them more consciously. A concrete result is that the universities participating in the project have used the practical and theoretical knowledge they have acquired **to develop their student and teacher mobility programmes** and **expand their regional and intercontinental networks**. The project also contributed **to strengthening networks and partnerships** between institutions, which is an important element of the internationalisation strategy in higher education.



## Cultural differences in project management

The survey also highlighted that **managing cultural differences** plays a key role in the success of international projects. Several respondents emphasised the importance of intercultural skills. During the project, they learned how to adapt to different national and institutional cultures and what tools they can use to bridge differences in communication styles. Several respondents emphasised that UNICATION helped them to *"gain a deeper understanding of the working culture of partner universities and adopt best practices accordingly"*. As a result, Asian and European partners learned from each other, creating an atmosphere of trust and respect for shared values. According to respondents, improving cross-cultural communication was one of the most important outcomes of the project: *"communication between different groups improved, the atmosphere became more inclusive, and cross-cultural cooperation became closer"*.

During the implementation of the project, cultural differences were most evident in changes in communication habits and project management methods. For example, formal respect and indirect communication were important to the Asian partners, while the European partners preferred direct feedback – these differences had to be consciously managed by the university implementation teams in each country. According to one respondent, as a result of the project, *they "became more confident in cross-cultural communication and learned new things about working with foreign partners,"* for example, the potential of student exchange programmes and online learning formats. During the project period, the parties flexibly adjusted their schedules and **adapted to each other's work routines and the challenges posed by the time difference**. The initial challenges caused by cultural differences became learning opportunities after regular communication and workshops.

## Development of communication and project management skills

Another key objective of the project was to develop the skills of the participants. Almost all of the respondents took part in some form **of training or workshop** organised by the European partners within the framework of the project, which focused on international project management communication and intercultural aspects. Some of the institutions even organised internal training courses for their staff or supported their participation in international training courses provided by the project. Based on the feedback, the participants found these training courses to be extremely useful in terms of improving communication and were able to immediately apply the knowledge they had acquired in their work.

Did your institution provide specific training/workshops as part of the project?

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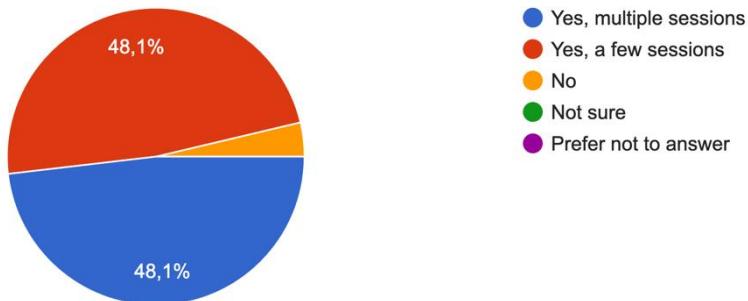


Figure 3: Did your institution provide specific training/workshops as part of the project?

Were these trainings useful in improving communication in international project contexts?

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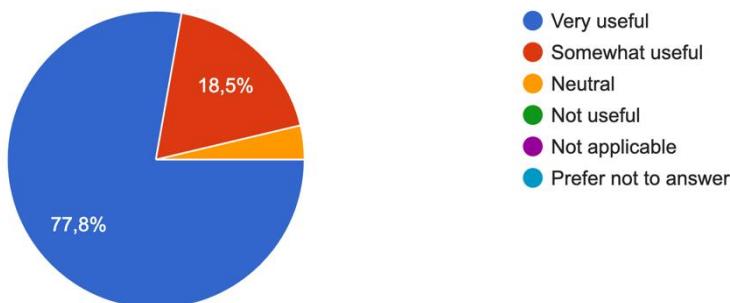


Figure 4 Were these trainings useful in improving communication in international project contexts?

Several respondents highlighted **the educational materials and tools developed specifically for the UNICATION project** (e.g. online learning modules, practical guides, communication toolkits), which greatly contributed to their competence development. According to one respondent, *"one of the most significant results of UNICATION was the development of tailored training resources – including teaching materials, guides and communication tools – specifically designed for staff involved in the management of international projects. These are already enriching the skills of administrative and teaching staff, equipping them with intercultural communication, project management challenges and institutional cooperation, making them much more effective.*



*their work". This feedback clearly shows that the knowledge base created within the framework of the project **could be directly incorporated** into everyday work processes.*

In the area of competence development, respondents identified the following areas: **improvement of project development skills, development of intercultural communication, and the ability to build international partnerships.** The feedback shows that the project not only developed individual skills, but also improved cooperation within the consortium.

The professional development of international office staff deserves special attention. The training sessions drew attention **to the importance of diversity, inclusivity and innovation** in international cooperation. As one respondent put it, "*UNICATION's training highlighted the importance of diversity, inclusivity, innovation and global cooperation in developing the level of competences and skills in higher education institutions*". The staff members participating in the project gained **a more open mindset and new methodological knowledge**, which they shared with their colleagues, thereby contributing to the development of the organisational culture.

## Changes in the functioning of international offices

The UNICATION project had an impact on the functioning and role of the international offices of the participating universities. The results of the survey lead us to conclude that the project activities *had a positive impact on the daily processes of the international offices*. As one respondent put it, "*the project activities had a positive impact on how we manage our daily operations and implement our annual work plans.*" This **refers to the** international offices' **ability to organise their tasks more efficiently.**

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

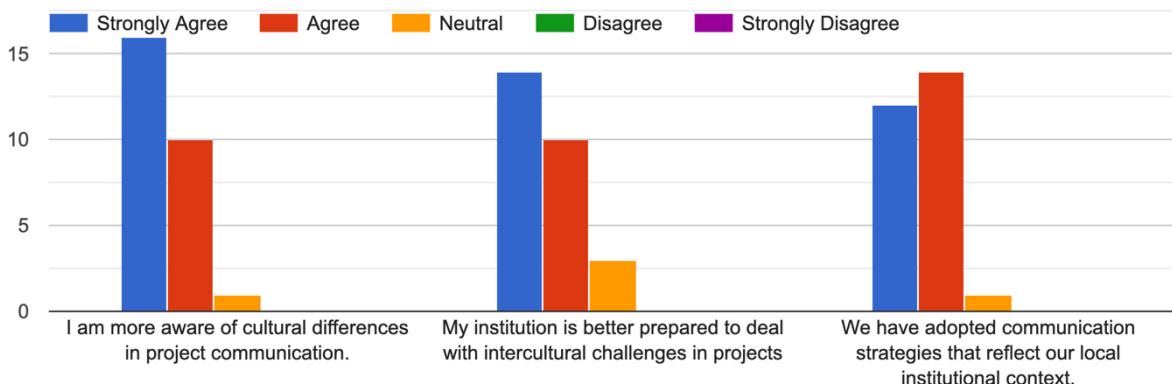


Figure 5: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Several institutions have developed **new communication platforms** for managing international projects in order to monitor their impact. For example, internal meetings





on the progress of international projects have become regular, or a standardised communication plan template has been created at the start of projects. These developments have contributed to **strengthening the organisational and managerial role** of the international office within the institution and to smoother information flow within the university. Respondents also reported that, as a result of the project, the IRO is **more actively building international relationships**: they are consciously seeking new opportunities for cooperation, monitoring international calls for proposals, and striving to expand their partner network. According to one response, the UNICATION project has "*succeeded in building a network with all partners and improving the institution's communication strategies*," which lays the foundation for future bilateral or multilateral cooperation.

The level of training of international office staff enables them to support the international aspirations of universities more effectively. According to one respondent, one of the most valuable outcomes of UNICATION is that it has succeeded **in achieving greater efficiency in intercultural cooperation** by improving communication between groups from different backgrounds, which was an area for improvement in the offices prior to the project.

Has there been an increase in collaborative international projects since the beginning of the UNICATION project?

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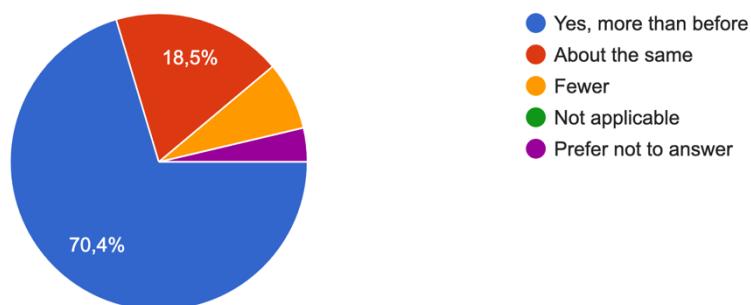


Figure 6: Has there been an increase in collaborative international projects since the beginning of the UNICATION project?

During the project, **the role of international offices** within universities **has been re-evaluated**. Whereas previously they functioned more as administrative support units, as a result of UNICATION, several institutions now view them as strategic partners in management when international projects or collaborations come to the fore. This is supported by the fact that the institutions will continue to operate this organisational unit after the project.



## Summary

Despite the small sample size of the survey, it is clear that the UNICATION project has successfully achieved its internationalisation development goals, confirming that internal communication and international networking are essential for successful internationalisation. Among the ASEAN countries, this result is particularly significant in the case of Cambodia and the Philippines, as universities in these countries were less integrated into the international higher education space. The knowledge and skills development provided by the project helped the participating institutions to increase their international presence and cooperation activities, which may improve their domestic and international competitiveness in the long term.

Based on the survey results, we can conclude that the UNICATION project successfully achieved its objectives in the areas examined. Its impact **on the internationalisation strategies of the institutions** was evident in their recognition of the importance of internal communication and international networking for successful internationalisation. The UNICATION project initiated *an intercultural dialogue* that **increased acceptance and flexibility** among the partners. This type of experience will be incorporated into the university's work culture in the long term. Targeted interventions, such as the practice-oriented training and resources provided by the project, **directly improved the quality of everyday work** and strengthened **institutional commitment** to internationalisation. This is particularly important for young or dynamically growing universities that have reached a level of development where they have elevated internationalisation to a strategic level.

**It can already be concluded that the changes in the functioning of international offices have had** the effect of enabling universities to be prepared and able to continuously manage international projects in the future. However, the support of university leaders, continuous training and the development of an innovative organisational culture will be essential in the long term. All this will ensure the sustainability of the project and, at the same time, trigger further developments. It is not a one-off, but a structural change. The UNICATION project has contributed at the strategic, institutional, organisational and individual levels to universities developing their internationalisation strategies more consciously and strengthening their international relations.