

“Congratulations REAL Centre for achieving a ten-year milestone! Your achievements in the field of global education and development particularly in producing knowledge from your research in Africa has been exemplary. As a Centre you stand tall when it comes to highlighting and promoting the contributions of education research from Africa, and you have not been afraid to invite challenging, respectful and constructive debate about research issues that advance global discourses on development. Thanks for the privilege of collaborating with your researchers on researching complementary basic education in Ghana which has led to new insights that are changing our understanding of how to provide quality education for out of school children in Ghana, and beyond. I have particularly admired the values of inclusivity, social justice, innovation and responsiveness that have characterised your research partnerships with African researchers and their institutions. This is unique in the field of research collaborations in the global south.

On the occasion of your tenth anniversary, I wish your leadership and members another decade of impactful research that continue to change the lives of many disadvantaged and marginalised children across Africa.

I look forward to us working together to advance knowledge on how to improve education in the global south and give children from marginalised backgrounds a brighter future.

As we say in Ghana - iAyekoo! [well done!!]”

*Kwame Akyeampong, Centre for the Study of Global Development, The Open University*

“For me, the most valuable thing I have taken from the REAL Centre are the wonderful colleagues it has brought together, both as formal members of the centre and those working in collaboration with us from all over the world. I left the REAL Centre about five years back but still enjoy working with colleagues I met right back at its inception, many of whom I can now call friends.”

*Benjamin Alcott, UCL Institute of Education*

“I was a PhD student at the University of Cambridge when REAL was being formed ten years ago, and what an incredibly exciting moment it was! I remember the brown bag lunches and conversations that led up to the launch, the passion and conviction with which Pauline Rose spoke on the day, and the thrilling energy in the room with which participants reflected on the thematic areas that would be characteristic of the Centre. In the years that followed, the Centre and its news were hard to ignore even when I had returned to my home country (Pakistan), given REAL’s engagements in the country as well as multi-country projects like the Systems Research program on understanding the state of early learning systems, for which our paths crossed. Working for REAL, I take incredible pride and joy in being part of something, the seed for which was sowed ten years ago. On the occasion of its tenth anniversary, I sincerely hope and pray that the Centre continues to thrive and tackle global inequalities and injustices in education head-on, producing excellent scholarship along the way which the University has always prided itself in.”

*Amna Ansari, REAL Centre*

“Being part of the REAL Centre was one of the most meaningful chapters of my life. It wasn’t just about research — it was about people, purpose, and making a real difference. I found a team that cared deeply — about the work and about each other. It was a place where I felt safe to grow, where ideas were valued, and where genuine friendships formed through shared challenges, coffee chats, and everyday moments. What began as a one-year plan turned into three unforgettable years. The REAL Centre gave me more than professional experience — it gave me a true sense of belonging, which I’ll always carry with me.”

*Mesele Araya, Former Senior Research Associate, REAL Centre*

"I am excited to be part of the REAL Centre's impressive 10 years accomplishments. My first contact with the Centre was in 2017 when I was in final year of PhD programme in New Zealand. I was convinced from the warm and welcoming email response that it was the right place to start my research career.

Luckily, I got a postdoctoral role in 2018 to work with Professor Pauline Rose and Dr Rafael Mitchell (now at University of Bristol) on a project in partnership with Education Sub Saharan (ESSA) - a partnership which is ongoing and growing stronger. The project aims at enhancing the accessibility and visibility of education research by Africa-based researchers for policy and investment decisions.

The inclusive and supportive environment at the Centre was instrumental in my development as a researcher and smooth transition to ESSA on the project. I got opportunities to contribute to grant writing, journal publications, conference presentations, supervision of undergraduate projects, among others.

Looking back, I have no doubt that my time at REAL Centre was a key component of the foundation for my growing career. I am excited for the continued link with the Centre through ongoing projects with ESSA."

*Samuel Asare, Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA)*

"Being part of the REAL Centre over the last decade has been incredibly enriching and rewarding for us personally and professionally. Working alongside such passionate and accomplished individuals, and the friendships that we have formed within the Centre, have been a great support and inspiration for us on our academic and life journeys. We have made such lasting connections that we know will continue to influence our work and outlook for years to come."

*Monazza Aslam / Shenila Rawal, Oxford Partnership for Education Research and Analysis (OPERA)*

"I have had the opportunity to collaborate with incredible and insightful colleagues at the REAL Centre. This experience has also provided me with an additional learning opportunity, particularly in inclusive and equitable education. A defining feature of the REAL Centre is its strong commitment to girls' education. Through research, we aim to empower girls, to enhance gender equality, and to support economic and social development."

*Nardos Chuta, RISE Ethiopia*

"Congratulations to the REAL Centre on achieving your tenth anniversary. You provide a great forum for respectful debate, stimulating ideas and impassioned argument and you showcase some of the best talent in our sector. Let's hope that the first ten years are just a prelude to at least ten more years to come."

*Andy Brock*

“Being part of the REAL Centre means engaging in research that is grounded in a long-term vision, beyond the scope of individual projects and being inspired by Pauline’s thoughtful leadership. Being part of the REAL Centre means being part of a dynamic community where, even if you’re naturally quiet, you can easily build meaningful connections with PhD students, postdocs and professors.

It means learning from the REAL community in ways that extend well beyond the university setting.

To work for and with the REAL Centre is committing to important causes in education and social justice.”

*Hélène Binesse, Associate Member, REAL Centre*

“It has been an absolute pleasure and honour to have worked with colleagues and friends at the REAL Centre over the last many years. We have collaborated on research, thought through ideas, wrote papers, policy-briefs and blogs, collaborated on conferences, workshops and events and have been friends to each other. I believe we have made real contributions in many areas, within education research in Pakistan, through the partnership with the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS). In particular I would like to mention the work we have been able to do in inclusion in general and girls’ education and disability studies in particular in this regard. REAL Centre has provided a welcoming home for all this. Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS) has been an institutional partner with REAL Centre.

We have interacted and worked with many faculty members and associate members of the REAL Centre and continue to do so. But, personally, I would, in particular, like to mention Professor Pauline Rose and Professor Nidhi Singal. It has been a joy to work with both of them and I have learnt a lot from our interactions and collaboration.

REAL Centre has made significant contributions to education research over the last 10 years. I congratulate the faculty, staff and management of the Centre on these achievements. And I wish continued success to the Centre.”

*Faisal Bari, National Institute of Technology (NIT), Lahore, Pakistan*

“I had the privilege of working with the REAL Centre for over seven years as a postdoctoral researcher on two major evaluations, Complementary Basic Education (CBE) in Ghana and the Leaders in Teaching (LIT) initiative in Rwanda. These projects gave me the chance to work closely with amazing researchers from REAL as well as in-country teams and partners, and to contribute to research that supports more inclusive and effective education systems. Some of my most memorable moments include sharing research findings and learnings with my teams with educators, policymakers, teachers, and community members during end of program events and celebrations in Ghana and Rwanda as well as exploring and learning about these wonderful countries during these times with my colleagues. I have absolutely cherished these experiences which made it clear how important it is for research to be both collaborative and grounded in local realities and relationships. I’ve also been incredibly fortunate to learn from and be mentored by Professors Pauline Rose, Nidhi Singal and Ricardo Sabates whose guidance has helped me grow as a researcher and develop a deeper understanding of how research can inspire meaningful change.”

*Emma Carter, University of Melbourne, Australia*

“I have had the opportunity to collaborate with incredible and insightful colleagues at the REAL Centre. This experience has also provided me with an additional learning opportunity, particularly in inclusive and equitable education. A defining feature of the REAL Centre is its strong commitment to girls’ education. Through research, we aim to empower girls, to enhance gender equality, and to support economic and social development.”

*Nardos Chuta, RISE Ethiopia*

“For the two years I worked at the REAL Centre, it was a place of warmth, diversity, and passion. For me, REAL is a place which prioritises doing research for the greater good and tries to challenge aspects of the research system which need to be improved for increased ownership, equity, and impact for those who are most disadvantaged. Under the leadership of Pauline, I felt supported, able to grow academically and personally, and valued as a research associate. My favourite thing about the REAL centre is the diversity of the team, and the mutual respect, kindness, and openness which comes with that. Not only does this diversity embody doing international development in a better way, it also resulted in me meeting colleagues who have become some of my best friends.”

*Luisa Ciampi, Action Research on Research Culture, University of Cambridge*

“I had the privilege of completing my MPhil and PhD with The REAL Centre, and working closely with Nidhi Singal, Ricardo Sabates, and Pauline Rose, who have always inspired me. My time at the REAL Centre was invaluable and has been extremely formative in my professional journey. I’m so grateful for the memories, friendships, and experiences - from my first job as an RA on the Mastercard Foundation secondary education in Africa report with Pauline, to homemade cooked dinners at Nidhi’s house, collaborations with CANDER, and Ricardo’s reaction after I submitted my first essay in the EGID track (shout out to the matriculating class of 2017 - we were the guinea pigs and the programme’s come along way since then!). Today, the Centre is still an important partner in my role at Education.org. Thank you, to my professors, colleagues, Sandra (!), and The entire REAL Centre.”

*Sophia D’Angelo, Education.org*

“Collaborating with the REAL Centre on our Gender-Responsive Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education (GRP4ECE) study in South Africa has been a powerful example of the support that strengthens VVOB’s commitment to evidence-based, gender-responsive education. The REAL team’s expertise in study design and data analysis added depth and rigour to VVOB’s methodology and findings, while their collaborative spirit made the experience both meaningful and memorable.”

*Hans De Greve, VVOB*

"I have had the privilege of engaging professionally with the REAL Centre and its Director Professor Pauline Rose OBE since the Centre's inception in 2015 to date. My engagement was initially through my role as the Founding Manager for the Cambridge-Africa programme at the University of Cambridge. However, I reconnected with the Centre as an external collaborator and a friend when I joined the international education charity ESSA four years ago. My key takeaway after a decade of partnership, including with Education Sub Saharan Africa, is the unwavering focus of the Centre on conducting rigorous, policy-relevant research that addresses inequality in education and amplifies the voices of marginalised and underprivileged people in the Global South. The REAL Centre should also be immensely proud of the long list of talented students and postdoctoral researchers from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and beyond, who have been supervised, trained, or mentored there, and are having positive impact all over the world. As we say in Ghana, 'Ayekoo' (meaning, 'congratulations', or 'well done') on your 10-year anniversary, and I wish you even more success in the years ahead!"

*Pauline Essah, Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA)*

"I have been collaborating with the REAL Centre on a research project funded by the Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA programme, and it has been a truly rewarding experience. I'm especially pleased to see the REAL Centre expanding its partnerships with universities in Ethiopia beyond the capital city, which reflects a genuine commitment to equitable distribution of resources. I and my colleagues at Bahir Dar University look forward to strengthening this collaboration in the years ahead."

*Dawit Asrat Getahun, College of Education, Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia*

"It has been a privilege to have been closely engaged with the REAL Centre from its launch and witness its impactful journey over the past decade. The REAL Centre's impressive, robust, and actionable evidence has been key to overcoming barriers for marginalised girls, including through its collaboration with CAMFED."

*The Hon. Julia Gillard AC, 27th Prime Minister of Australia and Patron of CAMFED*

"Wishing my congratulations to the REAL centre for all the extensive contributions to research on understanding education inequality in the poorest countries of the world. Thank you for the outstanding support you have provided on helping national governments and donors to deliver evidence-based education policy making and program design on gender equality and inclusion. In my personal experience both at FCDO and at the GPE, the REAL Centre under Professor Pauline Rose's leadership has had an impact in the real world which is what matters."

*Sally Gear, Global Partnership for Education*

"As a Palestinian and a doctoral researcher at the Faculty of Education, my engagement with the REAL Centre has been profoundly meaningful. The Centre has consistently provided space for critical global issues to be discussed with honesty and depth including the struggles and plea of the Palestinian people. Through its events and conversations, the REAL Centre has amplified voices that are too often silenced, and for that, I am deeply grateful."

*We'am Hamdan, Faculty of Education*

"1) My collaborating experiences with members of the REAL Centre has enhanced my skills in conducting educational research and publishing research outputs jointly. 2) Focusing on the agenda of 'equitable learning for all' is one of my lasting memories of the REAL Centre."

*Belay Hagos Hailu, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia*

"The REAL Centre was so much more than just a place I studied and worked. It truly felt like home. Indeed a home! During my time as an MPhil student and research assistant, I had the chance to grow, learn, and connect with the most amazing people. REAL gave me the chance to present at international conferences and met inspiring researchers. I was guided by the wisdom and support of colleagues which has shaped my personal and professional growth. The friendships and connections I made have stayed with me, even now. REAL gave me a sense of belonging that still means a lot to me today. Happy 10th anniversary to such a special place!"

*Daniel Hawkins Iddrisu, University of Oxford*

"I had the privilege of illustrating many of the REAL centre events when studying for my PhD, some of which became the impromptu wallpaper for the departmental REAL centre workspace. A common thread across the wide range of events and publications has been the commitment to social justice and being a catalyst for change. One of my favourite pinch-me moments is when Pauline used a REAL/BAICE event 'Inclusive learning and teaching' graphic during her keynote at the following UKFIET conference (2017). Presenting on a giant screen, there was my graphic, as tall as a house, being used to share her wisdom in creative ways. This reflected something I have noticed about Pauline and the REAL centre team: not only have they worked hard to include a range of voices in their research and presentations, but they also ensure that each speaker and contributor feels equally valued, regardless of their career stage or perceived status. I cannot wait to see what the next 10 years will bring!"

*Julia Hayes, Inclusive education and participation consultant*

"The REAL Centre has been a wonderful organisation to collaborate with. Awesome technical skills married to a genuine commitment to partnerships with researchers and policymakers in the countries that they work with."

*John Hoddinott, Cornell University, USA*

“Joining the REAL Centre as a postdoctoral researcher in September 2023 has been an exciting and rewarding adventure. A definite highlight was my recent trip to Tanzania, where I not only gained deeper insights into educational challenges but also shared memorable moments collaborating closely with amazing local partners. Beyond the fieldwork, the supportive community and inspiring colleagues at the REAL Centre have truly made my research journey enjoyable and meaningful. I’m genuinely thrilled to continue learning and growing with this fantastic team!”

*Yuyan Jiang, University of Cambridge*

“I am looking forward to the 10 Year celebrations of the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre as a believer in its mission driven core. I am a fortunate fellow traveler in the early conceptualization of the REAL Centre. In 2014 I was invited to speak about our experiences on ‘citizens reshaping education’ with purpose, rigor and centrality of citizen data “ASER Pakistan” on foundational learning along with Dr. Monazza Aslam and Pauline Rose; long before the Copenhagen Framework (2025) UN Statistical Commission’s endorsement of citizen data. In Dr. Pauline Rose OBE, the first Director and curator of the REAL Centre we find profound commitment to distributed leadership, empowering innovative methodologies of inquiry backed by deep conviction of human rights for ALL and pursuit of thematic priorities for the long haul. The REAL Centre has attracted a superb collective of inspirational thought and action leaders, bold and caring in gathering evidence across complex contexts! For Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) and the People Action for Learning (PAL) Network, the REAL Centre has supported our thematic anchors for making citizen data inclusive mapping and advocating for disabilities, gathering compelling evidence on innovations for accelerating girls education in Pakistan and Africa, interrogating and advocating for Early Years Partnerships within systems and society in Ethiopia and Pakistan, undertaking research and extending capabilities for the PAL Network Fellows as gurus and inspiring us for its bold work in Palestine for the people and with the people. The REAL Centre true to its mission gives voice to the most marginalized through its vision, capable research leaders, powerful data, alliances and platforms. Leadership at the REAL Centre means mobilising generational scholars, students and professors on a lifelong trajectory; a group of capable believers who fuel #REALCentre with cutting edge research over time, across geographies, pushing the boundaries of equity, inclusion, innovations and standing firmly for peace, planet and sustainability through a human and gendered lens! May there be many more decades of growth racing towards 100 years #CentenaryCelebrations @REAL Centre, no less and even more for the University of Cambridge.”

*Baela Jamil, ITA/PAL Network, Pakistan*

“I hope you’re enjoying this incredible 10th anniversary—what a powerful moment to pause, celebrate, and look ahead. Thank you so much for inviting me to the seminar last year. I really enjoyed being part of your community, and left feeling nourished, challenged, and deeply inspired.

What you have created here is not just a space for learning—it’s a community built on courage, honesty, and care. You don’t shy away from speaking difficult truths or from holding a safe space for painful conversations. Instead, you meet them head-on with integrity, compassion, and openness. The safe and critical spaces you nurture for students and colleagues are rare and deeply needed. You’ve built something that shines beyond the walls of your centre, that’s worth cherishing.

Pauline—hats off to your inspiring and courageous leadership. (Also, your support for our Brighton community, your joyful presence at our festivals, and the energy you bring to everything you do is really inspiring). Thank you for being a wonderful force of connection and care.

Maha—you are fighting important battles, and I want to say: you are really good at inspiring others to do the same. We have your back.

Sandra—thank you for being warm and welcoming. Your warmth and commitment shows in how people feel when they walk into your orbit.

Yusuf—I so appreciate your thoughtful support in preparing for the seminar. Your calm and care behind the scenes made a world of difference.

I know I can trust all of you. All of you are just extraordinary. Thank you for what you do, and who you are. Wishing you joy today and strength, love, and solidarity for all the futures to come.”

*Laila Kadiwal, Institute of Education, UCL*

“It has been such a pleasure engaging with our REAL centre colleagues, in particular Pauline, Ricardo, Nidhi, Emma, Dawit, Pat, Sandra and Tony over the course of the Leaders in Teaching initiative in Rwanda. I personally learnt so much from your expertise in education, rigor and willingness to do research that is meaningful, impactful and has clear policy linkages. Beyond the work, what a fun team to be around!!! I have fond memories of time we shared in Kigali, going to salsa classes, and hanging out in Edinburgh, Cambridge (along the river Cam), Oxford and more recently Brighton. What a wonderful experience. Happy anniversary to all and to 100 more!!!”

*Bélise Kangabe, Laterite, Rwanda*

“Being part of the REAL Centre has been deeply inspiring—its commitment to research rigour and genuine collegiality has shaped both my work and my values as a scholar.”

*Janice Kim, University of Glasgow*

“Over the past few years, my association with the REAL Centre—particularly as a postdoctoral researcher working with Prof. Ricardo Sabates on the Accountability from the Grassroots project—has been a deeply enriching experience. During my visit to the Centre, I had the opportunity to engage closely with a diverse community of researchers and faculty, participate in seminars, workshops, conferences, and lectures, and exchange ideas around our shared work. What stands out to me is the REAL Centre’s strong commitment to equity and its inclusive research environment, which actively supports and creates space for scholars from the Global South. The exposure to such a dynamic, globally engaged setting and its emphasis on policy-relevant research continues to shape my thinking and approach to research in meaningful ways. And along the way, I’ve also made lasting friendships.”

*Deepak Kumar, ASER Centre, Pratham Education Foundation, India*

“It has been my most wonderful experience working with such a welcoming and internationally diverse team. We have benefitted immensely from the collectively learning - this has enabled all of us not only to be better researchers, but also better persons with enhanced intellectual curiosity, shaper minds, and kindness to care for each other. The best memories for me are not only the big ‘shiny’ moments - those of course are remarkable milestones of our journeys at REAL. I feel truly inspired by the everyday moments of togetherness, whether it’s during our office chat, or the fieldwork in Rwanda. It is a privilege to have such a family-like community in academic life, which can otherwise feel isolating and hypercompetitive.”

*Pui Ki Patricia Kwok, Former Research Associate, REAL Centre*



“This volume of Research Horizons, which featured the research partnership between REAL and CAMFED encapsulates the value of our collaboration - “Education is Everything”!

*Lucy Lake, CAMFED & Yidan Prize Foundation*

“While working for Laterite, I collaborated with the academics of the REAL Centre, particularly Pauline Rose, for 4.5 years as part of the Leaders in Teaching project in Rwanda. This was an excellent collaboration; the REAL team provided the theoretical and academic thinking, while the Laterite team dealt with the on-the-ground data collection and interactions with local government and officials. Overall, the project delivered substantial new learning in terms of how teachers were able to deliver improved performance for Rwandan secondary school students. Additionally, given that the LIT project spanned the COVID years, we learned a lot about remote learning and observed the adaptability of school systems, teachers and students. While many highlights of the project between the REAL Centre and Laterite stand out, having the Rwandan Minister of Education attend our closing workshops and presentations really showed to me the value that the project had provided. Thanks a lot to the REAL Centre and I hope to work with you again on other collaborations.”

*Phil Leonard PhD, Formerly of Laterite*

“Being part of the REAL Centre has truly been one of the most rewarding and enriching parts of my PhD journey at Cambridge so far. As a research assistant working with Professor Nidhi Singal and Dr Emma Carter, I've had the joy and privilege of learning from their insightful guidance and unwavering support. Their mentorship has not only shaped how I think about inclusive and meaningful research, but also shown me the importance of kindness and collaboration in academic life. The REAL Centre feels like a real home – a place where ideas are shared with generosity, every voice is valued, and genuine friendships grow. I am incredibly grateful to have been part of this journey. The memories, lessons, and connections I've made here will stay with me always. A huge THANK YOU to Nidhi and Emma.”

*Aurora Lixinhao Gao, University of Cambridge*

“I am proud to part of the REAL centre, working on the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program which contributes to the creating access to quality education for scholars from the Global South; and the Mastercard Climate Resilience and Sustainability Collaborative project which promotes knowledge sharing on tackling climate change between partners. The REAL centre team has been a supportive sounding board to bounce off some ideas as I develop my research project. And what stands out to me is everyone's commitment at the REAL Centre to contribute to equitable and accessible learning through their various impactful projects.”

*Susan Marango, University of Cambridge*

"The REAL Centre has played a significant role in advocating for improved learning outcomes for children struggling with foundational skills in literacy and numeracy. Their team travelled thousands of kilometres to remote districts in Tanzania—a remarkable journey that I had the privilege to take part in. I was inspired by the team's passion for their work and their eagerness to ensure that all children have access to quality education."

*Ben Masebo, Uwezo Tanzania*

"I'll never forget the Day of the African Child 2015. In the morning, I had joined the First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama; the 27th Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard, and Professor Pauline Rose at a London school, in a roundtable discussion with UK government ministers about what it takes to support girls to learn. As soon as that roundtable ended, we were whisked to Cambridge for the inaugural seminar of the REAL Centre, co-hosted with CAMFED. I was one of the speakers representing 33,111 young women in the CAMFED Association—graduates-turned-leaders, working hand-in-hand with communities and government authorities to end gender-based violence, challenge discrimination, and support the next generation of girls through school. I felt privileged to witness the launch of an evidence-led approach to development. 10 years forward, the CAMFED Association movement has grown nearly tenfold. Today, 313,000 of us stand together across the African continent, and the Learner Guide model we co-created has been so transformative that it is being integrated into national school systems at scale. Together with the REAL Centre, CAMFED has built groundbreaking evidence: when you invest in the most marginalized girls, everyone benefits. And when young women who have themselves faced, and overcome, educational exclusion are at the heart of the solution, change is not only possible, it's exponential. I can't wait to see what the next 10 years bring!"

*Fiona Mavhinga, CAMFED Association Development*

"Being part of the REAL (Research for Equitable Access and Learning) Centre at Cambridge University research engagement has been a profoundly enriching and transformative experience for me, both personally and professionally. The REAL Centre's commitment to addressing the deeply ingrained social and gender norms that hinder girls' access to education resonates deeply with my own values and aspirations for educational equity in Tanzania and beyond. Through our collaborative research, I witnessed firsthand the power of rigorous academic inquiry to challenge systemic inequities and create actionable, context-based solutions. The project addressing social gender norms affecting girls' education demonstrated the critical role of evidence-based strategies in driving policy reform. It was deeply fulfilling to see the project's Learner Guide Model, findings and recommendations being embraced and integrated into the government structures of Tanzania, thereby marking a step towards sustainable and inclusive change.

The collaboration with the REAL Centre has been more than a research partnership; rather, it has been a shared journey of intellectual curiosity, innovation, and mutual learning. Working alongside a diverse team of researchers, teachers, parents, traditional leaders and policymakers expanded my perspective on global challenges in education and the nuanced interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors. It reaffirmed my belief that transformative change is only possible through collective effort, grounded in empathy, respect, and a shared commitment to justice. This partnership has also allowed me to reflect on my own practice and role as an advocate for education. It reinforced the importance of culturally contextualised solutions that respect the unique dynamics of each society while fostering collaboration and shared learning across borders. The REAL Centre's inclusive approach to research and its emphasis on equity serve as an inspiring model for my work at the University of Dar es Salaam.

In essence, being part of the REAL Centre has meant engaging with a vibrant intellectual community that is dedicated to addressing some of the most pressing challenges in education today. It has been a privilege to contribute to and learn from this collaboration—an opportunity that has both shaped my professional identity and deepened my commitment to advancing equitable education for all."

*Nkanileka Loti Mgonda, School of Education, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania*

“My time at the REAL Centre is etched deeply in my memory, not just for the project activities and knowledge I engaged in with REAL Centre staff, but for the high level of academic, project and research transformation I experienced. The project activities I engaged in with REAL Centre staff were punctuated by very warm social and humane reception from the REAL Centre staff. From the very first day, I felt a deep sense of social and professional purpose and belonging that was unlike anything I had encountered before. The Centre didn’t just teach me—it inspired.

One of my most vivid memories is how to contextualise a project where we explored challenges in education equity particularly in Rwanda. It was in those discussions, surrounded by passionate minds, that I realised the power of contextualised and evidence-based policy and grassroots innovation. I vividly recall when I started up my presentation on the challenges of L2 as a medium of instruction in Rwanda by ‘A Kinyarwanda statement’ and everyone was perplexed!!!! Guess what? I told the audience that, ‘your surprise, is how Rwandan students get confused when they commence studying in English—a language they never experience at home’. It was amazing!!!!”

*Eugene Ndabaga, University of Rwanda-College of Education*

“I remember writing my PhD during COVID-19 in Lahore, feeling both isolated and uncertain about future opportunities. Following the REAL Centre’s Twitter and LinkedIn pages helped me feel connected to the wider education research community in the UK. I often thought how incredible it would be to one day be part of a centre so forward-looking and deeply committed to meaningful work on education. Joining the REAL Centre as a postdoc was a dream come true and perhaps the best thing to have happened to me. Over the past few years, I have grown not only as an academic and policy enthusiast—thanks to the remarkable opportunities and work the Centre leads—but also as a person, shaped by the values and spirit of the community around me. REAL is more than just a workplace—it is my home, it is family. The integrity, humility, generosity, and courage of the people here continue to inspire me every day. Its stance on global injustices—especially its powerful voice in solidarity with Gaza—is nothing short of remarkable. I am truly humbled and proud to be part of this community. May the REAL Centre continue to thrive and celebrate countless such anniversaries. Inshaa Allah.”

*Laraib Niaz, REAL Centre*

“Happy 10-year anniversary to the REAL centre. When I first set foot in Cambridge in September 2022, I was a country side girl with a suitcase full of dreams and nerves. Everything was new. In a world of ancient buildings, polished accents, and academic giants, I asked myself; how will I even begin? Then I found the REAL centre through my supervisor Professor Pauline Rose, its leader, I stepped into a space that didn’t just accept me, it saw me. Suddenly, everything was real: real research, real community, real friendships, and real joy. As a novice researcher, I soaked in the wisdom from the REAL Centre’s seminars and conferences. It was where my academic journey took shape, and where I found my social wings too. But what sealed it for me, the moment I knew this place had touched my soul, was at one of the centre’s end of year socials. Where one of the activities of the day was hula hooping. In a flash, I was back in the Ugandan countryside, twirling hoops with my neighbours, so lost in play that I once burnt the beans on fire (and yes, my mum was not amused). But here I was again, in Cambridge, spinning with joy, cheered on by scholars and laughing like a teenager, only this time, no beans were harmed. In a world far from home, the REAL centre became my missing family. REAL centre, you didn’t just shape my research, you reawakened parts of me I had packed away. Thank you for ten years of making life real, for making me feel real. Here is to many more years of joy, brilliance and yes hula hoops.”

*Macklean Oshabahebwa MPhil, EGID 2022-23 Alumni Mastercard Foundation Scholar*

“Working with the REAL Centre throughout a five-year learning partnership on the Leaders in Teaching programme in Rwanda has been a delightful experience for us at Laterite. Together, we’ve been able to gather insights on teaching quality in secondary education that has been helpful to policy makers and practitioners alike. We’re proud that our learnings have been shared both with the Rwandan Minister of Education but also with the teachers from the 350 schools who participated in the research. Happy 10 years to the REAL Centre!”

*Jessie Ramirez, Laterite*

“It has been truly amazing working with such wonderful colleagues and partners over the past 10 years. The success of the REAL Centre is due to collective commitment in the power of evidence and collaboration in achieving change in and through education for social justice. I believe we should be proud of what we have achieved, while there is still much to be done. The needs are even more imperative in our increasingly fractured world, due to conflict and climate compounding social injustices. I am proud to be part of our caring community, and look forward to our continued collective action.”

*Pauline Rose, REAL Centre*

“A defining feature of my engagement with the REAL Centre has been the trust, collaboration and friendship that is established between scholars, practitioners and organisations all working towards improving the education of less privileged populations. As a member of the REAL Centre, I have had opportunities to collaborate with new colleagues, to learn from new contexts, methodologies, and approaches. I am grateful that through mutual support, I have been able to constantly reflect on my research approaches, what has worked well and what did not. I have been able to use my strengths, but more importantly learn from colleagues across a number of partnerships that we have been able to establish. To all, I am grateful for your support!”

*Ricardo Sabates Aysa, University of Cambridge*

“REAL Centre colleagues answered our call for support. The REAL team jumped to support UNRWA, helping us to call for international support for the most vulnerable and conflict affected children. The team prioritised the support and really work against the clock to support issued the report with UNRWA calling for international support for the education in Gaza. REAL colleagues worked as an amplifier of the desperate call for support to Palestine Refugees Children. Their flexibility and capacity to adapt to very complex and changing environment... Thanks on behalf of the school age childre in Gaza!”

*Unai Sacona, UNWRA. Jordan*

“I can’t believe it is ten years! The REAL Centre is an intellectual home for me: a place that welcomes academic, practitioner and policy voices equally; as a policy voice I have valued so many chances to engage in open, mind-opening debate with faculty and students. The questions that are asked at the REAL Centre, and the ways that they are asked, push hard against the global narratives of education: the REAL Centre’s work and debate has been a constant needle to the education world to think about politics, equity, poverty and voice. I’ve felt honoured to have been a tiny part of the journey.”

*Laura Savage, International Education Funders Group*

“Working with the REAL Centre over the past few years has been an incredibly rewarding experience. Our collaboration on the Leaders in Teaching initiative in Rwanda stands out as a defining example of rigorous, policy-relevant research grounded in local context. The REAL Centre’s expertise in education, commitment to equity, and collaborative spirit helped shape a shared vision of using evidence to inform change. A lasting memory is the richness of our joint reflections - whether in person in Kigali or Cambridge, or online - and especially the final closeout event in Kigali, where we came together to reflect on five years of learning - a meaningful way to mark the end of a collaborative and rewarding partnership.”

*Lydie Shima, Laterite Ltd, Rwanda*

“I have always been greeted with warmth at the REAL Centre over years, whether as an invited guest speaker or informally as an engaged friend - the association has been intellectually fulfilling and personally uplifting. An abiding (and quirky) memory is the gift of a real-time cartoon that (then PhD student) Kalifa Damani did of me while I gave talk, ‘How Can We Study Differentiated Access and Silent Exclusion?’ for the REAL Seminar Series in January 2020, which incidentally became one of the last international face-to-face talks I gave before the COVID pandemic struck. This has stayed with me. Thank you.”

*Prachi Srivastava, University of Adelaide, Australia*

“The REAL Centre was a vital part of the Impact Initiative (2015-2021), and I consider myself very fortunate to have been involved with it. Collaborating with researchers from all over the world, we hosted policy roundtables and networking events, and it was amazing to see how powerful knowledge-sharing can be!

One of the best parts was leading our ‘Research for Policy and Practice’ (R4PP) reports, which captured the impact of research projects on disability, quality teaching, and gender. The Impact Initiative united a group of passionate individuals, and I genuinely appreciate the friendships I developed at REAL!”

Elizabeth Tofaris, Former Communications Specialist for the Impact Initiative/REAL Centre

“As an early career researcher, in the last two years, my engagement with the REAL Centre in their collaboration with Education Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA) has really made great impacts on my research ability through 1. Workshop on Early Childhood Development and foundational Learning for Early Career Researchers in 2023 and Early Childhood Development Grant Writing Workshop in 2024.”

Oluwaseun Temitope Lawal PhD, Federal College of Education, Nigeria

“It has been a great privilege and a deeply rewarding experience to work at the REAL Centre over the past five years. What stands out for me is the Centre’s unwavering commitment to equity in national education reforms, its strong partnerships with local researchers, institutions, and policymakers in the Global South, and the diverse, highly supportive team that makes our work both possible and inspiring.”

*Dawit Tiruneh, REAL Centre*

"I had the privilege of being involved in the setting up of the REAL centre with Pauline and her team. The passion and enthusiasm of all those involved in the REAL Centre has made it such a resounding success. Congratulations to you all for doing such impactful research that makes a real difference to the world. So necessary, particularly in difficult times."

*Anna Vignoles, The Leverhulme Trust*

"The REAL Centre is unique. I struggle to think of any other organisation that combines rigorous research with public policy engagement as effectively. Over the years I've drawn so heavily on the research on early learning, learning equity, Covid-19 impacts, Ethiopia, and education finance that I could probably be sued for plagiarism. Keep up the great work - we need it now more than ever. #TenMoreYears."

*Kevin Watkins, Former CEO, Save the Children*

"My time at the REAL Centre has been deeply meaningful, not just because of the global impact of our research, but because of a genuinely supportive and inclusive environment, surrounded by mentors and colleagues who sincerely care about my personal and professional growth."

*Eunice Mueni Williams, REAL Centre*

"It's been an absolute pleasure to work with the REAL Centre over the last decade. Unlike many academic institutions, the REAL Centre is deeply committed to research that informs real-world action - supporting efforts to improve learning outcomes for the most marginalised children across the global South. They recognise that long journal articles and technical reports alone don't shift practice or policy. Instead, they've focused on making evidence accessible, relevant, and usable to those who need it. Beyond their work, the REAL Centre team is warm, down-to-earth, and collaborative - always looking to shine a light on the excellent work happening in the global South - whether in universities or implementing organisations. They consistently champion global South leaders, celebrate their expertise, and model what respectful and equitable research partnerships should look like. Whilst working with senior academics from a world-leading University could be intimidating, the REAL Centre team have always been approachable, humble, and great fun. Just as importantly - over the last ten years, they have also become great friends. Thank-you, REAL Centre, for leading the way. The ripple effects of your work - both the research, and the way you've chosen to do it - will be felt for many years to come. Here's to the next 10 years! With love and best wishes."

*Hannah-May Wilson*

"My time at the REAL Centre - both as a PhD candidate and a postgraduate researcher - enabled me to meet some pretty incredible people whom I would call lifelong friends and who I have gained a great deal of solidarity and friendship from. The highlights for me that stand out with regard to my time at REAL Centre include being involved in participatory research methods, being part of a solidarity group standing against the current genocide in Palestine, and above all the working and personal friendships this centre allowed me to make."

*Asma Zubairi, University College London (UCL)*