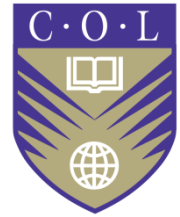


Summary: Governance, Conflict and Social Justice Theme



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Summary delivered by Tanyss Munro

There were good discussions in the governance sessions on the subject of facilitating greater access to education in tertiary institutions for women, for indigenous peoples, for the incarcerated and for marginalized communities. Other sessions focused on conflict prevention and mitigation using ODL and other sessions explored key elements to facilitate effective sustainable decision-making at the local level. Discussion in one session concluded that one of the key approaches for sustainable, effective governance interventions is to ensure the intervention responds to the underlying cause, not the symptoms.

Throughout discussions, one common thread was the importance of ownership through embedding governance into cultural frameworks. Culture is understood to mean the broader cultural systems and beliefs in society as well as work-place culture. Finding ways to incorporate culture can also mitigate against the volatile nature inherent in governance interventions and activities, by bringing people together through common ground. Observations were shared from Namibia of traditional and modern authority structures overlapping at the local level through a Local Governance Studies certificate course.

Finding ways to facilitate learners in developing and amending the learning materials, through OERs and other means is an important means to increasing ownership of initiatives. We heard from the World Universities Services of Canada in Ghana about girls who employ drama, story-telling and discussion groups to dialogue with mothers in 200 villages, in an effort to increase girls' retention in school.

Presenters described Human Rights and Conflict Prevention training, conducted through CD-ROM for learners in National Institutions of Human Rights Commissions and on-line peace-keeping diploma courses for peacekeepers and humanitarian workers in regions torn by strife and conflict. ODL has played an important role in reaching these learners, often in remote and difficult living conditions.

Concern was expressed regarding the ongoing need to find ways to empower the youth in good governance initiatives and examples were shared of youth producing newsletters and videos to educate others in the Caribbean, with an example of youth being involved in school management in Uganda.

We heard from the World Bank Institute about their lessons learned, based on what didn't work the first time. The main lessons are that any training must dovetail with existing training within the target organization; and partners must share common objectives to ensure focus and clarity.

Other lessons learned included the importance of implementing partners and stakeholders of having common objectives over the importance of expanding the number of partners, the importance of basing learning on real situations with case studies, over generalized, theoretical approaches and the importance of using blended approaches (face to face as well as multiple types of media) depending on learners' needs.

Ongoing dialogue is necessary to bridge the research-practice gap, to share what is and what is not working, to influence research, to gain new perspectives, and to encourage south-south learning networks and south-north learning. The Research Institutes who presented have papers and chat rooms which are well-used by certain groups, but not always by those practicing in the field. To bridge this gap and to encourage ongoing dialogue, the Commonwealth Youth Programme, African Regional Director, James Odit kindly volunteered to establish a site - in conjunction with COL. This site is expected to be up in August, with a direct link from COL's website.