COL’s regional agency, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), has been working with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to support the rapid expansion of community radio in India. More than 2,000 organisations have participated in 20 consultation workshops organised by CEMCA over the past two years. At these workshops, community groups and educational institutions learn about the potential of community radio, how successful stations function and how to submit license applications. As a result of these workshops, more than 1,000 applications have been made and 80 community radio stations have begun operation.

The Government of India has shown strong support of community radio, but it has been slow to spread. These consultation workshops are helping interested people and organisations to establish and maintain community radio stations. The process has been led by CEMCA’s Director, Dr. Sreedher Ramamurthy, who pioneered campus community radio in India.

“Community radio gives a voice to the voiceless,” Dr. Sreedher explains. “It empowers people to find solutions to their problems and serves the information needs of targeted communities. Mainstream media is not able to fulfil these needs.”

Mr. Abhilaksh Likhi, Director with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (currently Additional Director General to the 2010 Commonwealth Games) took part in the consultation workshops and provides this report:

“The objective of the community radio workshops is to inform and educate non-profit civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and educational institutions to develop capacity for establishing and running community stations. The workshops also create awareness about relevant programming content for community radio stations by locating such workshops in global rural initiatives such as the Barefoot College, Tilonia. The workshops were attended by civil society organisations and educational institutions from the state as well as representatives of functional community radio stations. Approximately 80-90 such civil society organisations and educational institutions attended these consultation workshops.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2
SUPPORTING COMMUNITY RADIO IN INDIA

CONTINUED FROM COVER

“The two-day workshop schedule typically includes an interactive introduction of participating organisations, followed by sessions on policy highlights, application form reading, functional stations’ perspective, content programming, funding/technical aspects and a field visit demonstration. To make the workshops more transparent and accessible, a committee of experts and officials screened radio station license applications.

“India’s national community radio policy announced in 2000 focused on campus radio stations in educational institutions. Since its reformulation in 2006, the policy now allows greater participation by non-profit rural civil society organisations that have a proven record of at least three years of service in the local community on issues relating to development and social change. At least 50 per cent of the content has to be generated with the participation of the local community preferably in the local language and dialect. A grant of license to set up a community radio station is processed in approximately 10 months.

“While funding from multilateral aid agencies can be accessed by the community radio station, limited advertising or announcements relating to local events, local businesses, services and employment opportunities are allowed. The maximum duration of such advertising has been restricted to five minutes per hour of broadcast.

“The consultation workshops have achieved more than merely generating expressions of interest from participating organisations to apply for a community radio license. The forums have brought to the fore four critical issues:

• First, a baseline survey in the community service area should be a rigorous exercise to identify the “media gap” that a community radio station’s programming has to address.

• Second, while the licensing process extends over a period of 10-11 months, no time should be lost to build capacities and train volunteers.

• Third, state governments have to act as focal points for injecting synergy via the Information Education and Communication (IEC) components of both the rural and urban flagship development schemes.

• Last but not least, the sine qua non of a truly empowered and community owned radio station is its management structure. It ought to include the marginalised in its ambit to both administer the station as well as monitor the programme content…”

The writer is an IAS officer and is posted as a Director in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The views expressed are personal.

CEMCA is planning 10 more consultation workshops and will then focus on capacity building for community radio. More than 120 people have already completed a certificate course in community radio through Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). The distance learning course includes an internship for students at an existing community radio station. CEMCA is asking each community radio station to enrol one person per session in the IGNOU community radio course and offers scholarships to support this important learning.

It is also important to increase campus/community partnerships, according to CEMCA’s Dr. Sreedher.

“Our higher education institutions have a wealth of knowledge to share,” he explained. “We need to encourage these educational institutions to support community radio and provide relevant, up-to-date information about community issues such as health promotion. Above all, the community voice must be heard.”

www.cemca.org

Read a special report about community radio in India in AudienceScapes, an online information source about developing countries: www.audiencescapes.org/india-special-report-india-special-report-community-radio-sustainability

SIXTH PAN-COMMONWEALTH FORUM ON OPEN LEARNING

CONTINUED FROM COVER

Secretariat team, the PCF6 Programme Committee and COL Education Specialists.

A list of accepted abstracts is available on the Forum website.

PCF6 will be held from 24 to 28 November at Le Méridien Cochin Resort & Convention Centre, located on the celebrated backwaters of Kochi, in Kerala, India’s unique southwest coastal state. Details on registration procedures and accommodation will be available on the Forum website. Five-star accommodation, including full buffet breakfast, at Le Méridien Cochin is available to conference delegates from Rs7250 (+12.5% tax), or roughly US $165 per night. Budget accommodation is also available nearby.

Participation in and benefits from PCF6 will be enhanced by the allocation of subsidies for fees and/or travel for deserving delegates from developing countries in the Commonwealth. Sponsorship funds help ensure that there is representation from as many Commonwealth countries as possible.

www.col.org/pcf6

www.lemeridien.com/cochin

CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

In partnership with UNICEF, COL is working to mainstream Child-Friendly Schools models and approaches into teacher education curricula and enhance the quality of education in schools. Efforts are focused on ten countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Trinidad & Tobago and Zambia.

Further information is on COL’s website where there will also be an exchange of ideas and experiences among the 10 countries participating in the UNICEF-COL CFS Project. Reports, training manuals and other materials developed by the partners will be freely available for download, use and adaptation. Resources such as UNICEF’s Child-Friendly Schools Manual are already available.

www.col.org/cfs
Leaders in open and distance learning (ODL), who serve as COL-UNESCO Chairs attended the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) Conference of Executive Heads and the Open Educational Resources (OER) Workshop in Cape Town, South Africa in April. Among the issues discussed was the role of higher education in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In the OER Workshop the following day, university leaders were alerted to the potential of OERs to expand quality higher education and examined policy issues relating to the use of OERs in universities (www.oerworkshop.weebly.com).

COL Chairs, many of whom are also jointly UNESCO Chairs, are leaders in education who promote ODL and ongoing partnerships. Attending the South Africa meetings were three of COL's Chairs: Professor Upali Vidanapathirana, Vice Chancellor of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), Professor Olugbemiro J. Jegede, Vice Chancellor of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and Professor Tolly S.A. Mbwette, Vice Chancellor of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). They met with COL President Sir John Daniel and Ms. Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, Chief, Section for Reform, Innovation and Quality Assurance, Division of Higher Education, UNESCO to discuss COL-UNESCO Chair activities, ODL research and technology-enhanced education.

The COL-UNESCO Chairs will submit their plan for the 2010-2011 period to COL and report back on progress made at their next meeting, at the Sixth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF6) in November in India.

**THE COMMONWEALTH CONVERSATION CONCLUDES**

Hosted by the Royal Commonwealth Society, the biggest public consultation about the Commonwealth ever undertaken was completed with the publication of a report, “An Uncommon Association – A Wealth of Potential”. “While we have heard much to give us hope, we have also heard more than enough to give us grave cause for concern,” says the report.

Over eight months from July 2009 to March 2010, the Commonwealth Conversation gathered extensive input through activities including opinion polls in seven countries, nearly 45,000 visits to its website and social media pages from 189 countries, 87 events in 26 countries, extensive media coverage and 11 expert group meetings.

The whole Commonwealth family is faced with a choice: settle for the status quo or aim high, the final report concludes. The final report provides ten recommendations that set out a constructive way forward for the Commonwealth.

[www.thecommonwealthconversation.org](http://www.thecommonwealthconversation.org)

**COL BUILDS PARTNERSHIPS IN ASIA**

COL and India’s National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) have agreed to work together more closely to strengthen quality assurance in open and distance learning (ODL). COL President Sir John Daniel and Professor H.A. Ranganath, Director of NAAC, signed a Memorandum of Understanding at NAAC’s new campus adjoining the University of Bangalore in February. The two organisations agreed to collaborate on activities such as promoting the use of COL’s Teacher Education Quality Assurance Toolkit, compiling best practices in higher education and teacher education, quality benchmarking for dual mode higher education institutions and promoting staff exchanges between NAAC and other quality assurance agencies.

COL’s relationship with UNESCO grows closer with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between COL’s regional agency, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), and UNESCO’s New Delhi Office. CEMCA and UNESCO will collaborate in higher, non-formal, and technical and vocational education as well as open schooling and teacher education, with the aim of accelerating the pace of educational reform in the region.
VUSSC DEVELOPS FIRST DIPLOMA PROGRAMME

Participants at a Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) training workshop in Maldives in March developed course materials for a Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture for Small States. This is VUSSC’s first diploma-level programme.

Twenty-five educators from 19 countries took part in the content development workshop. Similar to the past seven “boot camps,” this session provided hands-on training in ICT skills and course materials development.

Sustainable agriculture is especially important in small states, most of which depend largely on agricultural imports. The Government of Maldives, for example, wants to reduce the importation of agricultural goods by 20 per cent and believes the solution lies in investing in human resource development through quality education. The new VUSSC diploma programme, which will be finalised through online collaboration over the next four months, covers the business aspects of agriculture, including how to establish a viable agricultural enterprise.

“This was our most productive VUSSC workshop to date,” explained Mr. John Lesperance, COL Education Specialist, VUSSC. “The participants honed their expertise in online course development and have committed to training five colleagues in their home countries. In this way, VUSSC continues to build a cadre of experts throughout the Commonwealth.”

VUSSC is led by a Management Committee representing small states in all regions of the Commonwealth. All VUSSC course materials are freely available online for adaptation and re-use by anyone.

www.vussc.org

BUILDING OPEN SOURCE SKILLS

Two groups of information technology (IT) managers have completed COL’s “Linux for IT Managers” programme, an Open Courseware online course that is helping educational institutions learn how to work with open source software. The programme, which is offered by FLOSS4Edu and freely available on COL’s website and the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) website, is designed for new users of the Linux operating system. By building capacity in working with Linux, COL is helping educational institutions and government groups to save money by working with open source software. Interested individuals or organisations can access course materials in either open and distance learning (ODL) or face-to-face workshop formats.

www.col.org/coursematerials
www.vussc.org
http://wikieducator.org/FLOSS4Edu

HIV/AIDS HEALTH PROMOTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

COL is partnering with the Media and Training Centre for Health (MTC) in an HIV/AIDS community learning programme in Northern Cape Province, South Africa. MTC is working with 500 targeted learners who have been selected by non-governmental organisations and high schools. The distance learning programme is increasing knowledge and support for people living with HIV and AIDS through a four-step process:

- Identifying needs. MTC conducted an assessment to determine what information or support learners would find most useful and the appropriate channels for communication.
- Monthly contact. Learners receive information and support through participatory radio programmes, SMS messaging, referrals to websites and printed communication.
- Face-to-face mentorship. Partner organisations meet with learners to reinforce learning and monitor their progress.
- Measuring the impact. Following up on the baseline study conducted at the outset of the project, a second assessment will measure the impact of the intervention.

“This is an excellent example of how key groups in the same community can come together in a win-win partnership to promote healthy communities,” said Mr. Ian Pringle, COL Education Specialist, Media. “We hope the Upington experience informs solutions in other communities concerning health issues.”

www.vussc.org
COL is supporting Solomon Islands in its efforts to scale up distance education. In partnership with a working group of educators and Government representatives, COL has assisted with the development of a draft strategic framework that outlines how distance and flexible learning (DFL) can be used to achieve educational objectives.

“We want to use DFL to increase access to basic, secondary, technical/vocational and higher education programmes,” explained Ms. Mylyn Kuve, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) Permanent Secretary.

The new strategic framework explores how to achieve education objectives through DFL in Solomon Islands. COL has applied its expertise to provide direction on issues such as strengthening higher education institutions, regulation of off-shore education providers and improving teacher training.

COL will continue to provide support for Solomon Islands in implementing its DFL strategy. As a member of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, the country participates in the development of VUSSC courses and a Transnational Qualifications Framework. VUSSC course materials are freely available for use and/or adaptation.

COL is conducting further trials of its new Review and Improvement Model (COL RIM). Designed to provide higher education institutions with the knowledge and tools they need to conduct an effective institutional quality audit, COL RIM is a cost-effective “do-it-yourself” approach to quality assurance monitoring and evaluation. Planning has begun on three COL RIM implementations this year: the Dominica State College (Dominica), the University of Calabar (Nigeria) and the Open University of Sri Lanka. Following these trials, COL RIM will undergo any necessary refinements before being freely available to higher education institutions. For more information about COL RIM, contact Dr. Willie Clarke-Okah, COL Higher Education Specialist, at info@col.org.

For more information about COL RIM, see recent speeches by COL President Sir John Daniel (6 May) and Vice President Professor Asha Kanwar (9 April) at www.col.org/speeches.
SMALL STATES AND THE TERTIARY EDUCATION CHALLENGE: A NEW VIEW

If learning is the key to development, then higher education plays an important role in the fate of nations, particularly in small states. The ever-expanding demand for higher education poses a special challenge for small states. While in the past, many of their citizens studied at traditional universities overseas, increasing foreign exchange costs precludes this as a core strategy for achieving mass higher education.

Small states now want to offer more post-secondary education on their territories. In addition to saving money, this will stem the “brain drain” and provide the cultural, economic and social benefits associated with local higher education. The rub is that countries with populations of less than a quarter of a million people – what we call “small states” – do not have the critical mass to create national institutions in the image of traditional universities.

COL is helping small states invent new types of post-secondary institutions that are able to provide local education at reasonable cost. To offer a viable range of university programmes, small states must bring together all the elements of the modern higher education enterprise into one structure. This includes:

- All levels and modes of study; the institution cannot be a small college catering only to full-time students doing degree courses.
- Degree courses should be just one element in a curriculum that includes technical and vocational programmes, pre-university certificates, diploma courses and professional development courses of varied length in various subjects.
- Individual courses should fit into as many programmes as possible, so as to achieve economies of scale.
- The institution should be open to various modes of study: full time, part time, in classrooms and at a distance – either at home or in study centres where programmes can be accessed online.
- The institution must have partnerships with various overseas institutions, both private and public, that contribute to its curriculum.

Holding together such a disparate enterprise – and doing so cost-effectively – is a challenge to all universities, in big states or small. Information and communication technology (ICT) can play an enabling role. It can cut costs by allowing students to conduct many administrative functions themselves. Having courses available in flexible learning formats makes it possible to cope with various modes of study and can also help to integrate local and offshore offerings.

The most radical and helpful contribution of ICT lies in open educational resources (OERs). By using freely available course materials in digital formats, small states can break the culture of dependency and import/export that has dogged their previous attempts to expand higher education. The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is demonstrating the power of OERs to help states expand higher education without any threat to their autonomy.

The rapid deepening of a global pool of OERs of high quality enables institutions to offer authentically local curricula developed to world standards of quality. This offers exciting potential for small states seeking to expand local tertiary education.

Read Sir John Daniel’s speech, “Education within borders from beyond borders”, to the OECS Higher Education conference in St. Lucia in March 2010: www.col.org/speeches

VUSSC: www.vussc.org

As the apex organisation for open schools in India, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), is the largest open school in the world and is additionally responsible for training and research on behalf of, and certification of, open schooling in India. The rapid growth in open schooling in the country is creating a corresponding need for training and support for these institutions, many of which are newly formed.

To help open schools develop their capacity, NIOS needs to strengthen its training and academic capabilities. Noted at COL’s Pan-Commonwealth Forum for Open Learning in London in July 2008, this need for human resources development has now been acted upon. COL recently commissioned a report that provides an action plan for a capacity building cell within NIOS.

Written by Dr. Sanjaya Mishra, Associate Professor at Indira Gandhi National Open University’s Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (IGNOU/STRIDE), the report recommends that a separate Department of Capacity Building in Open Schooling be established at NIOS. The report provides a comprehensive plan, including 30 recommendations, that outlines action items over the next three years. Since NIOS supports open schools in 29 Indian states, increased capacity at NIOS could have a dramatic and far-reaching effect. The final report, which is available on COL’s website, was delivered to NIOS in April.

www.col.org/OpenSchooling
www.col.org/consultancies
www.nios.ac.in

In recent months, COL’s blog has included posts about subjects ranging from legislative barriers to distance education and quality failures in dual mode universities to why the very poor opt for private schooling and the challenges of educating adolescent girls. Read news and thought-provoking opinions from the COL team at www.col.org/blog.
MEGA CLASSROOM FOR COMMONWEALTH DEBT MANAGERS

By Angela Kwan, Learning Manager, International Organisations

It is a classroom that spans over five continents, ten countries and multiple time zones – and it promises to transform training for Debt Managers throughout the Commonwealth.

This mega classroom includes learners from Africa, South Asia and Pacific regions of the Commonwealth. Developed through a partnership between the Special Advisory Services Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat and COL, the online classroom exists virtually on Moodle (www.moodle.org), an open educational resources (OER) learning management platform. Nineteen debt specialists from ten Commonwealth countries (Belize, Botswana, Guyana, Mozambique, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Samoa, Tanzania and the Gambia) enrolled in training on the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Debt Reporting and Management System (CS-DRMS) “meet” asynchronously to:

- Discuss issues,
- Ask questions,
- Complete online quizzes,
- Submit assignments,
- View marked assignments,
- Get help,
- Check marks, and
- Collect certificates.

The physical distance between the learners and their e-tutors (based in The Gambia, Jamaica and Kenya) is huge, but through Moodle, the learners are connected to each other and supported 24/7 by the COL e-tutors and administrative team. Each learner is given a stand-alone, comprehensive CD-ROM that teaches the concepts of debt management, terminologies and the step-by-step recording and reporting of debt through a purpose designed software. The COL eLearning for International Organisations team used a wide range of simulations to teach the software application skills.

Following this pilot, the new CS-DRMS training programme will be rolled out to 60 more debt managers in July. In addition to enhancing debt management in Commonwealth countries, this eLearning initiative is staking out new ground by exploring the potential of such mega classrooms to accelerate and expand learning at scale. COl’s Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3 Farmers) programme is expanding beyond Asia to other regions of the Commonwealth. Launched in India in 2004 and Sri Lanka in 2007, L3 Farmers is now getting established in Jamaica, Papua New Guinea and Uganda.

In Jamaica, COL is working in partnership with the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) to provide learning for farmers. In a country where mobile phones are much more prevalent than computers, RADA is piloting the use of Learning Through Interactive Voice Educational Systems (LIVES), a system that provides audio lessons to multiple users over mobile telephone networks. Developed at the University of British Columbia in Canada, LIVES is also being tested in India.

The L3 Farmers programme in Jamaica is focusing on recertification of RADA extension officers and strengthening an existing farmer training and support programme called Financial Assistance for Responsible Members (FARM).

In Uganda, COL is working in partnership with Makerere University Agriculture Research Institute Kabanyolo to improve farmer livelihoods in the country’s southwest. The L3 Farmers initiative in Uganda is focused on 500 people involved in potato, sorghum and honey-bee farming. L3 Farmers is helping them access credit and updated market information through radio programmes, mobile phones and the Strengthening University Capacity for Promoting, Facilitating and Teaching Rural Innovation Processes (SUCA-PRI) website. Farmers are gaining valuable information about subjects such as pest control, product pricing, market development, loan management and farming practices.

In Papua New Guinea, COL has initiated L3 Farmers activities in partnership with the National Agricultural Research Institute. PNG Women in Agriculture, a national group representing women in the agricultural sector, and farmers in the Central Province are the major stakeholders.

L3 Farmers is a response to a critical need: the wealth of information resulting from agricultural research and development often fails to travel the last mile to farmers in the developing world who need it most. By bringing together farmers and knowledge through the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the context of the social and economic value chain, L3 Farmers enables rural farmers to improve their livelihoods and embrace learning.

www.col.org/L3Farmers
http://lives.cs.ubc.ca

L3 FARMERS EXPANDS IN JAMAICA, UGANDA AND PNG

By Angela Kwan, Learning Manager, International Organisations

www.col.org/COLeLIO
www.thecommonwealth.org/news/34580/222770/210410csdrmsonline.htm
A big part of Learning for Development – especially relevant to COL’s Livelihoods and Health sector – concerns non-formal education, the sort of somewhat-organised learning that takes place outside of traditional institutions and within the context of everyday life.

Without the captive audience of a formal structured system, community learning relies to a great degree on conversation as the basic model for learning. It’s a variation on the teacher-student relationship that positions learners as active participants, an intrinsic part of the back-and-forth exchange between and among people and groups that builds mutual understanding.

If our focus is health or livelihoods, people also need to be part of actions that learning aims to enable as part of a larger process of development. As community members, learners also need to be involved in identifying issues and making decisions about the conversation in the first place: What will it be about? Who will be involved? How will it be organised? When will it end?

A SOUND INVESTMENT
Increasing participation in learning and development processes – everything from identifying learning needs to designing programming, creating content, talking about it and providing feedback – is a good strategy and a sound investment.

Whether it’s part of a conversation, a communication programme or a development project, participation helps to ensure relevance in planning and responsiveness in implementation.

What’s particularly significant for COL’s work with open and distance learning (ODL) in non-formal contexts – and a salient feature in COL’s ongoing partnership with UNESCO in the area of development communication – is that participation simultaneously facilitates effective learning and enables better collective, collaborative responses to development challenges such as maternal and child health and HIV/AIDS.

PARTICIPATION AS CONVERSATION
Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education.
— Paulo Freire, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed

A wise man, Zane Ibrahim of Bush Radio, once said that community media are 90 per cent community and only 10 per cent radio. The technology is, at best, secondary to community participation in decision-making, organisation and programming. Community media strategies, practices and technologies offer compelling models for participation in communication for development, models that speak clearly to the application of new media (such as the web and mobile phones) as tools for education and development.

PARTICIPATORY MEDIA
Community media are well positioned to be participatory (although whether or not they succeed is another question). They function locally, generally at a relatively small scale, often on the margins. Their content, ideally, deals with local issues. Broadcasting uses local dialects. Overall, community media operate as part of the local cultural contexts and, for the most part, reach only local audiences.

In Isabel, an island province in Solomon Islands with a population of some 30,000, ten distinct languages and no roads or electrical grid, the local media stations serve communities of 3,000–4,000 people using low-power FM and two-way radiophones, email and, increasingly, mobile phones. The Isabel Learning Network is a partnership of Isabel Province, the Ministry of Health, People First Network, the Solomon Islands Development Trust and COL.

To varying degrees, be it on cable TV or the Internet, community-based communication depends on community members, not only as active users and audience but also as contributors and collaborators, both in the creation of content and in translating what’s learnt into action.

“The community are simultaneously listeners, learners and actors in the community development process,” says Mr. David Leeming, a longtime intervenor in developing educational technologies in Isabel.

In India, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), supported by the Department of Science and Technology, is spearheading “Science for Women”, an interactive radio series that reaches an estimated 12,000 people – mostly women – through 15- to 30-minute segments. The focus is on health and nutrition. This is a participatory process that includes the students and listening communities – the women learn radio production skills and create relevant content using information provided by university partners. In addition to providing valuable health information, “Science for Women” is creating a bank of content that can be re-used. It is helping women gain skills as announcers, interviewers and writers, while also providing a source of earning a livelihood.
FILLING YOUR BAG OF LIFE

In Mchinji District, Malawi, community groups, media and health authorities are working together on a learning programme about maternal and child health called Phukusi la Moyo (literally “Bag of Life”). The name comes from a local traditional Chewa proverb: Phukusi la moyo umasunga wekha (everyone should jealously protect their own bag of life). This proverb teaches that everyone is responsible for their own lives and health and should have a full bag of skills, knowledge and experiences, which they can use when needed. The hope is that the radio programmes will be a source from which people living in Mchinji can draw to fill their bags of life and safeguard mother and child health.

Phukusi la Moyo is a collaboration between communities in Mchinji, MaiMwana Trust (a community-based maternal and child health non-governmental organisation), Mchinji District Health Office, Mudzi Wathu Community Radio Station, Story Workshop (an educational media production group) and COL.

At the centre of the programme is the MaiMwana network of 200 women’s groups established in 2004 to reduce maternal and child mortality. Towards the end of a five-year cycle, the groups identified mass media as a communication strategy and, when the stars aligned and made a radio programme a reality, they played a key role in designing it. Now they listen each week and discuss the issues among themselves and the best way is storytelling: an individual talking about him or herself as an individual, for example what she went through when she took the drug which was injected giving birth, how she was saved, what she remembered most, etc. People are moved by these stories.”

As is the case in Mchinji, when community members participate actively they are engaged, not just as an audience and potential listeners but also as learners and community members; not only participants in the process of developing learning programmes but also in mobilising based on what the community as a whole is learning.

In Mchinji, participation happens in different ways. Each episode includes between two and ten community voices from two, three or more village areas. Monitoring reports in November 2009 from 120 groups indicate that as many as 3,500 women from across the district, primarily pregnant women and new mothers, were listening and discussing the programme on a weekly basis.

Women and other community members also participate indirectly through the MaiMwana network’s representative structure, in which village-based groups nominated representatives to zones, nodes and finally a district-level committee. Members of the district committee, representing as many as 10,000 women, were part of the design workshop and continue to be an active part of the core team.

COMMUNITY LEARNING

Participation is also part of making programme content, but not in the way one might expect. In Phukusi la Moyo the actual production – recording, editing and broadcasting – is left up to producers and volunteers from Mudzi Wathu Community Radio; however community participation is still central to the success of the programme.

While community members don’t actually create the content, their stories and experiences make up the most important part of the programme’s learning content. The programme’s approach focuses on the shared experiences of pregnant women, new mothers, fathers and other community members, voiced in their own words. It is essentially an extension of the conversation that women’s groups were having face-to-face.

“Young people need to speak the way they feel, not the way you feel,” explains Gladson Makaowa from Story Workshop. “The main way and the best way is storytelling: an individual talking about him or herself as an individual, for example what she went through when she took the drug which was injected giving birth, how she was saved, what she remembered most, etc. People are moved by these stories.”

Learning and collective response are reinforced each week through group meetings in the MaiMwana network, in which both women and men listen, break down content, discuss the issues among themselves and plan actions. The combination of media content and face-to-face interaction is a fundamental reason why Phukusi la Moyo and other programmes like it can be considered community learning programmes.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

GETTING ENGAGED

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As an online tutor for COL’s Operational Data Management Learning Programme for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), I work with people located around the world. In most cases, they work in one of the refugee/IDP (internally displaced person) camps in places like Colombia, Lebanon, Rwanda, Serbia and Sri Lanka. In nearly all cases, the learner is the only person in the operation (or in that country) studying in our programme, so they are truly isolated.

All our communication is through email. My academic tasks as an e-coach are first to guide the participants’ study through the 16 chapters, provide feedback on each of the associated assignments, assess whether they have attained the required standard and secondly to support their development of a project proposal and finally assess the end product of this project.

More fundamentally, I provide a human presence that offers advice, counsel or just a friendly sounding board. It is essential to develop a relationship with each participant that breaks down the teacher-student barrier that he/she is probably expecting. The e-coach must be seen firstly as a source of friendly support and guidance and secondly as an assessor. While email is not the ideal environment for establishing such a relationship, it does provide advantages for anyone who uses English as a second language – the ability to prepare and improve the text before sending gives the participant more confidence about communicating with the “expert” than may be the case with spoken communication. Including non-academic topics in messages helps to establish a more chatty environment. At the start of the programme, I describe the view through my window and ask each participant to do the same – usually a stark contrast. Sharing photos also provides a more human feel.

Like the other e-coaches in this programme, I have no personal experience of life within a UNHCR operation and probably only a lay person’s appreciation about how the organisation itself operates. It is essential to appreciate the potential challenges faced by participants who have to continue their normal duties while studying. The unexpected influx of a large number of new refugees that have to be processed, a change in the local security situation, health problems, the need to cover a colleague on leave are just a few of the potential factors affecting a participant’s studies. There are no fixed dates for the submission of each assignment, which provides flexibility for the participant. But each component of the programme does have an end date so it is essential for the e-coach to apply friendly pressure for steady progress without nagging.

Many of the assignments require the participant to relate the content of the chapter to their own work or operation. Responses to questions are likely to vary considerably across operations and usually relate to circumstances outside of my own experience. It is essential to develop an appreciation of enough of the context in each case to be able to provide feedback that is both relevant and constructive. This is particularly the case for the project component, which requires the solution of a real problem within the operation. For one participant, I may be advising on the development of a spreadsheet database system to aid the camp schools to store and process academic scores; in a second it may be the revision of data collection processes in the registration of refugees; in a third it may be the training of staff on good practices in data management; and in yet another, the creation of maps of a camp indicating the distribution of population, water sources and schools.

Developing the participants’ skills and the understanding of data management is the core purpose of this programme and their project work clearly indicates how their confidence has grown in this area. Arguably equally important is their development as distance learners who have accepted the responsibility for managing their own learning in one of the most challenging learning environments. The self-motivation and self-discipline required for the successful completion of the programme clearly marks these participants as valuable staff within the organisation. All this has to be done when your primary contact is a native-English speaker sitting in his Welsh home who needs educating about the operation, the local context and to some extent the organisation! My students make excellent teachers.
What could be more participatory than community media? COL describes community media broadly as any kind of media that are focused on the local community, including radio, TV, newspapers, telecentres and the web. As part of their mission, many community media organisations investigate and report on local issues – or national or international issues from a local perspective. Some aim to supplement traditional mass media channels; others provide an alternative. Either way, a strong link to local communities is a key ingredient.

Community media organisations are considered by some development agencies to hold great potential. For example, Major Programme V of UNESCO’s Communication and Information Sector highlights the role of both community radio and Community Multimedia Centres as catalysts for information and knowledge acquisition, learning and participation at the community level in Africa.

If we examine these programmes carefully, we can see that a key issue is to achieve a shared understanding of what participation should deliver in the community media/ODL space.

As development buzzwords go, “participation” is beginning to show some degree of longevity, perhaps due in part to its multiplicity of meanings. For example, the World Bank Participation Sourcebook (1998) suggests that participation is a “concept that means different things to different people in different settings”. Amongst the many definitions of participation in the development sector, there is a recurring focus on community involvement in decision-making processes. Many community media organisations do not consider themselves to be part of a formal development agenda and might not consider their mission to be a participatory one. However, those community media organisations that do actively identify themselves with the development process could well be considered to be participatory if they consult with community groups and local government; record and play local cultural forms; and/or interview community members as part of their programme output.

But just how “participatory” are these formats? Is the community actively engaged in content creation activities; or is it treated mainly as a source of sound bites and vox pops in a small-scale version of how larger traditional media players can operate?

Content providers such as community media or ODL organisations can be key players in the implementation of participatory content creation programs. The Phukusi la Moyo program in Malawi has been deliberately developed as a participatory content creation project: community groups were central to the programme’s inception and continue to provide program ideas and content.

Phukusi la Moyo is one of a number of emerging projects that indicate how multi-partner collaborations with community media can deliver and sustain learning programmes to marginalised groups. These programs can be achieved through the active, two-way participation of community members in content creation activities. This level of participation may be facilitated by more powerful and affordable communication technologies, accompanied by a network of human intermediaries to provide training and support. But the critical component is a management and communication strategy that acknowledges that the sustainability of grassroots development projects depends upon the active, two-way participation of the target community.

Those ODL players who can appreciate the potential of this kind of participatory communication will have the ability to design and implement powerful localised educational programmes and distribute these via community media. When this happens, “participatory” is transformed from buzzword to reality.

Jerry Watkins is a Senior Lecturer at Swinburne University (Australia) and co-editor of Participatory Content Creation for Development (published by UNESCO).

PARTICIPATING IN COLLABORATION

Participation should also be seen to extend beyond learners to experts and facilitators. The collaboration of different groups, for example local health services and community media outlets, is essential in developing high-quality learning programmes: accurate in terms of content and engaging in terms of format and style. Although people may learn more effectively from shared experience, the endorsement of health professionals is essential in ensuring veracity and trust.

In addition to sharing the experience of health care clients, Phukusi la Moyo has also helped to convey the human face of healthcare workers in the eyes of community members. And it also helps inform health and media workers about the realities of health in community contexts.

Done right, participatory media initiatives extend on the power of conversation as a tool for learning. As a mass medium, radio, for example, adds considerable scale – Phukusi la Moyo enlarges the scope of participation from thousands of women in the face-to-face network to tens or even hundreds of thousands across the whole district.

After a year of sponsorship from COL, funding for Phukusi la Moyo has been taken over by Mchinji District Assembly, a result of the active participation of the District Health Office and Hospital. The depth of participation, the role of media, and the impact on maternal and child mortality are the focus on ongoing research. So, as we say in radio, “Stay tuned…..”

www.col.org/HealthyCommunities
The University of South Africa (UNISA) conferred the degree of Doctor of Literature & Philosophy (honoris causa) on COL President Sir John Daniel at its convocation in Pretoria in May. Addressing new graduates, Sir John spoke about “UNISA’s Unique Academic Odyssey”, saying “No university in the world has faced a more challenging trajectory than UNISA in the last two decades.” Sir John’s address is online at www.col.org/speeches.

Mr. Paul West, COL’s Director of Knowledge Management and Information Technology, left COL at the end of May to return to South Africa, taking up a position at the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Mr. West is now leading the development of SAQA’s Career Development Multi-Channel Helpline, which will bring educational and career guidance services and resources to all South Africans, especially those located in remote areas. The service centre is expected to grow to handle about one million enquiries per year, in 11 languages, through a variety of technologies.

Mr. West came to COL in August 2001 from the Centre for Lifelong Learning at Technikon SA, in South Africa, where he was Director. At COL, he managed the development of systems to harness internal knowledge assets and the wealth of knowledge that is being created throughout the Commonwealth and the world. He has been an outspoken advocate for the use of open source software, open education resources, Web 2.0 technologies and “cloud” services, and has helped to clarify issues around the interpretation and use of Creative Commons copyright licenses. He also led the establishment of the Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth initiative.

COL President Sir John Daniel commented: “Paul will be sorely missed. As well as ensuring that COL operates with state-of-the-art IT and Knowledge Management systems, his strategy for developing the VUSSC has been brilliant. He has a tremendous talent for helping people do things they didn’t know that they were capable of doing.”

www.col.org/pwest

A research study that explored gender in open and distance learning authored by Dr. Rekha S. Sen, Reader with the School of Continuing Education at Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and Dr. Pema Sandup, Programme Officer at COL’s regional agency in India, the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), won the Best Research Paper award for systems-based research at IGNOU’s 21st Convocation in March.

“Revisiting gender in open and distance learning – an independent variable or a mediated reality?” studied the perspectives of learners and counsellors associated with five IGNOU programmes. It explores the impact of gender on learning through distance mode, how support structures address the specific needs of women, gender perspectives in content and issues relevant in the present-day context. The paper was published in Open Learning: The Journal of Open and Distance Learning, Volume 4, Issue 2, June 2009.

http://tiny.cc/subt5

(L TO R): DR. PEMA SANDUP AND DR. REKHA S. SEN RECEIVE THE AWARD FOR BEST RESEARCH PAPER FROM PROFESSOR RAJASEKHARAN PILLAI, VICE CHANCELLOR OF INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY AND CHIEF GUEST AT THE IGNOU CONVOCATION. PROFESSOR S.K. JOSHI, FORMER DIRECTOR GENERAL, COUNCIL FOR SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH (CSIR)
EXPANDING THE USE OF OERs

COL and UNESCO are partnering in an initiative aimed at improving the understanding of open educational resources (OERs) by educational decision makers in order to expand their use.

“Taking OERs beyond the OER community: policy and capacity” involves a series of capacity building workshops that will be held in all regions of the Commonwealth. The first two were held recently in Africa.

The OERs workshop for Heads of Commonwealth Universities was held in Cape Town, South Africa in April in conjunction with the Association of Commonwealth Universities Conference of Executive Heads. The workshop brought together Vice Chancellors from developed and developing countries to discuss the potential, use and development of OERs in higher education.

A similar one-day OERs workshop was held in Windhoek, Namibia in May as a lead-in to the 2010 Biennial Members’ Forum of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (INQAAHE).

STRENGTHENING TEACHER TRAINING IN SIERRA LEONE

COL has provided training for 55 educators in Sierra Leone who are developing materials for an important teacher education programme. Thirty course writers attended a workshop in March, hosted by COL at Freetown Teachers College. The focus: developing ODL course materials for the College’s Higher Teacher Certificate (Primary) course. The course writers received training in instructional design and began to develop course materials for the first two years of the teacher training programme.

A further 25 course writers attended a similar workshop in May and are developing materials for the third year of the programme. The capacity building, carried out in response to a request by Sierra Leone’s Minister of Education in December 2008, will help in-service teachers upgrade their qualifications by learning at a distance.

RADIO SCRIPTWRITING COMPETITION

COL is partnering with Farm Radio International on a new radio scriptwriting competition by supporting a free eLearning course on radio scriptwriting, this time focused on promoting healthy communities.

eLEARNING WORKSHOP AT UNIVERSITY OF GUYANA

By Dr. Ramesh C. Sharma, Director (Distance Education), Institute of Distance and Continuing Education, University of Guyana

A workshop on eLearning was conducted at the Institute of Distance and Continuing Education (IDCE), University of Guyana on 14 December 2009. Teachers from the University of Guyana, Cyril Potter College of Education and Guyana Technical Institute participated in this workshop.

Professor Lawrence Carrington, Vice Chancellor, University of Guyana, shared his vision on the importance of eLearning for the University of Guyana (UG) for three reasons:

• We need to reach more of Guyana’s population without having to invest in bricks and mortar for each community with whom we work.
• We need to share our intellectual resources across the campuses and centres that we have already established.
• We need to expand the scope of our subject-area offerings into academic areas in which it is difficult to recruit resident staff.

To achieve this, said Professor Carrington, we need to invest in contemporary information and communication technology (ICT), both in hardware and in acquiring the skills to convert the potential of the technology into educational results. Professor Carrington spoke about the need for focussed training activities to ensure all academic staff members, whether full-time or part-time, are confident users of ICT and are capable of delivering courses using the technology. He stressed the need to develop our own cadres of curriculum developers and course writers, to offer learner support through e-tutors and to ensure administrators are able to manage students and teachers through virtual media.

In the first workshop session, the role and significance of ICT in education, its need analysis and integrating ICT into teaching practices were discussed. The second session focused on quality in distance education, design principles for eLearning and integration of multimedia into eLearning. A session on copyright issues in distance education generated a lot of interest among participants.

The Institute of Distance and Continuing Education plans to have more eLearning workshops for teachers so that the vision of the University of Guyana can be fulfilled. We thank COL, Ms. Trudi van Wyk and all the participants for making the workshop a great success.
COL supported the participation of students at three Zambian schools by providing access to equipment and training in interviewing and radio production techniques. The students created their own reports on subjects such as the FIFA World Cup, reading circles at their school and cultural activities. The reports were broadcast on the BBC, along with news reports from students at hundreds of schools in the United Kingdom. In addition to introducing technology to the classroom, engaging students in learning and building reporting skills, the BBC School Report News Day initiative in Zambia opened a window to the larger world.  

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/school_report/news_day_2010/
PARTNERING WITH POLYTECHNICS IN AFRICA

COL continued its partnership with the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa (CAPA) by supporting its conference on the Entrepreneurial Polytechnic held in Nigeria in April. Officially opened by Nigeria's new Minister of Education, Professor, the Honourable Ruqayyatu A. Rufa'i, the conference was attended by 150 participants from eight African countries. The three-day meeting focussed on studies and activities to support students who are preparing for self-employment.

CAPA membership is open to any technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institution in Commonwealth Africa. Established by the Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1977, it supports capacity building and policy development within member institutions. www.capapartners.org

UPDATE FROM WIKIEDUCATOR

WikiEducator, the innovative online community dedicated to collaborative development of open educational resources (OERs) launched by COL in 2006, continues to expand its reach and features. Here’s an update from the OER Foundation, WikiEducator’s governing body:

- Vital statistics: 13,500 registered users on WikiEducator, top 100K website and approximately 10 million hits per month.
- New features: a WYSIWYG editor, the ability to convert MSWord and OpenOffice files into wiki format and a national OER repository for schools, pioneered by New Zealand teachers with funding support from the Ministry of Education.

- Plan approved: The OER Foundation Board has approved the strategy and operational business plan, which was developed openly and transparently in WikiEducator.
- Learning4Content: WikiEducator continues its groundbreaking work in providing free training in wiki skills through the Learning4Content project with funding support from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and COL. Close to 4,000 educators have already taken Learning4Content training; there’s at least one free workshop each month. All members of the Commonwealth have an open invitation to sign up for a course. www.wikieducator.org

COL, CEMCA VIDEOS ONLINE

COL’s website now offers a number of videos that explain COL’s work. The collection of short videos include COL President Sir John Daniel providing an overview of COL, Vice President Professor Asha Kanwar outlining COL’s Three-Year Plan, 2009-2012 and COL Education Specialists discussing their particular areas of work. There are also links to videos from COL’s Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in London in July 2008.

www.col.org/videos

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) website offers videos focussed on the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding: Civil Paths to Peace. These include interviews with Nobel Laureate Professor Amartya Sen, who chaired the Commission, and Commonwealth Secretary-General Mr. Kamalesh Sharma as well as educational leaders from around the Commonwealth. www.cemca.org

COMMONWEALTH COUNTRY INFO

COL has created a new online resource that provides access to information related to open and distance learning (ODL) from all Commonwealth countries. The Country Information database includes:

- Education statistics,
- A link to a Google Docs spreadsheet containing the statistical data, for use in preparing customised graphs or tables
- Visions and missions of government ministries (Education, Agriculture and Health),
- Education policies, plans, frameworks and legislation,
- Quality assurance agencies,
- Geopolitical information,
- Educational, agricultural and health news (collected from Internet media sources), and
- Regional graphs.

www.col.org/CountryInfo
A recent article in the *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* sheds light on the emerging field of mobile learning – also known as mLearning. "Use of Mobile Phones to Improve Educational Outcomes: An Analysis of Evidence from Asia" finds that while mobile phones can increase access to education, there is less evidence of mobiles promoting new learning. By exploring the results of six mLearning projects in Asia, the article covers current practices on mLearning, challenges and the need for further research.


**THE PROMISE AND PITFALLS OF mLEARNING**

As a relatively new and rapidly developing area of business, information technology (IT) lacks the certification and systemic training of more established fields such as accounting and human resources. Organisations around the world are turning to the Information and Technology Infrastructure Library™ (ITIL) to enhance the quality of IT service.

ITIL offers a systematic approach to the delivery of quality IT services. Developed in the 1980s and 1990s by Government of the United Kingdom, ITIL provides a best practice-based framework for IT management and a shared philosophy for the people who work with it.

The ITIL Qualifications Scheme involves four levels: Foundation, Intermediate, ITIL Expert and ITIL Master. Individuals gain credits for each exam they pass and can progress from one level to the next.

www.itil-officialsite.com

**OFFLINE ACCESS TO DIGITAL EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**

Educational institutions with connectivity challenges can access a wide range of educational resources through eGranary. Also known as “Internet in a Box”, the eGranary Digital Library provides more than 14 million digital educational resources to institutions lacking adequate Internet access.

While previous editions of the eGranary only allowed users to view pre-installed information, the new eGranary has a Community Information Platform that enables users to upload an unlimited amount of locally created resources to their eGranaries. By adding and editing local content, users can ensure educational resources are relevant and appropriate for their learners. The Community Information Platform also provides communities with access to sources of information such as community directories, course websites and social networking sites. The current eGranary, provided on an external USB drive, costs US $1,500.

www.widernet.org

**ODL BLOG WATCH**

Online blogs offer a wealth of information and opinion in almost every field. Here are a few blogs related to open and distance learning (ODL) that provide interesting and informative reading:

- http://mfeldstein.com
- http://elearningspace.org/blog
- http://blogs.ubc.ca/brian
- http://elearningtech.blogspot.com
- http://opencontent.org/blog
- http://halfanhour.blogspot.com
- http://nogoodreason.typepad.co.uk
- http://efareport.wordpress.com
- www.tonybates.ca/category/blogs/tonys-blog
- www.col.org/blog (COL’s new blog)