

to its learners. Issues which must be considered include the available infrastructure; national capacity; appropriate, accessible and affordable media; relevant staff training to achieve ICT integration and whether use of ICTs will be pilot tested before scaling it up.

- **COSTS AND EFFICIENCY:** There is evidence that, if organised in the right way and with attention to cost reduction, open schools can reap the benefits of the economies of scale that distance education holds out as a possibility. Policymakers must explore how the burden of high fixed costs can be reduced. Consideration should be given to what percentage of the national education budget is likely to be earmarked for open schooling and how the funding will be sustained. It is also advisable to explore a cost-sharing model with private providers through either loans or partnerships.
- **EQUITY:** The study confirms that open schools can reach marginalised groups and provide affordable education. It's important to determine what learner constituencies will be targeted: girls, out-of-school youth, and/or HIV/AIDS orphans. Open schools can either address issues of equity by rectifying past inequalities of access or by expanding provision to address issues of massive shortage. Both approaches are valid. Policies and strategies will need to be put in place to achieve this
- **QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS:** The study confirms that with proper attention to quality assurance processes open schools can function well and offer as good an education – and sometimes a better education – than that available through the conventional system. Open schools should embrace a culture of quality through a quality assurance policy that ensures accountability, transparency and good governance. Consideration should be given to the following: quality of institutional leadership, sound financial management, quality of materials (which include established procedures for their development) and quality of the student support and the logistical system underpinning the student support.

The Study suggests that even though open schools have had challenges in terms of low status, under funding and often poor results, there is strong evidence that if set up with proper planning and rigorous implementation, open schools can achieve economies of scale and reduce costs without cutting

quality or results. If due attention is paid to quality assurance processes, open schools can offer education that is as good as, if not better than, the formal face to face system. Proper funding, appropriate logistics and training for staff can help set up effective systems. As the demand for secondary schooling increases, open schooling is neither a second chance nor a second choice possibility but is the only option that can help us to achieve Education for All.



JANUARY 2008

The full study,
"Open Schooling for
Secondary and Higher
Secondary Education:
Costs and Effectiveness
in India and Namibia",
is available online at
[www.col.org/
OpenSchoolingStudy](http://www.col.org/OpenSchoolingStudy)



COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING



Life After Universal Primary Education

Open Schooling for Secondary and Higher Secondary Education:
Costs and Effectiveness in India and Namibia

A COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING REPORT PREPARED BY BADRI N KOUL AND GREVILLE RUMBLE

Commonwealth of Learning

1055 West Hastings Street,
Suite 1200
Vancouver, BC V6E 2E9
Canada
T. 1.604.775.8200
F. 1.604.775.8210
E. info@col.org
www.col.org



RECENT PROGRESS towards the achievement of the second U.N. Millennium Development Goal, Universal Primary Education (UPE), means that many more children who complete primary education will seek opportunities to access secondary education. As there is little likelihood that governments facing the challenges of meeting the UPE target will be able to vastly increase access to secondary education through conventional schooling, there is growing interest in the potential of open schools to meet this challenge.

It is within this context that this study was conceived. This report explores the provision of secondary level Open Schooling, in two contrasting contexts: India and Namibia. The aim of the study was to look at two successful models: the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) in India and the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) to draw broad conclusions about the nature and effectiveness of Open Schooling. The study was carried

INDIA

With one-sixth of the world's population, India is the second most populous nation in the world. It is highly diverse in terms of geography, languages, culture and income. The physical infrastructure and the related additional human resources required for secondary education do not exist, nor can they be created overnight to meet the impending deluge once

UPE is achieved (the latest forecast is 2010). Much of the burden for universalising education will have to be taken by the Central Government, which is raising funds and also adopting alternative modes of education for the purpose. As earnings definitely increase with rises in educational levels for

all in India, the need to provide access to education is clearly linked to the country's development goals.

India's National Open School (NOS) was established in 1989 to reach those who wished to study but were, for a variety of reasons, not studying in regular schools. Over the years the role of NOS expanded beyond the provision of bridging courses, alternative secondary/higher secondary curriculum and life-enhancing courses to also include vocational education courses. Now known as the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), it is a teaching and an examining and accrediting organisation. There are currently close to 300,000 students enrolled at NIOS.

out by two experts in the field, Professor Badri N. Koul, who researched NIOS, and Professor Greville Rumble, who researched NAMCOL, between April and October 2007.

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) defines Open Schooling as "the physical separation of the school-level learner from the teacher, and the use of unconventional teaching methodologies, and information and communications technologies (ICTs) to bridge the separation and provide the education and training".

Early open schools tended to arise from efforts to help individual out-of-school children to pursue their studies, either because they could not get to a school or because they were unable to stay in school. In current times, open schools have been set up to offer both junior and senior secondary education to adolescents, out-of-school young people and adults. These open schools have been successful in both bringing down the costs of education and educating out-of-school youths and adult learners.

NAMIBIA

The Republic of Namibia has a population of approximately two million made up of 13 ethnic cultures and 16 language groups. Although the Gross National Product is relatively high, the country has inequalities in income that are among the highest in the world. Namibia has significant natural resources but the potential for development is held back by a low skills base that hampers foreign investment. The country's Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme is aimed at improving the education and training system to support the achievement of development goals.

The Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) was formally established in 1997 as a distance education college within the Ministry of Education. NAMCOL took on the responsibility for Namibia's existing distance education programmes and to reach those who wished to study but were not studying in regular schools. Like NIOS, NAMCOL enjoys strong government support. NAMCOL's current student population totals 28,000. Of the total number of senior secondary students who sit their end-of-school examinations, 48 per cent are enrolled at NAMCOL.



SELECTED FINDINGS

- **COST EFFICIENCY:** NAMCOL is a lean organisation with a small core staff. Economically, it is very efficient in terms of its unit costs per student, in comparison with the formal system. NIOS is also found to be very cost-efficient when compared to other schooling systems in India.

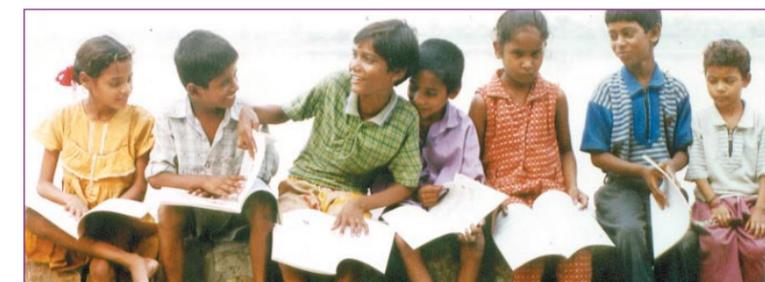
- **LEARNER PROFILE:** In general, conventional schools are not open to people who are aged 20 and over. In contrast, the vast majority of NIOS's and NAMCOL secondary school learners are between the ages of 15 and 25.

- **ROLE:** While NAMCOL supplements the formal education system, NIOS serves as an alternative. The study confirms that open schools can be either a complementary or alternative system to the conventional school system.

- **PASS RATES:** NAMCOL students generally do not perform as well as students in the full-time system. While NIOS students perform well in comparison with the students taking other Boards' secondary education examinations, they do not perform as well at the higher secondary level.

- **CURRICULUM:** NIOS offers vocational educational opportunities alongside more academic school subjects. NAMCOL's main focus is the academic stream, but plans are underway to broaden access to vocational courses.

- **QUALITY ASSURANCE:** The success of NAMCOL's pedagogic system rests on the quality of its course materials, the quality of its student support sub-system and the quality of its logistics. The quality of its course materials is not in



doubt and logistically the College performs well, but the student support system could be improved further to ensure that a higher proportion of students achieve their aim of getting an A to C grade in the national examination. NIOS has well-defined processes for curriculum development. Administrative and academic support is provided to the learners through the Accredited Institutes, which are selected against strict criteria. Academic facilitators monitor activities at these Institutes, including teaching and assignment marking. However, there is some doubt as to whether these monitoring processes are adequate, and there is no current means of planning and reviewing a system-wide process of evaluation and quality assurance.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

- **ACCESS AND REACH:** There is strong evidence that open schools have the ability to deliver secondary education to remote pupils and to reach communities that have never had such opportunities. Policymakers must determine what role the open school plays within the national education system – whether it will complement the existing system or be an alternative system that reaches new markets and offers a new curriculum. Both approaches are valid.



- **USE OF ICTS:** The study confirms that ICTs can be used successfully by open schools to enhance their reach, strengthen their operational systems and enhance pedagogic practice. It has shown that both low- and high-end technologies have been successful in different jurisdictions. Policy makers need to decide how technology can help to develop, expand and sustain the open school system to provide quality education

